

Homer Garden Club

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March 2021

The next HGC meeting is a Zoom meeting on **March 21** at 2:00..

Newsletter

Board of Directors

Kathy Dube, President—
425-241-1045
kdube197@gmail.com

Jan Peyton—Co-Vice President
299-0153
janpeyton73@gmail.com

Sally Coleman—Co-VP
805-746-4148
sallycoleman@gmail.com

Louise Ashmun—299-6360
leashmun@gmail.com

Elaine Burgess—299-2325
eburgess216@gmail.com

Ruth Dickerson—299-2773
ruthedickerson@gmail.com

Barbara Kennedy — 235-0007
barbara_e_kennedy@msn.com

Michael Murray—435-7333
murmurart66@gmail.com

Julie Parizek — 299-0343
j3parizek@outlook.com

Paula Riley — 435-7055
pauril@yahoo.com

Francie Roberts —235-1068,
francie.roberts@gmail.com

March 21 Zoom Meeting will Feature Francie Roberts on Hydroponics in the Home

Francie Roberts will speak at the March meeting of the Homer Garden Club on the topic of Hydroponics for the Home. The meeting will be conducted via Zoom.

Francie is a long time gardener in the Homer area. She has been interested in hydroponics for many years. Because of this interest, she taught the Natural Resources class at Homer High School where students learned how to grow hydroponically. She has experimented with hydroponic gardens in her home and has eaten greens grown in her hydroponic garden all this past winter. When

first deciding to grow hydroponically, it can be confusing how to choose the correct equipment. Francie will try to address the types of gardens and much of the techniques and vocabulary that go with this type of gardening.



Instructions for joining the March Zoom meeting are on page 2 of this newsletter.

Treasurer Reports

by Louise Ashmun, Treasurer

Monthly Treasurer Report for February 2021

Income

Membership	\$25.00		
Book Sales	\$741.94		
Total Income		\$766.94	

Expenses

Banking (new checks)	\$9.99		
Total Expenses		\$9.99	

Checking Beginning Balance 02/01/2021	\$	3,795.47
Income	\$	766.94
Expenses	\$	9.99
Interest	\$	0.16
Ending Balance 02/28/2021	\$	4,552.58

Money Market Beginning Balance 02/01/2021	\$	15,058.01
Interest	\$	1.16
Money Market Ending Balance 02/28/2021	\$	15,059.17

Total Ending Balance 02/28/2021	\$	19,611.75
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Accessing March Zoom Meeting

by Kathy Dube'

March Meeting will be via Zoom again!

Please join us for the March Garden Club Meeting via Zoom. It's easy and these have been very successful the past few months. Click on the link below – we will also send out an e-mail with the link the week before the meeting. The meeting is open to all and we are planning to record the session and make the recording available to members in case you miss it.

Join our scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Homer Garden Club Meeting

Time: Mar 21, 2021 02:00 PM Alaska

Join Zoom Meeting by clicking on this link: <https://zoom.us/j/96214719017?pwd=Y2Vwc2d5Q01GYUpCSTJ1MHhVVEIjUT09>

Or go to Zoom.com and enter the following information:

Meeting ID: 962 1471 9017

Passcode: 034114

The First Seeds of Spring

by Jessica Shepherd

I delight in the late-day sun, spreading radiance across the snowy mounds of the garden after days of deep cold and sober skies. Standing outside with the sun on my eyelids, I call my mother and we talk about her garden in central Texas, covered not in snow but in a flush of weeds, up and eager after February's ice storms. She is pleased about the seeds she bought today at the market. Pleased to fork over the earth and plant lettuce, radish, and carrots into the rain-fed soil while I, starving for spring, concede to the advantage of her southern latitude.

We plot my next trip south – a proxy for the one canceled last March on the cusp of the pandemic when I feared flight cancellations would trap me there in the orb of her gentle web. She is eager for my visit and so, Covid numbers notwithstanding, I will make that midnight flight, masked and sanitized, to see her. I look forward to seeing her. But if I'm to be honest, I am most eager to kneel in the warm soil of her garden and bury my fingers, bridging the time between her planting season and mine.

I imagine us together, dirt under our nails, sitting in lawn chairs situated in a sunbeam. We will watch the cardinals and chickadees address her bird feeders. Somewhere a mockingbird will trill long and lyrical while nearby, lost from sight in



the canopy of new leaves, another will answer. Back home, my feeders will swing empty and my chickadees and Steller's Jays will, by necessity, look elsewhere.



We will walk, as always, down to the steep banks of Clear Creek where water, shaded by century-old oak trees, moves slow and silt-laden, forsaking its name. The air, warm as a kiss, will smell of emergent grass while dry leaves crunch under foot. I will marvel at the way mesquite trees and a canopy of privet healed this land, long ravaged by cows, creating an oasis in an area otherwise given over to subdivisions and industrial parks.

