

Special points of interest:

- Mark your Calendars! Verna Pratt is here March 28 at the Best Western Bidarka!!!
- Planning has started for the Annual Plant Sale ~ Call Michael Lindon to help! 235-6632!

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# Homer Garden Club

March 2010

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## “Easy Rock Gardening”

### Prominent Gardener Verna Pratt Presents at March 28 Homer Garden Club Meeting

Come join the Homer Garden Club at 2 P.M., March 28<sup>th</sup>, at the Best Western Bidarka for an opportunity to hear renowned Master Gardener Verna Pratt. Verna started rock gardening as a child with her mother in Massachusetts. She drove the Alaska Highway up to Alaska in 1966 with her husband Frank, two children and a dog. “From the day I moved to Alaska, I wanted to pick berries and make jams and jellies, but I wasn’t familiar with any of them here,” Verna says. As she studied the berries, she and Frank also started photographing the unfamiliar plants around them, until by 1990 “we had hundreds of photos that we didn’t know what to do with, so we thought, ‘Let’s make a book!’”

For hikers and climbers wondering what that scrubby little thing with pink tassels might be, the Pratt’s field guides are the gold standard, starting with the first one, “Field Guide to Alaskan Wildflowers” (1990) followed by “Wildflowers of Denali

National Park”, “Wildflowers Along the Alaska Highway”, “Alaska’s Wild Berries and Berry-like Fruit”, and the children’s book, “Linnaea’s World”, with Allene Franklin.

in Scotland for the Scottish Rock Garden Club.

In 1997 she helped start the Alaska Rock Garden Society, and the Alaska Master Gardeners Association honored the Pratt’s decades of gardening generosity in October with their Lifetime Achievement Award:

Verna will be showing pictures at her presentation and



Photo and Garden by Teena Garay

Verna knows rock gardens as well as Alaska’s native plants (garden writer Jeff Lowenfels calls her “The world’s expert on the subject”), and greenhouse gardening (their greenhouse perches on top of their garage). She shares what she knows through talks, seminars, walks and college classes. Verna has spoken at Gardeners’ conventions in New York and Newfoundland for the North American Rock Garden Society and, in 2002,

giving advice on how to simplify rock gardening. She says that by adopting a few basic rules everyone can design and have fun with a rock garden. From her 44-year perspective on Alaska gardening, Verna says probably the best thing a gardener can do is hang around with other gardeners. “The Master Gardeners, the garden clubs – listen to other people who’ve had the problems you may be having.”

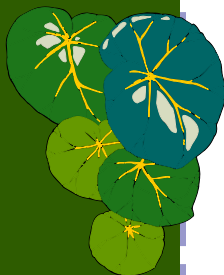
# Planning for Spring Begonias

By Jack Regan, Homer Garden Club President



Jack's Begonia Start

On March 15, the baskets are retrieved and the bulbs are gently shaken loose from their soil.



The Ides of March was a tough day for Julius Caesar but, in Homer, it is an ideal day to rejuvenate your tuberous begonia bulbs. I have often admired the beautiful display of hanging basket begonias when driving along the slope of East Hill Road, past the home of Rita and Gus Weber. I recently asked Rita how she manages to keep her begonias so vibrant. She says she learned how from her grandmother when

she was growing up near Zurich, Switzerland. The bulbs are stored in their baskets in the fall. They are placed in a cool, (40 -50 degree) dark place and the foliage is allowed to wither. On March 15, the baskets are retrieved and the bulbs are gently shaken loose from their soil. Half the soil is replaced with fresh potting mixture along with Magamp, a slow release fertilizer, available from nearby garden stores.

The bulbs are set near the surface of the recombined potting mixture with the top of the bulb exposed. Rita places the baskets outside after risk of frost has past. The plants prefer morning sun but, not full sun all day long. The leaves are dark and lush and the blossoms are intensely brilliant. I am starting my bulbs now with expectation of enjoying the rich colors of these beautiful plants this summer.

