

# Borealis

the newsletter of the



December 1994

P.O. Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514



## December Meeting

### Alaska's Move to Native Plants for Reclamation and Revegetation

Monday, Dec. 5  
7:30 p.m.

Alaska Aviation  
Heritage Museum,  
4721 Aircraft Dr.,  
near Lake Hood.

Stoney Wright, the manager of the Alaska Plant Materials Center, will give a program on the use of native plants for reclamation and revegetation projects. The use of natives for this purpose has been slowly increasing, as more commercially grown native plants become available in sufficient numbers.

**Plant Family** - Marlena Mooring will continue our series on the Figwort Family. Plants in the genera, *Mimulus* and *Veronica*, will be featured this month. See Page 3.

**Mini-Botany** - Trevor Ricketts will give a short presentation on berries. What are they, and why are so many of them red?

A board meeting will be held half an hour beforehand, starting at 7 p.m.

Happy Holidays everybody!

## Mystery Plant

Four species of this genus can be found in Alaska, of which three are native. The one non-native species has been widely planted as an ornamental, and is the only exotic tree to become naturalized in our state. All species are deciduous shrubs or small trees, and have gray bark. Leaves are alternate and pinnately divided. The inflorescence is a cluster of many small white flowers. Later, small, red fruits like mini apples (pomes) form. These become favorite winter food for many bird species, including crossbills, grosbeaks, crows and especially Bohemian Waxwings. These birds probably play an important role in seed dispersal.

Answer on Page 3.



Mystery Plant drawings by Toby Tyler, ANPS Kachemak Chapter.

## Anchorage Chapter Elections

At last month's meeting, Unison Hubbard was elected Treasurer of the Anchorage Chapter board. Retaining their seats were: Jean Poor (President), Julia Ricketts (Vice-president), and Andrea Woods (Secretary).

## Seed Swap Coordinator

Susan Attwater has volunteered to coordinate this year's event. Thanks, Susan!

We are still in need of seeds. If you have any, please bring them to the December meeting, or mail them to the ANPS care of the post office box address.

## Calling Internet Users

Liz, an associated staff member at the Herbarium at Berkeley, would like to hear from plant enthusiasts in Alaska.

Her Internet address is:

[liz@valleyoak.berkeley](mailto:liz@valleyoak.berkeley)

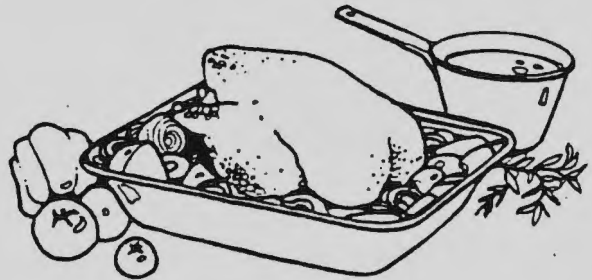
Please, drop her a line.

## Last T-Shirt Competition Reminder

Time's running out for entries to the ANPS T-Shirt Competition! The deadline has been extended to December 5, 1994. If you would like to submit an entry, either mail it to Ginny Moran, C/O ANPS, P.O. Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514, or bring it to the December Anchorage Chapter meetings. Call Ginny Moran for more details at w( ) or h( ).



## Recipe of the Month



## Cranberry and Orange Relish

As our thoughts turned to the holidays and turkey dinners, we decided it was time to include a recipe for cranberry sauce. Although this sauce goes well with turkey, there is no need to confine it to that. It goes just as well with poultry, pork or ham.

1 lb. cranberries (fresh or frozen)

The zest and juice of 1 orange

Piece of cinnamon stick

3 oz sugar

4 cloves

1/2 teaspoon ginger

2 tablespoons port

1. Mince cranberries finely, then place them in a saucepan.
2. Remove the zest of the orange, and cut into fine strips.
3. Place zest, orange juice, cinnamon stick, cloves, ginger and sugar in saucepan with the cranberries. Bring to boil, and cook, covered, for about 5 minutes.
4. Remove pan from heat and add port.
5. Pour into a serving bowl, cover, and leave in the refrigerator until required. (Remove cinnamon and cloves before serving.)

