



Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska

December 2020 Newsletter

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Messages from the Presidents

Well, we are certainly getting a lot of the “Poor Man’s Fertilizer” the last few days!! I keep telling myself what a good insulator it is for the gardens and plants in pots all over my yard. And the cloud cover keeps it from being too cold and bleeds off skiers from the shoppers right now. And it keeps the young man who helps me around the yard all summer occupied and making money (I am working those positives, you’ll notice...). I am still, however, waiting for the time of leisure I was so looking forward to at the end of the growing season—maybe after the holidays?? I am thankful for all of you, and for being upright and above ground, and for the anticipation of the new year and the healing it will hopefully bring. We should have a great year—the programs we have lined up can be presented either in person or on Zoom, so we won’t starve for interesting things to learn in the coming year, no matter what nature throws at us. I hope you have a blessed and fun holiday season.

Paul

This holiday season has been unlike any other, to cap off a year unlike any other. Throughout this season, and as we move into a new (and hopefully better) year, I wish you moments of peace amid the difficulties, connections with family and friends even if they can’t be in person, the warmth of memories from holidays past, and the wonderful feeling of joy that accompanies this time of year! Moving forward into 2021, know that we will continue to do our best to bring you interesting and educational monthly programs, as well as fun and exciting workshops. Warmest holiday wishes to you and your families.

Kathy



What's Growing Now?

We were still able to hold our annual wreath workshop with Darryl at Dimond Greenhouses on December 3rd. Nine people were able to attend. It was quite impressive the lengths Dimond Greenhouses went to keep us safe: all of us were masked, the tables were quite far apart, and we were pretty much the only game in the greenhouse. (*Masks removed for quick picture taking only!*)



We had an additional workshop fundraiser on December 17th with our Zoom-based workshop making a Kissing Ball. Twenty-two kits were picked up by members of local garden clubs. It is really enjoyable getting to work with and to know other gardeners in our community. Many thanks go to WGCA member **Robin Hill of Alaska Wholesale Flower Market** for allowing us to use her shop as a pick-up point for participants.



Announcements

Look for your 2021 WGCA Yearbook to arrive via USPS mail this year. We will be mailing them at the very end of December or early in January, so you should get them quite soon.

In case they do not arrive before the January meeting, which will be held via Zoom, the program promises to be a very interesting one. **Wayne Toups, of the Alaska Orchid Society**, will present **“Orchid Care 101”**

Orchid care is not as tough as we think it is! Do not be afraid to grow orchids yourself! Alaska Orchid Society guru, Wayne Toups, is set to put our fears to rest with simple tips on orchid care, watering, lights, humidity needs, “soils” and moss, and repotting hints. Those grocery store orchids can rebloom and thrive if you treat them right – no need to toss them



in the trash after the last bloom fades. Wayne can even tell us how to order some more exotic orchids once we get more comfortable growing these beautiful tropical plants.

The meeting will take place on **Thursday, January 14th at 10:00am**. We will send the Zoom link out a few days before the meeting.

Club Business

The 2020 Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska Grant has been awarded to a 4th-5th grade teacher at Susitna Elementary, **Jennifer Harmon**, to assist in building an outdoor classroom and nature path on site. The children will be able to learn **about** their environment **in** their environment, where they plan to focus on flora and fauna, and sustainability and the part they can play in keeping it thriving.

On another grant-related note, the ‘Butterfly Garden’ at the Campbell Creek Science Center has been completed by the Native Plant Society despite the Covid restrictions. The Native Plant Society received a grant from the WGCA a few years ago, which was extended through this year to allow completion of the project. We have received a very nice summary of the project and even received back a small amount of unused funds. The NPS has graciously arranged to have our name and logo included as a sponsor on the garden signage. Kudos to the Native Plant Society for completion of their project!

We are in the process of looking for permanent name badges with magnetic backs to upgrade/replace the paper ones we use now.

Committee Chairs Needed!

We are in need of committee chairs for the following committees: Publicity, Social Media, Conventions, Historian, Yearbook, Grants, Programs. The chair does not have to be the Lone Ranger—a pair of you could work on these committees together! Please help—there are too many duties for just the board members to handle these items. We might be forced to shut down some of these programs.

Wildflower of the Month

Submitted by Kathy Liska

Picea glauca/ Porsild spruce var. *porsildii*, Alaska White Spruce

Canadian spruce, Skunk spruce, Cat spruce, Black Hills spruce, Western white spruce, and Alberta white spruce.

