



# Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska

## Newsletter ~ January 2025

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### Message from the Presidents

Just like that a new year is here! There's lots of exciting Wildflower club meetings & workshops happening in 2025. We hope to see you there.

Another year of learning, laughing and fellowship with fellow Wildflowers. You are the best! We've learned so much and appreciate you sharing your knowledge.

Nights full of northern lights and seed catalogs to read while we're comfy in our chairs.

Unique and beautiful flowers, perennials and annuals abound, which you bring to our plant sale in June. It truly is the best sale in town!

Alaska's short growing season challenges our skills each season but brings great beauty. Here's to wishing for a warm and sunny 2025 summer.

Rhodochiton astrosanguineum (Purple Bell or Alaska State Fair vine) seeds are almost ready to plant. We love this plant and if you brought them to our June plant sale last year please bring more!

Yellow, red, green, purple, blue and even white flowers will bring happiness and smiles to all of us when winter melts away!

**Christie & Kellie**

“Anyone who thinks gardening begins in the spring and ends in the fall is missing the best part of the whole year; for gardening begins in January with the dream.”



- Josephine Nuese

## What's Growing Now

Rachel Shedd, volunteer coordinator at the Alaska Botanical Garden, has taken an interest in the Verna Pratt Wildflower Trail. Named in honor of our beloved club member and mentor after her passing, the club has maintained the wildflower trail for many, many years. On the ZOOM only January 9th meeting due to icy road conditions, Rachel shared facts and memories of the garden's development over the decades. She was able to share some of the goals of ABG for the trail and listened to suggestions and memories from club members. The session brought up many pleasant memories for those of us who had known Verna and for those who have worked over the years to make sure the garden was maintained for the many visitors who come through yearly.

## Special wildflowers that bloomed this month

Sally Byrne-Flores, Gina Docherty, Christie Holshouser, Merry Johnson and Beth Terry



**Carnations & Snowdrops are the flowers of January.** Cultivated for at least 2,000 years, carnations are well-loved and well-used in floral design and were even used medicinally. The Greeks and Romans used them often and the tradition has continued since then. The spicy scent and frilly edged flowers inspired the genus name ***dianthus*** from the Greek words *dios* (meaning divine) and *anthos* (meaning flower). These flowers are associated with love, fascination, and affection. Additionally, different colors are associated with

other aspects: admiration, royalty, romantic love, gratitude, sorrow, purity and friendship. Due to their long lived blossoms, they are associated with enduring love and thus are symbolic of a mother's love.

Snowdrops are native to some parts of Europe, Asia, and some of the Middle East. The Victorians considered them symbols of hope and consolation. As a result of their early bloom times, heralding the end of winter, they are associated with hope and rebirth. In association with innocence and purity, in some cultures they are linked to the Virgin Mary.

As they often bloom through snow in intense cold, these hardy flowers are often associated with strength and the ability to overcome challenges. They are planted in cemeteries and memorial gardens as symbols of remembrance. In ancient times, they were celebrated as the flower celebration of the halfway mark between winter solstice and the spring equinox. All parts of the snowdrop are considered toxic if ingested, due to the presence of alkaloids throughout the plant.



Happy Birthday

## **Club Business**

### **The Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska – 2024 Annual Report**

2024 found us promoting our motto: “Show, Share and Tell.” Our meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month offering both in person and on Zoom. Zoom meetings were a challenge as the internet in the meeting room came in and out.

Rachel Shedd, Horticulturist at the Alaska Botanical Garden, started the new year out presenting “Taking care of your Body in the Garden.” She passed along some excellent stretches, exercises and positions when working to help us maintain our ability to continue to work in the garden – knowledge that becomes more poignant year after year as we tend our corners of paradise.

In February, Debbie Hinckley took us along behind her camera on a beautiful month-long journey through a number of iconic English gardens, renowned the world over, in just one hour, culminating in the 2023 Chelsea Flower Show.

In March we began a new tradition with the club by offering craft round tables. Members Kathy Liska helped us make beautiful sun catcher mobiles, Sally Byrne-Flores brought materials for us to make bee hotels to encourage bees in our garden and Kellie Staples helped us paint rock strawberries to keep the robins out of our patches. This was such a success with our members that we incorporated a quarterly craft round table in 2025.

