

Wildflower Garden Club Newsletter

March 2019

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Messages from the Presidents

I know it is way too early to get excited about the snow melting so fast. We all know this. But every time I look outside these days. I get pumped. There are bare patches in the yard. There are plants showing their faces. I have been seeing flies and moths (yeah, yeah, their pesky little cousins will be showing up soon enough to sip the nectar of our blood_ I have a swatter.) My friend Robert in Wasilla has lilacs in the yard with leaves nearly an inch long!! This is Alaska—we know there will be more cold temperatures, and probably more snow, but the back of winter has been broken! If we are wrong and it stays so beautiful, yay!! If not, no shock—we know it is around the corner! I am happy to see so much talk about what seeds have germinated and what crops people are excited about. There's no holding down a gardener at this time of year!

Paul

Announcements

The plaque honoring Verna Pratt has arrived. Attending members for the March meeting were able to see it. It is very touching to see her wonderful face, big smile and to read her inspiring words. We cannot wait to have the plaque installed at the head of the Verna Pratt Wildflower Trail at the Alaska Botanical Gardens.

Maurine Loopstra celebrated her 96th birthday this month. The club was happy to sing to her in congratulations at the end of the business meeting, just before lunch.

What's Growing Now?

March's meeting started out with a wonderful presentation by Sarah Howard from the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center. She described in detail the breeding program for the Wood Bison, a native animal gone extinct in Alaska in the last century. A few animals were procured from Canada, and bred at the conservation center. The program was so successful; they were able to release 130 animals into the wild in 2015 to try to reestablish the herds in Alaska. Not quite like taking your cat to a new home in a pet carrier, Sarah gave an entertaining and informative description of the trials of moving 1500 pound animals in planes and barges. She also shared a documentary made about the whole process. It was a fascinating presentation for our group.

The Wildflower of the month, presented by Sally Byrne-Flores, is the Watermelon Berry.

Stephanus amplexifolius -
Watermelon Berry, Twisted-stalk, Wild Cucumber

Perennial from extensive rhizomes found circumboreal, with large gaps, to about 63 degrees north in moist woods or meadows sea level to alpine.

Likes partial to full shade.

The plant is up to 4 feet tall. A single stem sends up branched stems. The stems have dark bristly hairs on the lower third of the plant with the top being smooth.

The leaves are alternate, oblong-lanceolate 2 to 6 inches long, and the stems are branched bending at each leaf node.

The flowers are pale greenish white, single, bell shaped with 6 sepals and hang below the leaves on a kinked or



abruptly twisted stalk.

This zigzag stem, twisted flower stalk, and characteristic hairs on the lower stems help to differentiate it from the toxic False Solomon's Seal.

In the spring the young plant shoots can be eaten raw in salads or cooked as greens. The berries taste a bit like watermelon, are very juicy, with multiple cream colored seeds. They have a pleasant cucumber scent.

Difficult to propagate from seed as they are generally double dormant - needing two cold cycles to emerge. Easiest to propagate by division in the early spring.

These plants are widespread but not generally numerous and most people just snack on them on the trail or while picking other berries.

Dried they are good in cookies, as a garnish to a salad or a few sprinkled on a bowl of oatmeal, throughout the winter to remind us that spring is coming and of the fun you had when picking them the previous summer. It is possible to gather them and freeze them whole for use at a later time. If you are going to make jelly or syrup, be sure to strain out the seeds and skins prior to adding sugar or pectin. This takes a lot of berries and so frequently when using watermelon berries you just toss them in with your other berries that you are making into jelly or syrup.

Club Business

The Wildflower Garden Club has agreed to sponsor an award at the Alaska State Fair for the perennial division Grand Champion for each week of the Fair. These \$25 awards will be in addition to the Juniors Division Zucchini prizes already in place.

Marilyn Barker has agreed to accept the position of Education Chair for the club for the 2019 year. She brings great experience to this position due to many years of experience in the education field and her countless experience with gardening clubs and the natural flora in Alaska.

Membership stands at 61 people as of March.

Paul has asked for assistance in working on the garden craft section being implemented in the Plant sale this year.

The results of the poll for workshops brought much interest in the following topics:

Tool Care/Sharpening, Trellis making, Stepping Stones, Leaf Molds, and Birdhouses.

We will also conduct a in **Kokedama**: the practice of planting trees, grasses, plants or shrubs in balls of moss. These can be hung, displayed in a tray or in groupings. Look up the word: it is fascinating.

Reminders

The 2019 Master Garden Conference is scheduled for April 6th at the Cuddy Center.

Midtown Mall Garden Show is 20APR. Please sign up for a couple of hours to represent our club with the marigold giveaway.

Flower judge school and the Symposiums are still available. You may take any part of the training if you wish. To become a certified judge, you must take all of it, but to educate yourself, any pieces are available. The first session of the symposium is scheduled for Thursday, the 13th of June and the entire training extends daily, up to Monday the 17th for the test for full certification.

From National Garden Clubs, Inc: "Flower show school is not only for prospective flower show exhibitors and judges, but also for all garden club members and all persons interested in flower design and horticulture."

Member's Corner

Alis Schmitt says, I have two amaryllis blooming right now. I have about 6 bulbs: one had started showing growth so I planted it, and now it is up about two inches. I save my bulbs year after year, and they bloom for me. On a grey sky/dirty snow day, having color does much for my spirits.

There really is no secret to my method, and if anyone wants to know, I am glad to share.