

Homer Garden Club

Newsletter

October 2012



Contents

Article	Page
Dohnn Woods	1
President's Report	2
Fall Checklist	2
Thinking of Apples	4
Neil's Notes	5

The October Meeting will be held October 28, 2:00 pm, at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.

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October 28 Meeting to Feature Dohnn Wood and Urban Alaska Vegetable Gardening

Dohnn Wood's family moved to Anchorage in 1975, so he calls himself an Alaskan. He says "In the last 37 years I have raced bikes, owned and operated a retail store for 18 years, gotten married and now I'm a stay-at-home dad for a brilliant six year old, a family farmer and a general handyman, an Alaskan renaissance man."

Woods stated "In the summer of 2000 my family and I began a journey of food discovery. We now feed ourselves mostly locally, including about a ton of fruits and vegetables we grow on a regular city lot. With the help of many authors, and some classic Alaskan ingenuity we eat fresh from the garden from mid March to mid November, and I'll share with you what has worked for us.

"This will be a discussion of my journey from "discovering" that vegetables actually taste good, in the late summer of 2000, to growing and harvesting over 1500 lbs of food off my 5000 sq. ft. city home lot in 2011. With a little bit of ingenuity, and a lot of "stealing" of good ideas, my wife, son, and I eat almost a ton of farm fresh local food we grow ourselves. I'll share what has worked for us here

in Anchorage so far." (Woods grew in/on/under pots, hoops, floating row cover and in a solar greenhouse.)



Dohnn Wood's back yard garden

Also speaking at the October meeting will be Daniel Stanislaw from the Dutch Boy Landscape Company who will be explaining how they wrap trees for winter moose and rabbit protection.

REMINDER!!!!

Garden Club dues were due October 1. You can mail them in with the enrollment sheet on page 6 or at the October meeting. If you don't pay your dues, you will not receive the newsletter.

A GREEN BEAN FAREWELL

Homer is a magical place where each month somehow manages to be better than the previous one. As the garden is put to bed with a blanket of straw for the winter, I am left with an amazing memory of the bounty of my green bean crop. Haricot Verts (pronounced *arco vair*) or French fillet beans are delicate, slender vegetables profusely sprouting on a luxuriant growth of

shiny foliage. I planted them in Earth Boxes in my greenhouse. Earlier this year we heard from Millie Lewis on Earth Box management and from Neil Wagner on how to build them. They provide a convenient method of growing green beans and other vegetables.

When the green beans started coming in August, they were a delightful addition to the table. On the food network, I saw an amusing discussion on how to cook them. Julia Child and Jacques

Pepin demonstrated contrasting cooking techniques. Julia was cooking them in boiling water for about twelve minutes. Jacques Pepin had a different approach. He blanched them in boiling water for about five minutes, and then removed them from the heat. Next sliced shallots were sautéed in olive oil and the green beans were added to the sauté pan for another six minutes. I found the technique of Jacques Pepin resulted in an outcome that I preferred.

An Alaska Gardener's Checklist for Fall & Winter

Fall

- 1. Remove crop residues from garden plots.** Much residue can be recycled by putting it into the compost pile. Removing it also helps to prevent disease and insect pests, such as root maggots, from overwintering and returning.
- 2. Remove and store poles, trellises and portable frames.** Avoid the effects of winter damage and weathering. Needed repairs or refinishing can also be accomplished now. Mark perennials for spring. A marked stake can indicate location and provide information on what should be emerging next spring.
- 3. Apply mulch.** Mulch provides a protective, insulating layer around sensitive perennials. Avoid conditions and timing that would allow rodents to overwinter in the mulch. Grass clippings and leaves do not make good mulching materials. Straw and hay are excellent mulches. Mulch conserves moisture, reduces erosion and leaching, prevents rapid temperature fluctuations and improves soil structure after it is incorporated. Don't forget spring removal.
- 4. Surround shrub containers with insulating mulch.** The amount of soil in containers is not sufficient to buffer the fluctuating extremes of winter weather. Other options would be to place the container in the ground or store the plant in a sheltered location such as a crawl space or cool garage.
- 5. Till and turn heavy or compacted soils, then add organics.** This allows faster drainage and warming in the spring. More organic material may be added in the spring when the soil is prepared for planting.
- 6. Dig in a top dressing of compost for raised or deep beds.** This increases drainage, improves physical structure and adds nutrients. Material should be well composted to avoid introduction of weed seeds and other pests.
- 7. Put up windbreaks, fences and protective shelters.** Sheltering is an effective way to reduce the drying and damaging effects of winter winds on woody perennials. Fences may also be useful in preventing damage to plants by animals, winter traffic and other harmful activity. Windbreak material may include boards, burlap or other material that will disrupt the force of the wind.
- 8. Build a compost pile.** Select an open site with good drainage. Use finely divided material and turn the pile periodically to maintain aerobic conditions. Composting can recycle plant debris. Selected household scraps such as raw vegetables and egg shells provide nutrients when added to the soil and maintain the physical structure of garden soil.