March also had the Board of Directors approving two of the seven grant requests received. Chugiak-Birchwood ABC School submittal will introduce botany through their art curriculum. It proposes creating seed bombs, observational drawing and cultivating specimens to be transplanted to the community garden. Seven hundred fifty students from kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade will be engaged in the project. Bartlett High School submittal will outfit a recently school-built greenhouse (12'x12') to expand their Garden Club activities in growing fruits, vegetables and flowers. Currently there are 150 students involved in the gardening club. Preschoolers will be brought in for observations and learning basic gardening and older special needs students are part of the club utilizing garden activities in life skill development. Each grantee was awarded \$1,000.

Member Jaime Rodriguez shared his extensive knowledge of rock gardens in April including their history and why people plant rockeries. He shared with us his successful and not so successful experiences over his years of trial and experimentation as well as ways to enhance our rock gardening experience.

April also brought us our first service project: the Children’s Marigold Giveaway at the Midtown Mall. Our booth helps children plant a marigold in a cup to spark their interest in growing things. The table also offers a few garden-related sales items which are always a hit, as well as club information. Many club members help at this event, which makes it very successful.

After a winter we thought would never end, summer finally made an appearance, and we were off and running with two service projects – the annual Verna Pratt Wildflower Trail at the Alaska Botanical Garden and the clean-up of the native plant garden at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center. Although we rescheduled both events due to the amount of snow on the ground, both club members and members of other clubs helped with the

clean ups. Offering members of other clubs to join us aligns with our goal of collaboration with other clubs.

Held at the old DMV on Benson Blvd, our annual plant sale was a huge success again this year. Many attendees voiced it is a must go-to sale for them. Club members made this success possible by bringing plants to sell, volunteering on Friday when plants are being delivered and/or working on Saturday putting out and maintaining plant tables during the sale. The Cooperative Extension Service was there with their pamphlet's/information and was well received by the attendees. Our craft tent, which offers crafts by members, was not as great a success as in the past and is being re-looked at for 2025. Many thanks are due to the Hinckley family for their generosity in allowing us to have our sale held there again this year.

Our summer garden tours in July started out in windy Palmer, where member Jaime Rodriguez gave us a wonderful tour of the Palmer Visitor Center gardens. Jaime used to be the director of the program there, so he was a delightful and informative tour guide. It tied in very well with his April presentation, as well as gave us all the history of how the visitor center came about – thanks to funding that former Senator Ted Stevens secured. Seeing and hearing about the long-term growth and development of the gardens was quite inspirational. We then moved over to the Alaska State Fairgrounds where Becky Myrvold, Head Gardener of the Fair, took us on a wonderful tour through various gardens. She told us her experiences and experiments over the years. She is a wonderful guide with her humble and earnest manner and delightful approach to her gardening. It was fun to see the gardens growth from our July visit to a visit in late August during the Fair.

Annie and Dennis Ronsse opened their gardens to club members once again in August. Members were able to pick flowers from the Ronsse's gardens to make 2 bouquets and to take them home to enjoy.

August brought us to the 88<sup>th</sup> Annual Alaska State Fair to "Enjoy the Ride." The Fair Crops Superintendent & Horticulture Manager also happens to be our member Kathy Liska, who announced her retirement this year. Club members volunteered for both the Crops and Flower Departments on both entry and judging days. The Wildflower Garden Club also sponsors special awards for both the Junior Largest Zucchini Contest and the Perennial/Biennial Division Champions, and we made a donation to support funding the extraordinary 'Train Topiary' on display in the center Plaza of the Fairgrounds.

Recently there has been a large resurgence in canning, and in September, long time member Chris Wood presented "Yes you Can" where she demonstrated techniques for turning our summer grown harvest into shelf-stable foods for the coming seasons. She also demonstrated how she makes her AK Fair award-winning Zucchini Relish and shared the recipe with us.

Fran Flint, Sarah Black and member Judy Pendleton spoke to the club in October about their successes with vermiculture – growing worms. The castings are great for fertilizing and the worm teas are highly nutritious liquid fertilizers for both houseplants and gardens. The three presenters all had somewhat different methods and very entertainingly explained their different techniques. Growing a "herd" of your own is surprisingly easy and greatly rewarding.

October members voted on the 2024 Wildflower Member of the Year, with the award going to Kathy Liska. Kathy has served in many positions in the club from Co-President, Secretary, Mid-town Mall Garden Show Chair, co-writes the Newsletter and Yearbook and stepped in as the Membership Chair this year. She has rendered outstanding service to the club, and we are proud to have her as a fellow club member and especially as the Member of the Year for 2024.