Family: Pinaceae

Picea glauca is a species of spruce native to the northern temperate and boreal forests in North America. *Picea glauca* was originally native from central Alaska all through the east. It now has become naturalized southward into the far northern United States border states like Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. There is also an isolated population in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming. White spruce has one of the largest ranges of any North American conifer. It occurs from sea level to 5600 ft. in elevation.



The White spruce is a medium to large size coniferous evergreen tree which typically grows 50 to 100 feet tall when mature, with a trunk diameter of 1.5 to 3.3 feet. Ages of 200 to 300 years are common throughout the range. *Picea glauca* is often found on stream banks, lake shores and adjacent slopes. The species seldom occurs in pure stands but grows in association with balsam fir, black spruce, eastern hemlock, trembling aspen, and other northern hardwoods. The bark is thin, light grayish-brown and is produced in irregular, thin, scaly plates.



Leaves (needles) are needle-shaped and are often somewhat crowded on the upper half of the branchlets. Needles are usually 1/2 to 3/4 inch long, blunt at the tip and green to bluish-green in color. Typically, needles are 4 angled (4-sided) and are present on short twig-like structures on the stem. When crushed, needles have a disagreeable odor, thus, the common name of "skunk spruce" or "cat spruce" is often used by those familiar with the species.

The species is monocious, meaning both male and female flowers (strobili) are found on the same tree. Pollination occurs in the spring and cones ripen in early fall. Cones are cylindrical, pendulous, and slender, 1 1/4 to 2 3/4 inches long, 1 inch wide when open, with flexible scales, thin, green, or reddish, and pale brown when mature.

Cones usually fall from the tree shortly after seeds are shed. The seeds are black, 3/3 to 1/8 in long, with a slender, 3/16 to 5/16 in long pale brown wing.



More Interesting Info -

White spruce also hybridizes readily with the closely related Sitka spruce where they meet in southern Alaska and northwestern British Columbia. This hybrid is known as *Picea × lutzii*.

Wildlife value includes nesting and shelter for many animals and birds. Seeds used as food by crossbills, grosbeaks, and nuthatches. Foliage is eaten during the winter by deer, rabbits, and grouse. Red squirrels often cut cones as they mature and eat the seeds. Black bears may strip white spruce bark for the sweet sapwood. Porcupines are considered destructive pests as they often eat the bark, particularly of young trees.



The spreading branches give it a nice appearance for use as an ornamental tree in the yard and as an outside **Christmas tree** with its excellent foliage color, short stiff needles, and a good natural shape. Some spruce cultivars are even used in Bonsai.



Sadly, outbreaks of spruce beetles have destroyed over 2,300,000 acres of forests in Alaska in past years.

White Spruce in Kathy Liska's backyard.

Members Corner



Annita Magee's healthy Rosemary on her Hawaii lanai, and one of 6 Avocado trees she planted in 2013, which now has blossoms. Aloha Annita!



A couple of funnies to enjoy ... and bring a smile or chuckle to you!



Members are encouraged and welcome to share photos, recipes, plant information, garden stuff, etc. for this page.

Send to Kathy at akliska@com

How Do You Take Care of Poinsettias?

Holiday Poinsettia care begins with proper light, water, and temperature conditions. During the holidays, while in full bloom, they typically enjoy semi-cool, humid locations in bright, indirect light with plenty of moisture.

Poinsettia plants should be watered thoroughly, taking care not to drown them by ensuring adequate drainage is available. Likewise, avoid letting them sit in water-filled saucers, which can lead to root rot. Adding plants nearby can help increase humidity levels in dry rooms, as will humidifiers.



Fertilizing Poinsettia plants is never recommended while they are still in bloom. Fertilize Poinsettias only if keeping them after the holiday season. Apply fertilizer every two weeks or once monthly using a complete houseplant fertilizer.

Once flower bracts have fallen, you have the option of discarding the plant or keeping it an additional year. For those choosing to continue with Poinsettia care, decrease regular watering to allow the plant to dry out some. However, do not let it dry out completely. Also, relocate the Poinsettia plant to a cool, dark area until spring or around April.

In spring, return the plant to a sunny area and water well. Cut back all canes (branches) to about 6 inches from the pot's rim. It may also be a good idea to replot the Poinsettia using the same type of soil. While Poinsettias can be kept indoors throughout summer, many people choose to move them outdoors in a sunny, but protected, area of the flower garden by sinking the pot into the ground. Either way is fine.

Merry Everything and Happy Always!!!

