

# BOREALIS

April-May 2025 Edition

## MEETING DETAILS: APRIL & MAY

### Monday, April 7, 7 PM

*In-Person & Zoom*

- In-person potluck (**6-6:45 pm**)
- Main Topic: “**Plants that Eat Bugs**,” presented by **Bob Armstrong**
- Plant Families: Monocots, **Iridaceae (Iris Family)**, presented by **Glenn Brown**
- Mini-Botany: Medicinal Plants, **TBD**

### Monday, May 5, 7 PM

*Via Zoom*

- Main Topic: **Honoring, Preserving and Protecting Traditional Native Knowledge and Use of our Plant Relatives**, presented by **Tia Holley**
- Plant Families: Monocots, **Liliaceae (Lily Family)**, **TBD**
- Mini-Botany: Medicinal Plants, **TBD**

**Virtual Meeting Link:** [Join via Zoom](#)

Meeting ID: 947 5146 9324

Passcode: 812931

In person meetings are at the **Campbell Creek Science Center** (5600 Science Center Dr., Anchorage, AK 99507)

Meeting details are also posted at <https://aknps.org/upcoming-events/> and our Facebook page: [facebook.com/AKNPS/](https://facebook.com/AKNPS/)



*Salix alaxensis* (Feltleaf willow) is a native plant in the Salix (Willow) family that is being honored along with *S. reticulata* (Netleaf willow) as 2025 Native Plant(s) of the Year. Photo courtesy Anne Ruggles of Fairbanks.

## NOTICE TO PRINT SUBSCRIBERS

Due to printing cost increases, *Borealis* print subscriptions now cost ~\$20/year per subscriber; we charge \$10/year. The board will review our printing costs again in the fall but a price increase is expected to go in effect for print subscribers beginning Jan. 1, 2026, that is adequate to cover the actual cost of a print subscription.

## President's Message

# Lessons from Willows

By Sara Hogan

As winter gradually releases its hold, we find ourselves eagerly awaiting the first signs of spring. One such harbinger is the emergence of catkins on the feltleaf willow (*Salix alaxensis*), typically appearing in May before the leaves unfurl. These catkins play a crucial role in supporting early pollinators and stabilizing our riverbanks. Their forthcoming arrival serves as a reminder of the resilience and interconnectedness of our native ecosystems.

This month, we're celebrating two remarkable species as our Native Plants of the Year: feltleaf willow and netleaf willow (*S. reticulata*). While they may be different in form, one growing tall and resilient, the other hugging the ground—both play an essential role in Alaska's ecosystems. Our native willows provide food and shelter for wildlife, enrich the soil, and even hold a place in traditional medicine.

Their story is a reminder of why native plants matter, not just as scenery, but as keystone species that sustain the land we call home. It's also why the work of the Alaska Native Plant Society is so important. Whether we're sharing knowledge through our meetings, participating in or leading a field trip, or contributing to native plant conservation, we are all part of this larger network of connection, just like the willows.

As the season shifts, I encourage you to step outside and notice the first signs of spring. Look for the willows. See how they stand resilient, adapting to whatever nature throws their way. And as we continue our own journey of learning and stewardship, let's take a lesson from them – spread roots, grow strong, and support those around us.

Looking forward to a season of discovery!



*"A non-profit organization to promote the study and conservation of Alaska native plants."*

## Alaska Native Plant Society Officers, Committees & Program Coordinators

### President

Sara Hogan  
[president@aknps.org](mailto:president@aknps.org)

### Vice President

Amy Tippery  
[vicepresident@aknps.org](mailto:vicepresident@aknps.org)

### Secretary

Anne Gore  
[secretary@aknps.org](mailto:secretary@aknps.org)

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[treasurer@aknps.org](mailto:treasurer@aknps.org)

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Aaron Wells  
[membership@aknps.org](mailto:membership@aknps.org)

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Elizabeth Bluemink  
[newsletter@aknps.org](mailto:newsletter@aknps.org)

### Field Trips Coordinator

Dennis Ronsse

### Seed Program

Coordinator  
Erika Wolter  
[seeds@aknps.org](mailto:seeds@aknps.org)

### Campbell Creek Science Center Wildflower Gardens

Ginger May  
[ccsc\\_gardening@aknps.org](mailto:ccsc_gardening@aknps.org)

**General Inquiries:** [admin@aknps.org](mailto:admin@aknps.org)

**Website:** <https://aknps.org/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/AKNPS>

**Address:** PO Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514



Anyone may contribute articles, book reviews, event/class fliers, photography and artwork for publication in *Borealis*. All materials should relate to the study and conservation of Alaska's native plants.

