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Homer Garden Club

Newsletter

January 2016

The next Homer Garden Club meeting will be February 28, 2:00 pm, at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.

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February 28 Meeting to Feature Teena Garay on Starting From Seed

Please join us on February 28th as one of Alaska's preeminent gardeners, Homer's own Teena Garay, provides a fascinating presentation on starting perennials, shrubs, and trees from seed.

Teena has been gardening, consulting, and lecturing in Alaska for nearly 30 years, and her gardens have been featured in Horticulture and Sunset magazines. She has travelled to such far away places as China to collect seeds which do well in our unique climate, and many of the plants she started from those seeds are now flourishing here in Homer. Teena will share with us her



Chinese Gloxnia

tips and techniques for gathering, storing, and germinating seeds of perennials, trees and shrubs; provide recommendations for ones that thrive in our climate and can be started successfully from seed; and share with us her favorite seed sources.

All photos shown are of plants that Teena started from seed and which are now thriving in her amazing garden.



Hydrangea



Rosa



Treasurer's Report

by Peggy Pittman, Treasurer

January 2016

Income

Membership	\$ 210.00	
Total Income		<u>\$ 210.00</u>

Expenses

Meeting		
Venue	150.00	
Program	81.70	
	\$ 231.70	
Gardener's Wkend Venue	82.50	
Total Expenses		<u>\$ 314.20</u>

Beginning Balance 1/1/16		\$ 9,200.32
Income		210.00
Expenses		<u>(314.12)</u>
Ending Balance 1/31/16		\$ 9,096.20



ANNOUNCEMENTS



***** Did you know that the Homer Garden Club is now on Instagram? Those who follow Instagram can check Instagram user "homer_garden_club" for club updates and helpful horticultural tips. If anyone has ideas for photos/topics they would like to see on Instagram, please contact Joan Splinter.



***** Ptarmigan Arts, 471 Pioneer Avenue, is honored to present a Back Room Gallery show by Homer's own **R.W. "Toby" Tyler** for the month of March. The show's opening reception will be held on Friday, March 4, from 5 to 7 p.m. Refreshments will be served, and visitors will have an opportunity to visit with Toby.

More than a few surprises will be unveiled in Toby's show. Well known for his ability to capture the beauty and essence of wildflowers and plants, he will be displaying a collection of prints that have not been seen for many years. Of particular interest are five seasonal charts of local flowers and plants, a project that he undertook in a five-year span from 1979 to 1983. Among the items from Toby's attic are sets of notepapers depicting 11 Russian Orthodox Churches in Alaska. From his days in California, Toby offers sets of notecards with intricate pen and ink drawings of Victorian-era homes. A special treat for Back Room Gallery visitors will be a jigsaw puzzle replica of an oil and palette knife painting created by Toby in 1957. The original painting, which will be on display, captures the view of Grewingk Glacier as it appeared in that year. A collection of original watercolors, acrylics, and oil paintings will round out the show.

The last surprise is the best. Toby's ability to paint was compromised by a stroke in December of 2014. He recently returned to painting in studio space generously provided by the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies. Working first with oils and a palette knife, he is now using a paintbrush and hopes to return to working with watercolors. Several of his new works will be on display.

Please join us at the First Friday reception on March 4. The opportunity to visit with Toby, who has given so much to Homer and the art community over the years, should not be missed.



As I look out today at the green grass and lack of snow, I ask myself "Is this a fluke or Homer's new norm?" Jeannette Lawson was up at our Homer Garden Club's Baycrest Garden taking pictures of the new shoots poking up and wondering the same. Our many wonderful volunteers planted hundreds of bulbs last

were so solid that we eventually took the snowshoes off and just hiked them. It was cloudy and sprinkling rain a bit, but still a wonderful time to just be out and enjoying the fresh smell and crisp air of a winter day. I love summer and gardening, but there is something invigorating about being outside in Mother Nature's own garden.



