



Wildflower Garden Club of Alaska

Newsletter ~ February 2026

P.O. Box 240563
Anchorage, AK
99524

FB: Wildflower Garden Club
akwildflowers@gmail.com
wildflowergardenclub.org

Message from the President

Oh, the weather outside is frightful! Hazardous conditions, reduced visibility, severe weather warnings. The first 31 months of January have been exhausting. Sadly, the forecast for February doesn't look much better! Even Outside is having terrible weather! I've followed the storms on the East Coast these past few days (my extended family lives in North Carolina). That prompted me to go down a rabbit hole on frost quakes and exploding trees. Exploding trees! I simply had no clue. But here's what I learned:

- A frost quake, or cryoseism, happens when rapidly falling temperatures cause groundwater to freeze and expand. They often happen at night, causing a loud noise and visibly shaking or cracking the ground. Fortunately, they are not dangerous and don't indicate an impending earthquake.
- A frost crack, or exploding tree, occurs when rapidly falling temperatures cause the water or sap inside a tree to freeze and expand, splitting the trunk or limbs. While not a true "explosion," they can be strong and sudden. The more you know!

On a brighter note: daylight hours are increasing and at my house the sun is finally shining between the peaks of the mountains. Soon, it'll be OVER the mountains. That means only one thing: summer's coming, summer's coming, summer's coming!

A gentle reminder that if you are planting marigolds for the Midtown Mall Garden Fair in April your marigold seeds should be planted by FEBRUARY 8th in order to have blooming plants. Best to use the 'Petite Marigolds' - any color you like, that grow only 6-8" tall. It's always fun to see and hear the excitement the children have when planting their marigold to take home! **Christie**



What's Growing Now

The Wildflower Garden of Alaska had the honor of hosting Dr. Richard Benfield at our February meeting. While looking for speakers for the year, Kathy came across his name and his topic sounded colorful, so she invited him to do a Zoom presentation. Dr Benfield one upped and said he had a free trip somewhere and he would be delighted to come up to talk to us in person.



The Garden Club extended invitations to other garden clubs in the area, the Alaska Botanical Garden and the Cooperative Extension, and ensured that other attendees were able to participate on Zoom.

A fascinating man, Richard has lived in multiple countries, has traveled to see gardens in 137 countries, and was working for the Canadian wildlife service when the request for wolves to reintroduce them to Yellowstone came in. He was tourism director for a part of Canada as well, for a time. Born in rural England, Richard has always been interested in gardens, and after his stint as Director of Tourism, he embarked on a quest to see gardens around the world, his presentation to us was titled Around the World in 80 Gardens, which is also the name of his first book.

He arrived on Tuesday night, spent the next day with the WGCA Board of Directors, including a visit to Mann Leiser Memorial Greenhouse, and a winter tour of the Alaska Botanical Garden with Mike Monterusso, whom he had met on previous trips to Anchorage.



Thursday morning, we had a Meet-and-Greet for our club members. In the afternoon, Paul and he went to see native art at The Fur Exchange and the Native Hospital, and proceeded to the BP Energy Center where he assisted in the meeting prep. There were a few more than 60 people who ultimately showed up in person and there was a large presence on Zoom, including Gina from New Zealand, Bonnie in Arizona and Kym in California. The colors and art structures he shared were exactly what we needed in our extended winter white season.

An altogether delightful evening.

Special wildflowers that bloomed this month

Barbara Baker, Billye Goff, Kat Karabelnikoff, Annita Magee, and Judy Pendleton



There are two birth flowers for February: the **Violet (Viola)** and the **Primrose (Primula)**. Many think of the red rose as the flower for February, due to its prevalence for use for Valentine's Day, but it is only associated with the holiday, not the month.

The Iris occasionally appears as a modern third option representing wisdom, courage, hope, and inspiration.

As with many flowers, different colors have different symbolisms, but generally, the violet is symbolic of modesty, faithfulness, humility, and deep love. In

Victorian times, violets were a declaration of loyalty. Used for perfume and in both the culinary arts and medicinally, they have taken a firm place in the hearts of many. Napoleon Bonaparte was partial to giving violets to Josephine.

The primrose symbolizes young love, youth, new beginnings, and hope. It often represents the start of something new. The name primrose comes from the Latin "primus," meaning "first," as it's one of the earliest flowers to appear after winter, often blooming through snow. These jewel-like flowers come in a myriad of colors, often with different meanings, but are always a joy with their dazzling appearance in the garden.