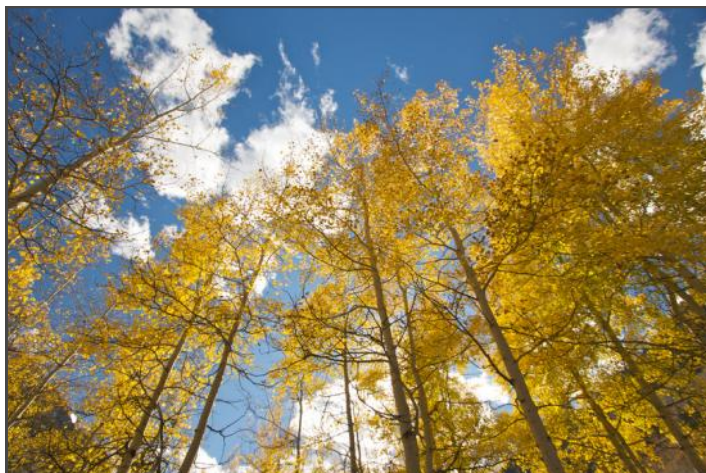
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9. **Empty buckets, watering cans, rain barrels.** Emptying reduces freezing damage, prevents the accumulation of debris and allows for any needed repairs or refurbishing.
10. **Put away hoses and sprinklers.** Drain completely. Check for cracks and other damage. Store in a location where they will not be subject to physical damage.
11. **Store clay and terra-cotta pots out of the weather.** Clean thoroughly if they have been used. Store in a dry location away from activities that may cause breakage.
12. **Keep evergreen and deciduous shrubs well watered before the ground freezes.** Watering prevents winter desiccation. Plants can lose water even during dormancy. Watering is ineffective after the ground freezes. Insufficient moisture, frozen ground and winter wind combined can result in drying or winter kill.
13. **Carry out any garden expansion plans at this time.** Fall is usually a time of decreased activity, which allows opportunity for these projects. Conduct a soil test on the new garden area to determine fertility and liming requirements. This may be a good time to construct raised beds and improve the soil for their use.
14. **Plant bulbs.** Soil should be well drained. Fall planting allows time for root development so that the bulb can produce and push forth leaf growth as soon as spring soil conditions allow. Mulch to prevent temperature extremes. Remove the mulch in spring to allow soil warming.
15. **“Winterize” perennials.** This includes watering, pruning to remove dead, damaged or diseased parts, mulching to provide insulation over the root area, and wrapping thin bark trees to prevent damage by winter sun and rodents. Dividing and replanting some perennials may also be required.
16. **Prune raspberries, currants, roses, gooseberries and other berry bushes.** Remove old nonbearing canes, thin overgrown areas, prune, and remove any damaged, dead or diseased parts. Remove branches that are too close to the ground. Head back canes or branches that have grown too long. Canes may be saved for markers or supports.
17. **Have frost covers ready for use on shrubs and any crops that are still in the ground.** An early frost can damage garden crops and perennials that have not had time to prepare for dormancy. Damage from a light frost can be prevented by frost covers, but a hard freeze will probably result in extensive garden damage. Some possible frost covers include plastic milk containers, newspapers, plastic sheeting, bed sheets, paper bags, fiberglass sheets or panes of glass.
18. **Sharpen and repair hand tools.** Resharpener hoes to a blunt angle, about 30 degrees. Other cutting tools can be sharpened to a finer angle, 20–26 degrees. Clean off all rust and dirt and apply a protective coat of oil before storing tools for the winter.
19. **Bring in soil, sand, compost and flats to use for starting seedlings later in the winter (spring).** Pasteurize starting media and screened compost by heating to 180°F for one-half hour. Avoid recontamination of pasteurized media. Store all materials in a dry location. Clean flats with a mixture of one part bleach to nine parts water if they have previously been in contact with soil.
20. **Check to see that leftover and collected seeds are stored properly.** Provide a cool, dry location for maximum storage life. Conduct a germination test on leftover seeds in the spring to determine viability.
21. **Change management activities for the greenhouse accordingly.** As days shorten and temperatures decrease, plant activity slows and requirements for water and nutrients diminish. After harvest is complete, remove plants from the greenhouse.
22. **Index stored, frozen and canned crops.** Make everything easy to find and maintain an inventory of what is remaining. Storage cannot maintain quality, so plan to use stored produce as soon as possible.
23. **Dry herbs, collect rose hips, make dried arrangements.** Herbs can be a welcome addition to winter meals. Rose hips can be made into jelly or another form for a delicious and nutritious treat. Dried arrangements will preserve your favorite flowers and plants.
24. **Make Christmas gifts.** Jellies, jams and canned produce make very personal and welcome gifts. Design your own personalized labels; your thoughtfulness will be long remembered. Dried material from your garden can be used for wreaths and potpourri that will bring joy for many years.