So, as you drool over the seed catalogs and calculate your summer schedule, don't forget what a terrific bounty we have in Homer if you just get outside and experience it, no matter what the season. If you don't like to hike, drive up to the Overlook and see what's coming up in the garden, but don't forget to look over onto our gorgeous bay and mountains. Or just walk the many easy trails right here in town, like the paved trails out East End Road and the Spit. The Reber Trail at the end of Fairview Avenue is right in town, but gives you the feeling of being out in the wilderness without having to drive very far. Naturally, the beach

fall and already they have started showing their hopeful faces through the frost and remaining snow. I can't help but wonder if they will get their little noses frozen, but the forecast says just barely frost at night for the next week and the low 40s during the day. It looks like their biggest danger will be the moose wanting a delicious bite of that first green shoot.



can be peaceful on a calm day and exciting and thrilling during a storm. Of course, there are numerous short trails scattered all over town that can still bring you right up face to face with Mother Nature. All in all, nature is something to experience all year long, whether it's in your own backyard garden or in the wilderness. Just be sure to give yourself the time to enjoy it!

Yesterday friends and I went out to McNeil hoping to

find adequate snow for snowshoeing. I put on the snowshoes I bought two years ago and hadn't taken out of the package due to lack of snow. There is snow out there, but the trails





President Francie Roberts called the first meeting of the New Year meeting to order at 2:01 pm. On January 24, 2016. She pointed out that the minutes of the prior meeting were published in the newsletter and will be available on the website.

Treasurer Peggy Pittman reported \$9,117.82 in the treasury.

Francie invited new members to introduce themselves. There were quite a few new folks including Pat and Lyle, Charlie, Ben, Marcia, and Vicki plus others whose names went by faster than I could type! My apologies for missing a couple of you. Francie also pointed out the availability of the HGC book to the crowd in the room.

Data Base Manager Barbara Kennedy said past members need to pay dues or they'll receive no more newsletters!

We have a website called www.homergardenclub.org, an active Facebook page, and now also an Instagram account, so there are many ways to keep abreast of club activities. When you look for the Homer Garden Club Facebook page, add AK because there are several Homer Garden Clubs throughout the country.

Recording Secretary and Gardeners' Weekend (GW) co-chair Brenda Adams announced the 10th annual Gardeners' Weekend (GW) event will be held a week earlier this year—July 30th and 31st—to eliminate the conflict with Salmon Stock. GW will feature best-selling author and incredible speaker Tracy DiSabato-Aust, who will give two presentations on Saturday afternoon and early evening. Each talk will be 1 ½ hours. One will be on design, the other on pruning perennials to control bloom time and to lengthen bloom time. This is a

totally new topic for the Homer Garden Club. Tours will be Sunday from 11 am-5pm followed by a reception for participants at Bear Creek Winery. It's a grand event. Brenda asked that we all put it on our calendars NOW!



Co-Vice President Tony Burgess announced next month's speaker will be Teena Garay on the topic of starting perennials from seed. In March, Alaska native plant expert Verna Pratt will be our speaker.

Then Tony introduced our January speakers, Brigitte Suter and Carole Demers, both long term and excellent Homer gardeners. He described them as "two of the best we have". He asked that we hold our questions until the end of their information-packed presentation.

Brigitte began by saying she has been here 31 years. The first year her husband ran a tiller in a circle and cleared an area. From there the garden grew and grew, all on a hillside that had to be terraced. Brigitte grew up gardening. She told us her grandmother gardened until she died and predicted her

Mom will too. The result of all this work and experience is an incredible garden very reflective of her Bavarian traditions. She gardens at 500 feet. She talked at length about her soil building and composting activities.

Carole Demers said she has a similar philosophy. She has been gardening in Homer for 41 years. Carole's family homesteaded in Fairbanks. She's always gardened and put up food. Carole brought a handout (that will be published on our website for those who didn't get a copy) that covered the topics they discussed, plus how they put up food and other topics not covered today.