## Homer Garden Club Board Members

President ~ Jack Regan ~ 235-3650

Vice-President ~ Neil Wagner ~ 235-6953

Secretary Paula Riley ~ 235-3983

Treasurer ~ Peggy Craig ~ 235-0631

Social Chair ~ Roni Overway ~ 226-3404

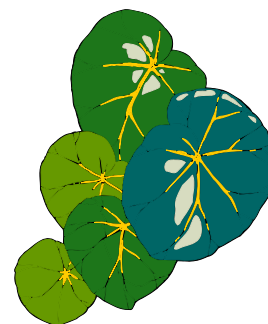
Historian ~ Barbara Kennedy ~ 235-4347

Publicity ~ Barbara Landi ~ 235-1809

Newsletter ~ Pam Voeller ~ 235-8078

and Kim Smith ~ 235-6703

Past President ~ Brenda Adams ~ 235-3763



# Our Gardens

By Neil Wagner, Homer Garden Club Vice President

It's a beautiful winter scene outside my window with the snow drifting down across our garden. Meanwhile inside we are still eating the gardens' bounty of carrots, beets, rutabagas, potatoes & cabbage from our root cellar. I consider my garden better than money in the bank. I have much more control over it and inflation usually means, -more vegetables!

With our two new high tunnels going up this spring my imagination has been running wild with ideas of planting zone 5+ plants. Corn, pole beans & winter squash, -the three sister's guild is just the start. We'll have room for lots of experiments. I hope other members can also take advantage of this grant. It is planned to continue for the next three years so you still have time to apply.

While it's fun to have a garden, really how important is it? The farmers that feed us make up less than 2% of our population. They are very efficient with large scale machinery, feed lots and mono crops. But this is only possible with cheap oil. What will happen in the future as the declining oil gets more expensive? A number of government people were also asking this and it's part of the

reason for the USDA High Tunnel Grant program. Food security is considered a big issue.

On average most areas in the US grow about 2% of their own food locally. The rest is imported with yes, more cheap oil. -If you think oil is expensive now, just wait a few years. Currently it takes about 7.4 calories of energy to put 1 calorie of food on the table in the lower 48, up here it's probably around 10 calories! It would be a lot more efficient if we could just drink the stuff.

One answer that would help is getting people to learn how to garden and grow more food locally. My view is that there are quite a few underemployed lawns out there. It's four times more efficient to grow food in your backyard than buying it. Of course that's once you get a garden put in and you learn how to plant & tend it. Officially close to one third of Alaskans rent, so we have another challenge. It seems that's where the Homer Garden club could fit in. We have some very skilled gardeners in our group. Maybe those with land and unused garden space could mentor those without land and skills and share the produce? Bet-

ter yet, a community garden of acreage could provide both education and fresh produce. The community food bank people might also provide some of the labor with any surplus going back to them.

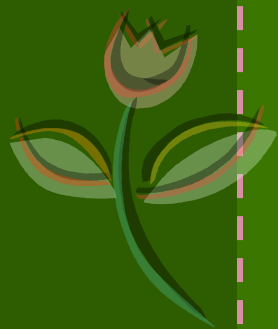
I've recently started a Permaculture study group with the idea of educating ourselves on how best to design our backyards for food producing efficiency with a minimum of input from oil. Permaculture includes all aspects of living locally off your land and also works towards building a resilient community. If you are interested in joining or have any ideas about our local food security [respond to neil@sustainablehomer.org](mailto:neil@sustainablehomer.org)

**"My view is that there are quite a few underemployed lawns out there. It's four times more efficient to grow food in your backyard than buying it."**



**Garden of Jim and Linda Reinhart**

**"We farmers and gardeners are responsible for the health of this nation. As growers, we can do more to keep people healthy than all the doctors and hospitals combined. Human health is an agriculture issue." --John Kempf**



## Treasurer's Report

Peggy Craig, Homer Garden Club Treasurer

### February 2010

#### Income

Membership 95.00

**Total Income** \$95.00

#### Expenses

Administration 49.30

Meeting 165.00

**Total Expenses** \$214.30

**Beginning balance 2-01-10** \$10,559.18

Income 95.00

Expenses (214.30)

**Ending balance 2-28-10** \$10,439.88

## Membership News

In an effort to make it easier for members to remember when their dues need to be paid and to reduce the work load on the folks who manage our membership data base (currently Kim Smith and Pam Voeller), the Board decided to make all dues payable on October 1st, the beginning of our fiscal year. To ease the transition to this new system, those members whose dues would normally expire between now and October 1st need not pay their dues until October 1st. New members will be asked to pay \$10.00 on joining (essentially an initiation fee) regardless of time of year. Their dues will then be payable on October 1st.

Our current process of allowing a 90 day grace period before folks are dropped from the data base will continue.

Please understand that if you are not receiving your email in your inbox, it could be for a variety of reasons. Often, individuals boxes are over content, or the email address you entered on your membership form is wrong. Please, if you are having any difficulties, email Kim Smith at [krsmith@gci.net](mailto:krsmith@gci.net).