Our November Friendsgiving Potluck and Food Drive is always a success. This year, we added making crafts to the event where members Sally Bryne-Flores, Kellie Staples and Christie Holshouser helped members paint acorns, make seed bombs and make their own carrot and lettuce seed tapes.

December, ever a busy month, had club members enjoying our annual holiday luncheon with tasty food, a spirited gift exchange and tons of fun. We had workshops to make wreaths or centerpieces which is always popular and workshops to make gnome centerpieces. 2025 Yearbooks were passed out to members in attendance.

## December 2024 Treasurer Reports

### Nuvision Federal Credit Union

Business Savings	\$7,587.73
Business Checking	\$5,765.99
CD - 12 month (matures 7/30/25) 3.34%	\$5,299.73
<b>Balance 12/31/24</b>	<b>\$18,653.45</b>



<b>Morgan Stanley Balance 12/31/24</b>	<b>\$52,714.30</b>
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<b>Total Funds 12/31/24</b>	<b>\$71,367.75</b>
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## Upcoming Meetings, Projects, & Workshops

### February 13 – “Challenges & Rewards of Alaska Container Gardening”

Guest Speaker: John Horstkoetter

10-11:30am at Central Lutheran Church followed by Annual Business Meeting.

**February 15** – Time to plant Marigold seeds for the Midtown Mall Spring Garden Show taking place on April 19. Please let us know if you are sowing & growing by sending an email to [akwildflowers@gmail.com](mailto:akwildflowers@gmail.com)

### March 13 – “Crafting Round Tables”

Presenters: WGCA Board of Directors

10-11:30am at Central Lutheran Church



## **Announcements**

The **2025 Yearbooks/Directory** were mailed to all new or renewed members in the first days of January. If you have not received your yearbook by 20JANUARY, please let us know at [akwildflowers@gmail.com](mailto:akwildflowers@gmail.com)

### **WGCA 2025 Grants – This is the last month for applications to be submitted!**

Please share this opportunity and web link with those you know who may be interested in applying. Information and the application can be found using the following link to our website. <https://wildflowergardenclub.org/wgca-grant-application.pdf>

The goal of the **Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska** Grants Program is to encourage botanical education by funding scholarly studies, scientific research projects, or work in the areas of Horticulture, Floriculture, Landscape Design, Forestry, Botany, Agronomy, Plant Pathology and/or allied subjects.

- Individuals, Schools and Non-Profit entities engaged in work in the above listed fields may apply for grant funding until the **deadline of January 31, 2025**.
- Organizations must have 501(c)(3) status.
- All applicants must be based in the State of Alaska.



## **Member's Corner**

### **How to Winter Sow Seeds: Starting Your Garden in the Cold Season**

Want to get a head start on your spring garden? Winter sowing might be exactly what you're looking for! This budget-friendly seed-starting method lets you work with nature's cycles to grow strong, healthy plants. Learn how to turn simple household containers into mini greenhouses and start your garden during the coldest months.

#### **What is Winter Sowing?**

Winter sowing is like having your own fleet of tiny greenhouses right in your backyard. This method mimics nature's way of propagating plants. Seeds naturally fall to the ground in autumn, lie dormant during winter, and sprout when conditions are just right in spring. The best part? You don't need fancy equipment or a heated greenhouse. Just a few recycled containers and some basic supplies will get you started.

#### **Why Should You Try Winter Sowing?**

Starting seeds outdoors during winter offers several advantages over traditional indoor seed starting:

- Your seedlings will be naturally hardy and weather-resistant
- No grow lights or heat mats needed
- Seeds germinate at their own pace, just like in nature
- Less watering required than indoor starting
- Perfect for gardeners with limited indoor space
- Great way to reuse household containers

## Which Plants Work Best for Winter Sowing?

Not all plants are created equal when it comes to winter sowing. Here are some excellent candidates:

### Perennial Flowers

Many perennials actually benefit from cold stratification:

- Echinacea (Coneflower)
- Delphinium
- Lupines
- Black-eyed Susan
- Columbine
- Blanket flower



### Native Plants

Local native species are naturally adapted to your climate's winter conditions. Check with your local extension office for suggestions specific to your area.

