

Some background information about the Southeast Alaska Master Gardeners Association:

There are Master Gardeners organizations all over the USA. We function almost as a volunteer arm of the Cooperative Extension Service, by giving classes and otherwise helping spread the learning about gardening. The Cooperative Extension Service itself, of course, exists throughout the USA. In states that have counties, there is a "county extension agent" everywhere, who works with farmers, homemakers, 4H groups, etc. The Cooperative Extension Service is jointly funded by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and the state, through the state's land grant college. In Alaska, that is the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. By "land grant college", we mean that university in each state that has the obligation to teach agriculture, by reason of the grant of land from the U.S. Government to each state for the purpose of creating a university. (Examples are Oregon State U., Iowa State U., Kansas State U. and so on.)

One becomes a Master Gardener by taking the master gardeners training course, which one is not qualified to do until after having gardened at least two years in the local climate. One pays for the course, which is given annually, with money plus a promise to do at least 40 hours of volunteer work related to the topic in the following two years. Many Master Gardeners continue to do gardening-related community service far beyond that requirement.

In Juneau, here are some of the things Master Gardeners (through the organization, Southeast Alaska Master Gardeners Assoc., SAMGA) typically do or have recently done.

SAMGA enhances and supplements the University of Alaska Cooperative Extension Service's work by widely disseminating gardening information to Alaskans in our area. SAMGA members help teach gardening classes given by Alaska Cooperative Extension for master gardener training. Each spring we give a brief series called "Gardening at Noon" tailored to fit the schedules of office workers. We hold workshops on pruning, dividing, houseplants, and greenhouses, among other topics. We have aided Habitat for Humanity with plans and the work of landscaping for new houses built by Habitat. We organize and hold garden tours. We installed a memorial garden spot for Donna Flint at Auke Bay School. We designed and installed the new landscaping (trees and shrubs) for Wildflower Court, a long-term care facility, and paid for all the materials used. We joined with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities by planting spring bulbs in a beautification project at Auke Bay Triangle; and we provided the lawnmower that our members use to maintain that area.

Each year when Juneau Douglas High School holds a science fair, we judge the student projects related to plants or botany, and give awards for the top three. We fund and award (to high school seniors) scholarships for first-year college work in botany, horticulture, or related fields. We gave a grant to Auke Bay Elementary School for grow lights, for first graders to improve their vegetable garden plot.

In 1990, we helped fund the startup of the Juneau Community Garden (located on Montana Creek Road), in 2002 we assisted them to build a new shelter for tools and garden events, and in 2003, we provided financial support toward an electric fence to keep out four-legged garden pests. Master Gardeners maintain test plots at the Community Garden; the vegetables grown are given out to local charitable organizations, while the knowledge gained is shared with other gardeners.

In early May in even-numbered years, we organize and host, together with Alaska Cooperative Extension, a major gardening conference and trade show attended by people from all over Alaska, as well as some from nearby parts of Canada, and from the Pacific Northwest.

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