Both Carole and Brigitte worked with Kyra, Tracy and others on the Baycrest garden. Together they worked, amended and sculpted 65 yards of new top soil and enormous amounts of wood

ashes, steer manure, four or five bags of fish bone meal, and other additives to build the soil. The garden has shown the fruits of their hard work and wisdom; the plants have done beautifully. With additional volunteers they planted 650 bulbs this past fall. Spring will be spectacular at the garden!

Both speakers garden organically and believe in improving the soil. Brigitte doesn't rototill while Carole does because she has a lot of snow compaction. Carole advised us not to walk on garden beds; walk on paths. Both are fairly relaxed composters, not worrying about ratios, turning or if the pile is fully composted before using it. Some of the ingredients they use include kitchen scraps, chicken manure, salmon carcasses and heads. Cover scraps and fish waste well

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(about a foot) to avoid attracting bears and other visitors. Brigitte puts seaweed, wood ashes, and fish bone meal directly onto the beds in the fall. When she butchers chickens she catches the blood and puts it under currant and goose berry bushes. She loves leaves and collects them from her paths. She gathers about 12-16 garbage bags of leaves each fall and puts them on the compost pile and directly onto her gardens. Leaves left in the bags turn into leaf mold which, after shredding, is

a perfect topping over a little fish bone meal and wood ashes around perennials that do better in sweeter (less-acidic) soil.

Carole has a huge pit. She layers chicken manure, rabbit manure, garden and household waste, old local hay, soil, and fish waste as she gets it throughout the year into her compost pit. She doesn't use horse or cow manure at all because of the potential for getting chickweed. In fall she puts fish bone meal and the compost onto her beds just the way it is, even if not fully decomposed. By putting

this on in fall, the beds are ready to go in spring.

They covered lots of other "how to grow" subjects and ended with a delightful series of flower photos from Carole's garden, a welcome sight in mid-January! Much of what they explained is detailed in Carole's handout. See www.homergardenclub.org for a copy. It's an educational read.

After a full half hour of questions, Francie adjourned the meeting at 4:00 PM.



Winter Gardening Alaska Style

by Susan B. Sommer, *GRIT*
Rural American Know-How

Ah, yes, winter in Alaska. Today it's 33 above and raining on top of a foot of brand new snow. Spring, however, is around several corners yet; it's only February after all. Three more months till the birch leaves are the size of mouse's ears, and I can work the garden soil, start pressing vegetable seeds into rows. Three more months of enduring a palette of white, blue, and dark, then brown and muddy.

But in my mind, the picture is clear and bright and full of green. My winter garden comes to life in visions of tender spinach leaves growing bigger every day under the



long northern summer sun, until they are themselves like salad plates; feathery green carrot tops waving gently in the breeze as their orange roots reach ever deeper; purple-red radishes ready to eat in

no time; tight little broccoli heads forming and expanding despite my worries they won't.

Even the mosquitoes are welcome in these dreams, for the smell of Off is our summertime perfume. Inside our little old run-down greenhouse, tomatoes bask in the heat. The raspberry bushes – Boyne and Killarney and Goldens – are forming fruits, luscious and juicy, ruby red and yellow. Salad tonight! Jam tomorrow!

These are the dreams that sustain me through the rest of winter.

I fertilize my garden visions with seed catalogs and photos from last year's crops, water them with research on irrigation methods for our planned garden expansion, light them up by talking to other green thumbs. I even plant some actual seeds for basil, parsley, and cilantro, and when they sprout, set them in a cool room on a table by a big window. I build a fence of sorts with cardboard and duct

tape around the edge to keep the cats out. Can reality rival my imagination?

It's a common saying that gardening is an act of faith. So is living in Alaska. I was born and raised here, but left a few times in my twenties, convinced the grass was greener elsewhere. Literally, it was, but metaphorically, not so much. Alaska always wooed me back with promises of wildness and midnight sun in June. Eventually I settled down, settled in, got married, and moved to an old homestead property with plenty of space to plant our own food. As our garden takes root, so do I. And I put up with the fickle winter weather and months of bundling up because I know the snow will melt and the world around me will come alive again and sustain my body and soul. In the meantime, my winter garden thrives.





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