www.uaf.edu/ces or 1-877-520-5211

Michele Hébert, Extension Sustainability Agent. Originally prepared by Wayne Vandre, Extension Horticulture Specialist.



It is 6:50 in the morning, and I'm waiting for the 7:30 flight up to Anchorage where I'll spend the day in a meeting. There's a full moon this morning, and the season's first skiff of snow left a white lace on the steps as I headed from the house up to the car.

The drive to the airport was a show of boiling inky clouds backlit by the moon. Now and then the clouds would part and allow the full face of the moon to illuminate the stage. Golden birch leaves blew across the road and swirled in an eddy at the corner where I turned onto the main road. I was watching for the dark movement of moose along the equally dark edge of the road as I drove, but I was thinking about apples.

Dr. Bob Bors, a northern fruit specialist, is in town this week from the University of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan. So the past two days were spent shivering with a group of 20 or so fruit tree enthusiasts as we toured local fruit orchards. On Thursday we gathered at Dave Schroer's place up Portlock, and yesterday we hiked up the grassy lane at the head of McLay Road to look at Walter Johnson's trees.

We saw trees loaded with all variety of northern apples, crabapples, sweet and sour cherries, and even a few plumbs and pears. The trees had silver tags wired to them with names like "Rescue Crab", "Parkland" and "Almata" - an ancient Russian variety apple which surprised us with its deep beet-red colored flesh. It was very tempting to hang back and discretely pocket one or two of the abundant fruits

hanging heavy and blushing red on the trees, but while I palmed a few to get their heft, I left them hanging.

Dave, still trim and keen-eyed in his 70's, and Walter, now 90, have tended these orchards for upwards of 30 years, starting with trees that were single stem whips just a few feet high. The trees now stand tall with their wide branches loaded



nearly to the ground with red and green and yellow fruit. Three-legged ladders stood in each orchard ready for the day when picking commences.

Because this summer has been so cold, most of the fruit is not yet ripe. Dave and Judith Johnson (Walter's wife) are hoping for a few more hours of heat over the next several days. Enough to ripen at

least the fruit on the south side of the trees and drive up the sugar content. Judith explained that the fruit can withstand cold down to 27 degrees for a few hours before showing damage. It's a race against winter, which is coming early this year. I imagine them sitting at a warm kitchen table with their hands wrapped around a mug of hot cider from last year's fruit, watching the thermometer drop. Do they throw on their fleecelined Carhartt overalls and fingerless gloves to hurry out and pick when the temperature dips below 30 degrees? How long does it take to pick all these smooth-skinned beauties? Do they have to put up floodlights and pick through the night?

This year the harvest will come too early for the apples, and much of what is picked in the final hours of fall as the temperature slips lower will end up in the compost pile, rotting sweetly as the days grow shorter and the air fills with snow.