Editorial deadlines are the 15th of September, November, January, March and April. Recommended article length is 400-600 words. Written materials are subject to copy editing and space constraints. Send submissions to [newsletter@aknps.org](mailto:newsletter@aknps.org).

**SIGN UP HERE**

*Medicinal & Monocot 5-Minute Talks*

## 2025 Alaska Native Plant(s) of the Year: Feltleaf and Netleaf Willow

By Beth Baker and Kitty LaBounty

No matter where you are in Alaska, a willow is likely to be growing nearby. While some willows have a diminutive, creeping habit, they are still categorized as trees or shrubs. In fact, the willow genus, *Salix*, is the largest plant genus in Alaska by number of woody species. We have 36 native willows in Alaska, omitting their subspecies and variants. You'd be a champion if you could identify all of them, plus their hybrids. The author Janice Schofield calls willows “**a taxonomic nightmare**” due in part to their tendency to hybridize. The feltleaf willow for example can hybridize with grayleaf willow, woolly willow, and Richardson willow. What a plant ID headache!

But wait, willows can relieve headaches too. They produce **salicin**, related to the chemical in aspirin. The medicinal value of willows has been put to use around the world for thousands of years, including in Alaska where willow bark was chewed for head and tooth aches. People also eat the inner bark as food.

Let's get real, willows don't always like to be eaten and can't run away. So, if an animal chews on them, some willows are known to ramp up their production of these bitter-tasting chemicals, making their leaves less palatable. Better living through chemistry. How clever!

Despite the complexity of willow identification, a few Alaska native willows can be easily identified. This year, the Alaska Native Plant Society is honoring two of them—**feltleaf willow (*S. alaxensis*)** and **netleaf willow (*S. reticulata*)**—in the second year of our Native Plant of the Year program.

### Feltleaf willow

Feltleaf willow is found throughout Alaska except the Aleutians and Southeast islands. It forms dense, bushy stands but can also grow up to nine meters tall.

The leaves of feltleaf willow make it easy to identify. The tops are hairless and dull green and the undersides are covered with dense, whitish felt. The only other willow species with dense woolly hairs, according to the late **Dominique Collet**, is the sageleaf willow (*S. candida*).



Feltleaf willow (*Salix alaxensis* v. *alaxensis*) on Alaska's North Slope, photo courtesy Dennis Ronsse.

Feltleaf willow performs a lot of ecosystem services. When a moose walks up to a salad bar of green options, it moves to its favorite feltleaf willow. Feltleaf is also appreciated by snowshoe hares, willow ptarmigan and insects seeking pollen and nectar in the early spring. As columnist Ned Rozell wrote, “Willows like the feltleaf are the little engines that make the northern forest go.”

Feltleaf willow quickly colonizes disturbed soil, growing rapidly after flooding to stabilize the soils. No wonder it is valued for projects such as wildlife habitat restoration after fires, streambank protection, erosion control and mining reclamation. Thousands were propagated and planted after construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline.

This is a plant worth getting to know, and despite the best efforts of hungry moose, it is thought to be Alaska's most abundant tree.

### Netleaf willow

Beloved of Alaska rock gardeners, netleaf willow (*S. reticulata*), is a diminutive willow found throughout the northern latitudes—skipping only Iceland and Greenland. In Alaska, it is abundant at all elevations. In boreal forest regions, netleaf willow is mostly in open areas. In the warmer regions of the state, it is more restricted to rocky alpine habitats, where it is covered with snow and difficult to see for much of the year.

*Continued on next page*

## Willows, from previous page



Netleaf willow (*S. reticulata*) growing in Anchorage; iNaturalist observation by shaunpogacnik (CC BY-NC).