# Member Bulletin Board

## Gel Mix Seed Planting Submitted by Tracie Brown

During the January 24, 2010 Garden Club meeting, a question was asked, "has anyone pre-germinated carrot seeds? I shared that I had used the gel mix recipe mentioned on page 145 of Lenore Hedla's 1994 book *The Alaska Gardener's Handbook*. I have used this method for planting carrots with excellent results for at least two seasons. The planting was fast and easy, the seeds stayed moist for their relatively long germination time and there was little thinning needed.

Here is the Gel mix small seed planting method: 1 Tablespoon cornstarch mixed into 1 cup of cold water in a small saucepan. Bring it to a boil, whisking. Let the gel cool to room temperature. Or, if in a hurry, remove from heat and keep whisking while cooling the pan over ice water. Place a sandwich size plastic bag into a cup with one corner down, and pour in about half a cup of cooled gel. Add carrot seeds to the gel, seal the bag, gently massage bag to evenly distribute seeds. To plant: Have furrows ready. Cut a small corner off the bag, just large enough for the seeds to pass through but not too big a hole. Be prepared to walk along the row at an even pace as you squeeze the seed laced gel into the furrow. Cover lightly with seed soil and keep moist.



One year, several days passed while the gel/seed mixture sat in my approximately 65 degree entry. I noticed that the seeds began to germinate in the gel mix in half the time the seed package said they would. Though the seed gel mix had begun to thin, I planted them and the carrots grew well.

So far, I have also used this method for lobelia (in January-February due to long growing time) and grass seed used to turn 3/4 egg shells into "grass heads" for Easter decoration. This method is particularly suited for small

seeds, especially those difficult to keep moist.

Thanks to all that answered the call for a ride for two boxes of books to Anchorage or Palmer. The books arrived safely in Anchorage March 1 where they were turned over to Ellen Vande Visse who uses them in her classes. Ellie says thank you to the wonderful people in Homer Garden Club.

For any that want a copy of our book, let Jack Regan know and he will bring copies to the next meeting. The price is \$30.

For any that didn't get copies of the seed starting information that Jeanne McArthur handed out, let Peggy Craig know and she will bring you a copy to the next meeting. Peggy is keeping her copy in her permanent file as there is much information she finds important. Peggy Craig can be reached at [michaelandpeggy@acsalaska.net](mailto:michaelandpeggy@acsalaska.net)

## GARDEN CLUB PLANT SALE 2010

It's March already and time to think about getting your garden together, and the Homer Garden Club Annual Plant Sale as well!! Michael Linden is ready to get the Committee going! Several people have signed up for helping with the sale and now we need to get together and start planning to make this event a success for the club and the community. Michael would like to have a committee meeting this month before the next Garden Club meeting on the 28th. The library has a conference room available Tuesdays and Thursdays in the evenings until 8:00pm. Any members willing to work on the planning committee, please contact Michael Linden at [homerlinden@gmail.com](mailto:homerlinden@gmail.com) or call 235-6632 and let him know what works best for you. Michael will also be contacting those members already signed up.

## THE HOMER GARDEN CLUB – MEMBERSHIP FORM

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

New or Renewal    Month/Year \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_    \_\_\_BASIC \$10    \_\_\_SUPPORTING \$15    \_\_\_BUSINESS \$25

**Please make check payable to "Homer Garden Club" and mail, along with form, to:**

**Homer Garden Club, PO Box 2833, Homer, AK 99603.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Resource info:** May we put this information into our *Resource Book* for distribution to members?    \_\_\_OK    \_\_\_Not OK

May we include your Email address in our *Resource Book*?    \_\_\_OK    \_\_\_Not OK

**May we send your Newsletter via Email?**    \_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_No

Gardening skill level (Make a guess):    \_\_\_Master    \_\_\_Advanced    \_\_\_Intermediate    \_\_\_Beginner

# Years Gardening \_\_\_\_\_ # Years Gardening in Homer \_\_\_\_\_ Elevation of your Homer Garden \_\_\_\_\_

Gardening Conditions \_\_\_\_\_

Gardening Specialties \_\_\_\_\_

Gardening Goals \_\_\_\_\_

**How would you like to participate in the Garden Club?**

\_\_\_ Refreshments    \_\_\_ Spring Plant Sale    \_\_\_ Newsletter    \_\_\_ Autumn Harvest Dinner

\_\_\_ Telephone    \_\_\_ Pioneer Avenue Garden    \_\_\_ Baycrest Garden    \_\_\_ Program Committee

\_\_\_ Nominating Committee    \_\_\_ Officer/Board of Directors    Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Homer Garden Club**

**P.O. Box 2833**

**Homer, Alaska 99603**