**The Figwort Family continued:  
*Mimulus* and *Veronica***

This month two genera with opposite leaves will be featured. Plants in the genus *Mimulus* (Monkey Flower) have a bilabiate (two-lipped) flower and 4 stamens. Those of the genus *Veronica* have a rotate (flat and circular) corolla and 2 stamens.

There are two representatives of the genus *Mimulus* in Alaska: *M. guttatus* (Yellow Monkey Flower or Wild Snapdragon) and *M. lewisii* (Purple Monkey Flower). The former (pictured



left) is found at the edge of streams and lakes, and on wet, rocky slopes near the coast in Southeastern and South-central Alaska, and in the Aleutian Islands. Occasionally, it occurs along rivers in interior Alaska. The plant is sprawling, with upright, blooming branches to 16 inches tall. Stem leaves are round to oblong, and toothed on the margins; lower leaves are petiolated (with stalks). Flowers are large, 5-petaled, irregular-shaped, and bright yellow, with reddish spots in the throat. The leaves are edible, either raw or cooked. Purple Monkey Flower occurs in scattered locations in Southeastern Alaska. Its habit is more erect, the flowers are bright pink, and the lower leaves are sessile (without stalks).

Hulten lists 11 species of *Veronica* in Alaska, plus 2 sub-species; some are introduced weeds. The genus is named in honor of the saint who wiped Christ's face on the way to the crucifixion. Some species are also known by the common name of Speedwell. The flowers of plants in this genus somewhat resemble those of the forget-me-not, but have 4 unequal petals and 2 stamens, compared to the 5 petals and 5 stamens of the latter.

Gardeners will probably be familiar with the Aleutian Speedwell (*V. grandiflora*), a species with large and conspicuous purple flowers, and hairy leaves. The plant grows to 4 inches high, in rocky or gravelly soils. It's found in the Western Aleutian Islands and on the Kamchatka Peninsula in Siberia.

Other species have smaller, less showy flowers. The most widespread are described below. American Veronica (*V. americana*), also known as American Brooklime, is an inconspicuous herb of streams and roadside ditches, with violet to lilac flowers and glabrous (lacking hairs) stems. Its range includes much of the southern half of Alaska. The green leaves can be harvested and eaten. (In Japan and Europe some species of *Veronica* are considered a delicacy, with a flavor similar to watercress.) Brook Veronica (*V. serpyllifolia*), an introduced weed found in moist places along roadsides and in waste places throughout South-coastal Alaska, also has glabrous stems. Its flowers are white or pale blue. Alpine Veronica (*V. wormskjoldii*) occurs in meadows and on alpine slopes throughout Southeastern, South-central and eastern Central Alaska, and the Aleutian Chain. It has hairy stems, and bluish-lavender flowers.

**Mystery Plant Answer:**



**Mountain Ash *Sorbus* sp.**

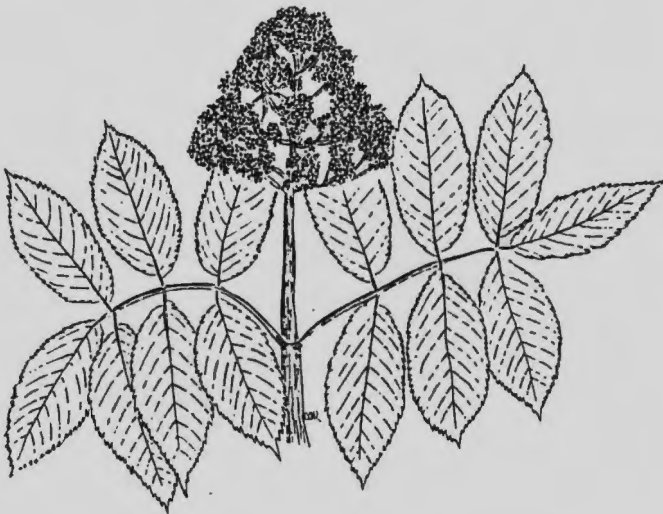
## What's in a Name?