Despite its small stature, netleaf willow is one of the most easily recognized willow species in Alaska. The shrubs are small, up to six inches tall with small, dark green leaves having depressed (deep) net-like veins. Some might only recognize it as a willow because of the tufted seeds erupting from the mature fruits on the dark purple-red catkins.

When catkins aren't present, the plants could be confused with **alpine bearberry** (*Arctous alpina*). Alpine bearberry leaves are obovate (widest toward the top) and finely toothed along the margin with skeletonized leaves usually present. Leaves of netleaf willow are round, lack toothed

## Recommended Reading on Willows

- *Willows of Southcentral Alaska* and *Willows of Interior Alaska*, by Dominique M. Collet
- *Alaska Trees and Shrubs*, by Leslie A. Viereck and Elbert L. Little, Jr.
- *Feltleaf willows: Alaska's most abundant tree*, by Ned Rozell, Alaska Geophysical Institute ([available online](#))

margins and skeletonized leaves are not present.

Like many woody shrubs, netleaf willow forms **ectomycorrhizal relationships** with fungi that supply the willow with mineral nutrients that are in short supply in cold soils. In turn, the willow provides the fungi with carbohydrates.

There are reports of tundra and alpine mammals browsing this tiny plant, but the most obvious sign of animal interaction is the formation of insect galls on the leaves. Species of **galling sawfly** are likely the most common types of insects causing the red or green galls. Larvae of flies and sawflies also feed on the maturing catkins. Netleaf willows are likely to be at least partially wind pollinated, but both male and female flowers produce nectar for attracting and rewarding pollinators.

Next time you find yourself in alpine or arctic tundra, keep an eye open for this attractive willow.

## 2025 Alaska Native Plant(s) of the Year Shirts

For a second year, the Alaska Native Plant Society is offering Native Plant of the Year shirts. We are partnering with the Flora of North America, which provided its *Salix alaxensis* and *S. reticulata* illustrations free of charge for this project. You can find the FNA Vol. 7 botanical descriptions of *S. alaxensis* [here](#) and *S. reticulata* [here](#). Source: [www.eFloras.org](http://www.eFloras.org)



Order a feltleaf or netleaf willow shirt: <https://alaska-native-plant-society.square.site/s/shop>

## Field Trip Spotlight

# Five Years of Nature Journaling with Alaska Native Plants

By Barb Johnson

I have always been interested in art but did not delve into nature journaling until the COVID-19 pandemic, when I had a lot of time to look closely at plants in my yard and on my hikes.

I took classes from **John Muir Laws** and began looking carefully at my surroundings while recording my observations. I was astounded by how much I learned and how much more connected I became to the natural world. I also found nature journaling to be meditative. During the pandemic, it calmed my nerves and helped me focus on something positive and interesting. Since then, it has been a practice I enjoy sharing with others.

In 2021, Annie Ronsse, Monica O'Keefe and I co-led the society's first "**Art to Explore Native Plants**" field trip to Turnagain Arm. We had a glorious time looking at spring flowers and painting them while enjoying the gorgeous landscape views. We repeated this location in 2022 and again, it was wonderful.

The 2023 trip at nearby Bird Ridge began with drawing and painting in chilly, windy conditions. After a short time, we drove to the AKNPS self-guided plant hike at **Indianhouse Ridge** to draw and paint in a warmer, less windy location.

In 2024, our venue moved to Beach Lake in the Chugiak area. We sketched and painted along the lake and hiked out to **Fire Creek Estuary** to paint the gorgeous shooting stars just beginning to bloom.

Our 2025 trip will focus on willows since netleaf

and feltleaf willow are featured as native plants of the year. Of course, flowers and any other interesting plants may also be drawn, painted and studied.

The location is weather dependent but we plan to meet at **10 am, Saturday, April 26**, at the **Mt. Baldy Trailhead** parking lot and walk a mile to the first sketching and painting location. We will focus on feltleaf willow around a pond and then venture on a steeper hike up the backside of Mt. Baldy looking for netleaf willow and focusing on differences and similarities of these species. I would love to have a knowledgeable member attend this trip or join me for a recon hike beforehand, so I am more confident identifying them.