### Essential Supplies for Winter Sowing

Getting started with winter sowing doesn't require a big investment. Here's what you'll need:

#### Containers

- Clean milk jugs or water containers
- Clear plastic containers (like salad boxes)
- Take-out containers with clear lids
- 2-liter soda bottles

#### Other Materials

- Quality potting soil
- Seeds of your choice
- Duct tape
- Waterproof marker
- Sharp knife or scissors
- Small drill or heated nail (for drainage holes)

## Step-by-Step Guide to Winter Sowing

### 1. Prepare Your Containers

Let's turn those recyclables into mini greenhouses:

First, clean your containers thoroughly with soap and water. For milk jugs, cut horizontally around the middle, leaving a small "hinge" intact. Remove the cap – this will provide necessary ventilation.

Make several drainage holes in the bottom using your drill or heated nail. Four to six holes should do the trick. Good drainage is crucial for preventing damping off disease.

## 2. Add Your Growing Medium

Fill the bottom portion of your container with 3-4 inches of pre-moistened potting soil. The soil should be damp but not waterlogged. Think of a wrung-out sponge – that's the moisture level you're aiming for.

Pat the soil gently to remove air pockets. Don't compact it too much; roots need room to grow.

## 3. Sow Your Seeds

Check your seed packets for proper planting depth. As a general rule, plant seeds about twice as deep as their width. Some seeds need light to germinate and should just be pressed into the soil surface.

You can sow seeds a bit more densely than usual since you'll thin them later. Just don't overcrowd them too much.

## 4. Seal and Label

Close up your container and secure it with duct tape, leaving the cap off for ventilation. Label each container with:

- Plant name
- Sowing date
- Expected germination time

Use a permanent marker or weather-resistant label ... You'll thank yourself later!

## 5. Position Your Containers

Finding the right spot is crucial for success!

Place your containers where they'll receive:

- Plenty of natural sunlight
- Natural precipitation (rain and snow)
- Protection from strong winds

Consider using milk crates or aluminum trays to keep containers from tipping over. A sheltered corner of your yard or patio often works well.



## Caring for Your Winter-Sown Seeds

### Monitoring Moisture

Your sealed containers create a self-watering environment. However, check moisture levels occasionally, especially during dry spells. If the soil looks dry, water gently through the ventilation hole.

### Temperature Fluctuations

Don't worry about freezing temperatures! These temperature swings are actually beneficial. The freeze-thaw cycle helps break down seed coatings and promote germination.



## Spring Care

As temperatures warm up, your seeds will begin sprouting. Once seedlings appear:

- Open lids on warm days for better air circulation
- Close them back up at night if frost threatens
- Gradually increase ventilation time to harden off seedlings

## Transplanting Your Seedlings

When spring arrives and frost danger passes, your seedlings will be ready for their permanent homes. Here's how to transplant successfully:

1. Water your seedlings well before transplanting
2. Gently separate individual plants, or plant in clusters
3. Transplant on a cloudy day or in the evening to minimize shock
4. Water immediately after transplanting

## Troubleshooting Common Issues

### No Germination?

- Check if seeds need specific temperature ranges
- Ensure soil stays consistently moist
- Some seeds simply take longer – be patient!

### Mold Growth?

- Increase ventilation
- Reduce watering
- Remove affected plants if necessary

### Leggy Seedlings?

- Ensure containers receive enough sunlight
- Consider repositioning to a brighter location
- Some stretching is normal early in the season

### Final Tips for Success

Remember these key points for winter sowing success:

- Start with easy plants your first season
- Label everything clearly
- Keep a garden journal to track results
- Join online winter sowing communities for support
- Save containers throughout the year for next season

Winter sowing is a rewarding way to start your garden early. It's budget-friendly, environmentally conscious, and produces strong, healthy plants.

Give it a try this winter – you might just discover your new favorite gardening method!

**This article was shared from the following link:**  
[Welcome to Garden Lovers Club - Garden Lovers Club](https://www.gardenloversclub.com/welcome-to-garden-lovers-club-garden-lovers-club)

### Our Motto... Show, Share and Tell!

The purpose of the Member's Corner section is to inspire and encourage each other.

Submit items: articles, garden ideas, photos, recipes, etc. for our newsletter by the last day of each month. Send to Kathy Liska at [akliska@aol.com](mailto:akliska@aol.com) or Paul Marmorat [pmarmorat@aol.com](mailto:pmarmorat@aol.com)