by Julia Ricketts

### *Sambucus racemosa* (Red-berried Elder)

Many members of this widespread genus have stems that, when young, are like wooden tubes filled with a soft, white pith. Generations of children, from around the world, have hollowed-out the stems to make whistles or pea-shooters. The hollow tubes were also used as fire-blowers, like bellows, in the past. "Sambucus" is derived from "sambuke", a Greek musical instrument made from the hollow, woody stems of the elder. "Racemosa" refers to the arrangement of the flowers, in racemes (an unbranched, elongated inflorescence with stalked flowers maturing from the bottom upwards).

The Red-berried Elder is a common shrub in woods and openings throughout Southeastern, South-central and Southwestern Alaska. The bright, red berries are prized by birds, but the seeds are considered poisonous for humans. The common name, elder, is derived from "Ellern", an old English word for the elder (*Sambucus nigra*) in that country. Another common name, Alaska Lilac, refers to the large, pyramidal clusters of showy white flowers.



## Simple Ways to Extend the Life of Cut Flowers

During the winter months cut flowers help to brighten our homes. The following two recipes were taken from the Northern Nevada Native Plant Society newsletter, and should help prolong the life of your cut flowers.

1. Mix 2 tablespoons white vinegar, 1 tablespoon sugar, and 1 quart warm water. (At least 3 inches of the stems should be underwater.)
2. Mix one part of any of the common lemon-lime sodas with three parts of water. (No diet drinks - they have too much acid.) To a quart of the mixture add a quarter teaspoon of household bleach. Every four days of use add another quarter teaspoon of bleach to keep the solution clear. Flowers in this solution were found to last longer than those in commercial preservers.

Bleach helps prevent bacterial and fungal growths that clog the flower stem and prevent take-up of food. Sugar provides food to help buds open. Acid in the fizzy drink helps liquid move up the plant stems.

Ideally, cut flowers early in the morning and place them in water at once. Before placing them in a vase, recut the stems under water, removing one or two inches at an angle. This ensures that water is drawn into the stem, instead of a bubble of air being drawn in. Use a thoroughly clean vase with the liquid mixture given in the recipe warmed to about 100 F. Never use softened water in vase solutions; it contains sodium, which is harmful to cut flowers. In hard water areas, where white deposits form on teakettles and faucets, use demineralized water, sold for filling steam irons.



**Decorating for Christmas?  
Spare a thought for the plants that help us celebrate.**

*"The holly and the ivy, now they are both full grown"*

*"Deck the halls with boughs of holly, Fa, la, la, , la, la, , la, la, , la, la."*

*"O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree, Your branches green delight us"*

These Christmas carols attest to the long-standing European tradition of bringing evergreen foliage inside the house, in the midst of winter, to celebrate Christmas. How and where did these traditions begin?

The Holly Tree, originally called the "Holy Tree", was believed to have sprung up for the first time beneath the footsteps of Christ. The tree has long been a symbol of Christmas: the prickly, green leaves representing the crown of thorns, the red berries reminders of the Blood of Christ, the white flowers symbolic of the purity of Mary. All three songs feature plants with evergreen leaves, all are associated with eternity. The carol "Deck the Halls" originated in Wales, where doors were left unbolted on Christmas Eve so that the Holy Family could visit if they wished; the decorations were intended as a welcome. The song "O Christmas Tree" (originally, "O Tannenbaum") came from Germany, where decorated Common Silver Fir (*Abies alba*) trees were first used around the time of Martin Luther.