Club Business

January 2026 Treasurer Reports

Nuvison Federal Credit Union

Business Savings	\$8,001.83
Business Checking	\$6,459.85
CD-9 month (matures 5/1/26) 5.37%	\$5,138.07
Balance 1/31/26	\$19,599.75

Morgan Stanley Balance 1/31/26 **\$59,548.09**

Total Funds 1/31/26 **\$79,147.84**



Upcoming Meetings, Projects, & Workshops

February 15th -21st – Time to sow seeds for the “Children’s Marigold Giveaway” at the Midtown Mall Spring Garden Show on April 18. Please let us know if you are sowing & growing by sending an email to akwildflowers@gmail.com

March 12th – “Crafting Round Tables” We will make Seed Flowers!

Presenters: WGCA Members

10:30am-12:00pm at Central Lutheran Church

April 18th – Midtown Mall Spring Garden Show

Volunteers are needed to help set up, plant marigolds with the kids, answer questions about the club and gardening, assist with plant and craft sales, and take down. An opportunity to sell a limited amount of plants and garden related craft items will be available for members. SignUp Genius will be sent in March.



Announcements

Volunteers Needed for Committee Positions

Publicity Chairperson

Yearbook Chairperson – 2027

Social Media – Facebook & Instagram – Even some help to keep WGCA visible online.

Contact Kathy Liska at akliska@aol.com for more information.

(Don't be intimidated, this is not brain surgery ... everything is set up and ready to go!)

Member Share ~ Starting Marigolds Inside from Kathy Liska

In timing your planting for a target date so plants are in bloom, the soil, lighting, and watering conditions are important. Make sure the containers you choose have enough room for adequate root growth. I use flats/trays to start my seeds indoors. Use a well-draining, soilless potting mix, such as ‘Pro-Mix’, that has plenty of organic material and other ingredients that allow for good drainage. Marigolds take approximately 8 weeks from germination to bloom. The ‘Petite’ type works best for small hands that will be planting.

Most annuals require warm soil temperatures: 65 degrees or higher to germinate. Start them on top of your refrigerator or another warm surface. You can use a heat mat to be sure your seeds get the temperature they need. I use a grow rack with the lights lowered to 3-6” above the flat. Seeds should be sown on top of the surface and then covered lightly (about 1/8”) with soil. Mist the soil to dampen, then cover with plastic wrap to create a greenhouse effect. If too much moisture accumulates, pull plastic off, and let dry a bit. Check daily and mist as necessary until they begin to poke their heads up, then remove the plastic wrap for good. **For germination 16-18 hours of light is necessary.**



Most seeds need light to germinate. Once germinated, they need good light to grow strongly and not go all leggy. This is common when starting all types of plants, not just annuals, indoors. Even in a sunny windowsill, plants will grow leggy and weak, and are prone to stem damage.

A close light source will eliminate this problem.

T5 fluorescent bulbs are an excellent choice for this purpose. Air flow is also extremely important to develop strong stems. A fan to keep the air around the plants moving is crucial. Another very effective technique is to gently run your hand over ('pet') the plants daily from germination until they go to bud. This helps to stunt legginess and strengthen the stem. It sounds silly but I have been doing this for years with good success!



When most of the plants have their second set of true leaves, thin out any that are slow to develop – about one-third of the seedlings. This allows light and air to reach the seedlings which encourages more robust development.

Once plants are 3-4 inches tall, transplant the seedlings into jumbo 6-packs to give the roots room to grow. This is the time to adjust down to **12 hours of light and 12**



hours of darkness to stimulate the buds to form.

Raise the lights gradually as they get taller so there is always 3-6 inches distance from the light source. As the buds mature, you can place them in a bright window out of direct sunlight until you are ready to harden them off outdoors - (gradually increasing outdoor sunlight and temperatures for a week to avoid sunburn and shock).

As they mature, too much watering could cause your flowering annuals to die of damping off. One way to avoid diseases that can occur from soggy conditions (like root rot or powdery mildew), is to water them from the bottom. To do this, place a solid tray under the marigold draining tray and fill it with water.

They do not need special soil or fertilizer. Marigolds will actually set bud and bloom better without it. They also will not immediately die if you allow their soil to dry out. Marigolds are forgiving, but do not like wet feet!



... it is simple and rewarding!



A beautiful bulb planter created by Paul Marmora during one of his 'Friday Floral Classes' at the Alaska Wholesale Flower Market.



Wildflower's 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 or Paul Marmora at pmarmora@aol.com