ANNUAL ELECTIONS

At the Harvest Dinner, members voted to continue the current roster of Board members. The members who will continue to serve for another year are:

President.....Jack Regan

Vice President.....Neil Wagner
Recording Secretary-Jessica Ryan
Treasurer.....Peggy Craig
Past President.....Brenda Adams
Social Secretary.....Julie Parizek
Publicity.....Kyra Wagner
Historian.....Michael Linden
Data Base Mgr ...Barb Kennedy
Newsletter Editor...Paula Riley



Dr. Bob Bors came to town September 27 –30th for a three-day barnstorming tour of Homer's fruit growing trees and bushes. Bob inspected and answered questions at over a dozen private and public orchard tours with about 25 people attending each public tour. He gave three well attended lectures at the college—"Secrets of Great Fruit Production in Cold Climates" "Lecture Cold Hardy and New Fruit Varieties" and "Gathering Wild Fruits and Propagating."

The events were capped off with a pot luck dinner at Jack & Jane Regan's house on Saturday night. Sunday he had a glacier flightseeing trip over to Seldovia where he gave another lecture before heading off to Anchorage and the Canadian high prairies. We all learned a lot from his expertise and had our questions answered. Marion Nelson from the Central Peninsula Garden club was key in organizing this along with the support of the Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers, the Homer Garden Club and ERA Aviation.

My "potato experiment" this year was a chance to loosely compare 16 different varieties. Most of them were planted in new raised beds built this spring with sawmill slabs for the sides. I just used the existing soil within the bed. Luckily for us our loamy garden soil is rich from the alluvial washout from the

hills above us. We just turned over the soil to get the horsetail out, added about (6 lbs/100 sq ft) fish bone meal and planted the potatoes.

These are my top six potato preferences, chosen by how prolific they were. They are shown from left to right in the picture. I and two others pseudo scientists tasted these six and came up with only minor differences in flavor and texture. Attractive color, creaminess and smaller potato size were preferred for our eating.



"German Butterball": the most productive: a nice white potato, yellow inside. I like that it didn't produce huge potatoes.

"Appalachian Blue": Vigorous purple red with a nice reddish color inside.

"Austrian Crescent": very productive yellow banana shape with white inside.

"All Red": productive dark red with white and a little red inside

"Peanut": small peanut shaped potatoes.

"Chiefton": light red potato with white inside.

These are not pictured but were part of the "trial."

"Superior": A nice white potato that also did well.

"Cranberry": A dark red outside with light red center.

"Magic Molly": Usually a vigorous dark blue elongated spud with dark blue inside.

"Homer Blue": my name for the round blue potato. It's usually not that prolific, but maybe because I've used my own seed potatoes

for several years.

"Homer Red": my name for a dark red with inside white similar to all red.

"Alleghany": dark brown skinned and white inside, new potato but not prolific.

"Mainstay": produced very large white potatoes, too big for my liking.

"Valley light red": my name for a light red spud similar to Chiefton.

"Sangria" and "Dark Norland"; red skinned spuds that were not exceptional.

Notes: The plots varied from new beds to older established beds. A mixture of four varieties planted in one older bed with a pH above 6.5 caused all varieties to

have scabs. Those potatoes with green vines had tender skins compared to those whose vines had already died. Magic Molly, my favorite and usually most productive potato, produced poorly this season. I can't figure that out. Like all gardening, you have lots to think about as you move through the seasons.



REMEMBER: Dues are now due October 1st. Members are encouraged to have the newsletter sent to them via e-mail as it is much less expensive for the club and you will then receive it in fabulous color.

THE HOMER GARDEN CLUB MEMBERSHIP FORM

Date: _____ Membership Type: Basic (\$10) __ Supporting (\$15) __ Business (\$25) __

Name: _____ Phone #: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City/State/Zip Code: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

May we send your Newsletter via E-Mail? Yes ____ No ____

Are you interested in vegetable gardening ____ ? flower gardening ____ ?

How would you like to participate in the Garden Club?

(please check any activities you may be interested in)

Meeting Refreshments Board of Directors Nominating Committee Newsletter
 Programs/Speakers Spring Plant Sale Harvest Dinner Pioneer Garden
 Baycrest Garden Gardeners' Weekend

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