Europeans, emigrating to America, brought their traditions with them and looked for alternative plants, botanical cousins, to use. The traditions have now become so well integrated into our collective Christmas culture that the original symbolism and purpose of bringing greens into the house is often forgotten. Modern plastics enable us all to have a realistic-looking Douglas Spruce, or other tree, in our home, with the added benefit of no needles on the carpet! However, many people still love the real thing. What are our options in Alaska? Most years, Christmas trees can be cut from certain areas of public land near Anchorage. This year, Chugach National Forest is allowing Christmas tree cutting near Bertha Creek (Turnagain Pass area). Only one tree can be cut per family, and other restrictions apply. Call 271-2500 for more details.

Commercially, none of our Alaskan trees are widely available for Christmas tree use. Black Spruce, although used in some areas, are not ideal because of their tall, thin and scraggly shape, and

Continued on Page 6.

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**ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL**

The Alaska Native Plant Society was organized in 1982 by an enthusiastic group of amateur and professional botanists. It is a non-profit educational organization with the aim of uniting all persons interested in the flora of Alaska.

Membership is open to any interested individual or organization. If you wish to join us, please indicate the category of membership you desire, then clip and mail this application with the appropriate remittance to: **Alaska Native Plant Society, P.O. Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514**

Select the membership category you desire:

Full Time Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$5	Name: _____
Individual	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10	Address: _____
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$15	City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Organization	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$25	

Membership is on a calendar year basis. Any renewals before the end of 1994 will be valid until December 1995.

down-drooping branches. Not much support for all those presents. White Spruce are sometimes used, and are a much better shape. There has even been some interest in establishing White Spruce Christmas tree farms in Alaska. If you venture a little further afield, you may get permission to cut a Sitka Spruce somewhere on the Kenai, but good luck in handling and decorating it - if ever there was a spiky spruce this is it! As for Hemlock, with its bent-over top, well there's a recipe for a fallen angel. Most of the Christmas trees for sale in Alaska are non-native species: Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*), Colorado Spruce (*Picea pungens*) and Blue Spruce (a form of Colorado Spruce) are the most common. Their regular, conical shape, with higher branches ascending and lower branches either drooping or level, make them perfect for decorating.

What about materials for cut boughs or decorating wreaths? When we lived in Texas we used to cut boughs of Loblolly Pine, and make wreaths from native muscadine grape vine, weaving in sprigs of the native yaupon holly, with its bright, red berries, and of wax myrtle for their sweet fragrance. In Alaska, cut branches of both spruce and hemlock shed their needles promptly when brought indoors. However, they can be used in a wreath designed for outside. One circumpolar plant has actually earned a name for its use in Christmas decorations: the humble Fir Club Moss (*Lycopodium selago*) is also known as Christmas

Greens. It will stay green all winter, and its long, spreading stems make it easy to pull up great lengths in one go. These are great for weaving into wreaths, or for other decorations. (However, if you use it, be sure to keep it out of reach of young children, as it is poisonous.) Mountain Ash berries and rose hips can both add color to your decorations. It may be a little late to collect them for this year, as the fruits will probably drop. Verna advises us to pick them early, when the berries and hips are under-ripe.

Maybe we've missed something - let us know if you use a native plant for decoration at Christmas, and we'll mention it next month. At least we can rush out and gather some for New Year.



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The newsletter of the Alaska Native Plant Society is published monthly except for June, July, August and September. Contributions for the January issue should be mailed to: Julia and Trevor Ricketts, , Anchorage, AK 99516 to arrive by December 16.

**Anchorage Chapter Program Coordinators**

Ginny Moran Main Program  
 Verna Pratt Plant Family  
 Julia Ricketts Mini Botany  
 Sarah Andres Field Trips

Full Color

20 by 24" Alaska Wildflower Poster

HOLIDAY SPECIAL

For A.N.P.S. members

\$8.00

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