For nature journaling, you'll need warm clothes, snacks, water, a pencil, eraser, fine-tip black-ink pen, notebook or journal, and hand lens. Other helpful extras are colored pencils or a small watercolor set, paintbrush or water brush, small container for holding water if you plan to paint, a paper towel or Kleenex for dabbing, and a pad to sit on. A phone camera is helpful too if you want to finish your painting later.

I feel that every person could benefit from nature journaling, especially in our hectic world with so much time spent on the Internet instead of outside in nature, observing, using all our senses and learning. The connections and aha moments are endless.

*Text Barb at 907-229-6891 with your name and contact information if you would like to RSVP for the April 26 "Art to Explore Native Plants" trip.*



L to R: "Art to Explore Native Plants" field trips held at Windy Corner in 2021 and at Beach Lake/Fire Creek Estuary in 2024.

## Upcoming Workshops

### Trees to Wood Workshop: How Trees Grow and Wood Properties

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, May 27 & Thursday, May 29, 6:30-8:30 pm (both sessions)

**Cost:** \$11/person

**Location:** Campbell Creek Science Center, 5600 Science Center Drive, Anchorage, AK

**Register:** <https://www.recreation.gov/>

Trees dominate our landscapes and inspire us with their grandeur. They grow to inspiring heights and live to great ages. Yet, they all start from a tiny seed. Do you ever wonder how they grow?

In this two-session workshop, we will explore the growth process and learn how the cambium layers make new wood and bark. Students will learn about growth rings, heartwood, and how conifers differ from broadleaf trees. Each tree species produces unique wood characteristics, and we will investigate some of the more common types, mainly oak and pine.

### Understanding Potentilla: Three-Day Workshop with Dr. Barbara Ertter

**Date/Time:** July 11-13

**Cost:** \$150/person

**Location:** UAA + one day in the field

**How to Register:** Contact Marilyn Barker at [mhwbarker@icloud.com](mailto:mhwbarker@icloud.com)

Puzzled by *Potentilla*? Baffled by all the name changes? Then this workshop is for you!

This three-day workshop will be taught by Dr. Barbara Ertter, lead author of *Potentilla* and related genera for the Flora of North America and emeritus curator of Western North American Flora, University Herbarium and Jepson Herbaria at UC Berkeley.

The workshop includes: a worldwide overview of all of Potentilleae; examination of freshly collected and herbarium representatives of Alaska native

#### Session 1 (May 27):

Introduction to the basics of secondary woody growth (how trees grow, cambium layers including the bark and wood)

#### Session 2 (May 29):

Characteristics of wood (hardness, grain, cuts, and uses).



Bring a hand lens, if you have one, writing utensil, and a notebook.

Poplar growing near the Eagle River Nature Center, (c) Patrick Crooks via iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)

This workshop is taught by AKNPS member Cindy Johnson, a retired biology professor and award-winning instructor, in partnership with the Campbell Creek Science Center.

**NOTE:** When you sign up for the first session on May 27, you are automatically signed up for the second session. If there is no "A" on a program date when attempting to select an event date, that means the event is sold out.

Potentilleae; and an outing to observe the complexity of local populations. We'll learn the rationale for segregate genera such as *Drymocallis*, *Dasiphora*, and *Comarum*, with a look at ongoing challenges.

We'll also take a close look at problematic groups in Alaska, notably sections *Niveae* and *Pennsylvanicae*.



*Potentilla hyparctica*, courtesy Marilyn Barker

**IMPORTANT:** Registration is first come, first served, and a waiting list will be maintained. Until April 30, registration is limited to active AKNPS members, after which registration is open to the general public. Contact Marilyn Barker at [mhwbarker@icloud.com](mailto:mhwbarker@icloud.com) to reserve your spot and arrange payment. Payment by check is preferred.

*No refunds for cancellations after July 1.*

## Alaska Native Plant Month

Alaskans celebrate Native Plant Month in May. We are so grateful to many partners organizing activities for their communities. Many more native plant month events will be listed in our next newsletter!



### Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival Highlights Native Plants

Shorebirds depend on native plants for food and shelter during their migration and nesting seasons. The organizers of this year's Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival, May 7-11 in Homer, were inspired this year to arrange some events and exhibits related to Alaska Native Plant Month. Here is a roundup:

- **Thursday, May 8, 10-11 am - Creating Bird-Friendly Spaces with Native Plants Walk:** A guided walk with Mossy Kilcher at the Seaside Farm to explore how to create bird-friendly spaces in your backyard or community. \$5. Limit 30.
- **Friday, May 9, 1-1:45 pm - Native Plants: A Lifeline for Birds:** A presentation about Alaska native plants and the birds that rely on them. (included with registration)
- **Native Plant Self-Guided Walk:** Learn about Alaska native plants by taking a walk through the Pratt Gardens and forest trails at the Pratt Museum. Free.
- **Alaska's Birds and Plants Exhibit:** The Pratt Museum will have a small, special exhibit featuring Alaska birds and the museum's herbarium specimens. This exhibit will show how plants give birds food, shelter and nesting spaces. Museum admission: \$15 adults, \$13 seniors and AK residents.

Review the festival's full schedule and register here!

<https://kachemakshorebird.org/>

### Delta Junction Workshop: Enhancing Pollinator Habitat with Native Plants

Summer Nay, the Salcha-Delta SWCD Invasive Plant Program Manager, and UAF Entomologist Alex Wenninger will teach this free workshop in Delta Junction on **Saturday, May 17, from 10 am to 2 pm**. An event flier is in the works and early registration is available now through the Delta Career Advancement Center.

The class will focus on learning how to provide pollinators with a range of the plants they love, how to recognize the pollinators and their favorite native plants, and the best locations and soils to allow those plants to prosper so you can create a thriving community of nectar-rich native plants in your home gardens and yards. We will spend some time in the classroom, but (weather permitting) much of the class will be hands-on at the Salcha-Delta Soil & Water Conservation District native plant nursery. We will get our hands dirty and you can take home what you sow/transplant to get an early start on your native plant garden bed. Bring your own lunch and gardening gloves.

A poster for the Spring Plant Sale at the Southcentral Alaska Native Plant Nursery. It features a green and yellow color scheme. At the top, there's a stylized illustration of a plant with leaves and flowers. To the right, the text "SPRING PLANT SALE" is written in large, green, block letters. Below that, "SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA NATIVE PLANT NURSERY" is written in yellow. Further down, it says "ANCHORAGE SOIL &amp; WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT NATIVE PLANT PROGRAM". A paragraph of text explains the purpose: "DURING THE MONTH OF MAY, ALASKANS RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE PLANTS TO ALASKA'S PEOPLE, ECONOMY AND ECOSYSTEMS BY CELEBRATING ALASKA NATIVE PLANT MONTH!". To the right, the date and time are listed: "SATURDAY MAY 31, 2025 10:00 - 4:00". Below that, the location is given: "801 ERICKSON ST. GOVERNMENT HILL COMMONS COMMUNITY ORCHARD". At the bottom, it says "Regionally Grown &amp; Adapted NATIVE ALASKAN PLANTS".

# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

To join the Alaska Native Plant Society or renew your membership, you can either 1) fill out our online form and pay online at <https://aknps.org/membership> or 2) fill out and mail the form below with an enclosed check to **Alaska Native Plant Society, PO Box 141613, Anchorage, AK 99514**. There are two types of memberships:

- Single-year annual memberships are tied to the calendar year. Dues received in October-December are applied to the following year. After the first of the year, there is a two-month grace period for membership renewals before we consider your membership inactive.
- Recurring annual memberships are not tied to the calendar year and renew automatically. They must be paid online, and your membership is considered active until you cancel it. You can log into your PayPal account to view and manage your recurring payments.

Need some help? Contact [membership@aknps.org](mailto:membership@aknps.org)

STATUS       NEW       RENEWAL

CATEGORY	E-mail Newsletter	Mailed Newsletter	Email + Mailed Newsletter
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<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen	\$12	\$22	\$22
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$15	\$25	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$20	\$30	\$30

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Telephone: (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Anchorage, AK 99514

Po Box 141613

Alaska Native Plant Society