In the three-and-one-half years since my last visit (has it really been that long?) she will have aged. Her hair may be thinner. Her always-erect posture curved by gravity. It will give me a start to see the way time has shaped her. I too have aged, with new frown lines around my mouth and a glint of silver in my hair. When we greet her neighbors, the ones with the exuberant dogs, they will nod with familiarity. Like a mirror into time, they will see in me the woman she was, and her in the

woman I will become.

In the home she shares with my stepfather, I will run my fingers over the spines of her books, recognizing titles I have sent for a birthday, Mother's Day, Christmas. I will breathe in the cinnamon and cloves of an apple pie she'll bake in my honor, and dutifully join her for a Saturday afternoon tai chi class at the college. I will be her shadow, the way she likes, agreeable and deferential, and leave while we are still polite with one another.

Already I am half homesick and second guessing this trip, knowing I will miss the reedy call of the first varied thrush and the way winter gives over to spring not in weeks but in days. Still, my mother's voice and a southern sun exert a strong pull. And how many more uncomplicated years do we have remaining? There is no question that I should go, and I will, packing light and returning exonerated. Home to till my own garden and plant the first seeds of an Alaskan spring.



Gardeners' Un-Weekend 2021

by Francie Roberts

Unfortunately, the annual Gardeners' Weekend will be postponed another year as several of our garden hosts are not yet comfortable with large numbers of visitors to their gardens. We look forward to planning and hosting the event next year.

In lieu of the regularly scheduled tour, the Gardeners' Weekend Committee is sponsoring a "Gardens in Progress" event for Thursday, June 24, 2021, and Thursday, July 8, 2021. Two or three gardens will be featured each day for Garden Club members when a maximum of 75 members can visit to view the creative, artistic, whimsical, and innovative touches our local gardeners are using in their home gardens. Interestingly, this was the original concept for Gardeners' Weekend many years ago.

The Committee is looking for gardens that would like to host such an event. If you have a garden that you would like to share, a specific plant or plants that you would encourage others to grow, a technique that you are practicing, a favorite greenhouse, or even garden art pieces, please email or contact one of the committee members listed below.

Annie Oberlitner annobe@gmail.com
Ruth Dickerson ruthedickerson@gmail.com
Patti Jay pmjhome@gmail.com
Susan McLane macsmith869@gmail.com

Louise Ashmun leashmun@gmail.com

Francie Roberts francie.roberts@gmail.com

Indoor Seed Starting

by Burpee Seeds

It's possible to have a fine vegetable garden by buying young plants, but you will have a much wider range of possibilities if you start your own plants from seeds indoors. Not only is it much cheaper, but you can buy seeds for many more varieties than you will find for sale as plants. This will allow you to experiment with more different flavors, shapes and colors, and to harvest your favorite edibles over a longer period by planting varieties that mature at different times.

Why is it necessary to start some plants before it's warm outdoors? Many of our favorite flowers and vegetables, including tomatoes, peppers, squash and beans, are native to such places as Central America and Mexico, where they had many more hours of sunlight in their growing season, and a much longer season of warm temperatures than they can get in most of the United States. Their seeds will not sprout in soil that is still cool in spring and the fruits need more sun to ripen than is available in the wan-

ing days of autumn. If you were to sow tomato seeds in the ground outdoors in May in New England, Oklahoma or Minnesota, the plants would take so long to grow that the first frost in October would likely kill them before you got a single ripe tomato.

Even for crops that don't come from near the equator, starting seeds indoors gives some plants a head start that brings earlier harvests and greater yield. The same is true for many of our favorite annual flowers. If you start them indoors, they can spend more time in your garden flowering instead of maturing enough to flower. Even many perennials benefit from a good head start indoors.

Note that not all plants should be started indoors, some are best sown directly in the garden. Different plants have different needs, so always refer to the directions on the seed packet to tell you when and how to sow your seeds.

For your first experience of starting seeds, it's wise not to take on too



much. Start no more than a couple of dozen plants in three or four varieties while you learn how it all works. Starting seeds is not complicated or difficult, if you understand the process. The basic ingredients are a proper growing medium, containers, light, warmth, water and your attention.

Finding the Right Growing Medium

Seedlings are very delicate. For the best chance of success, start them

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in a fresh, sterile seed-starting mix that is light and fluffy and designed to hold just enough moisture. If the growing medium is too wet or not sterile, disease can strike. If it is too heavy or sticky, fine new roots won't be able to push through it.

Burpee offers a range of seed starting soils, from compressed coir pellets (coconut husk fibers) that expand when wet, to bags of loose seed starting formula. All our mixes have a trace of starter fertilizer in them so you will not need to start fertilizing until the seedlings have several sets of leaves.

Choosing the Right Container for Indoor Sowing



Anything that will hold the growing medium and has drainage holes will work, but we recommend specially designed seed starting kits because they include everything you need to grow strong, healthy seedlings. Burpee offers a variety of seed starting kits that include trays with cells, expandable coir pellets, a tray to set them on and a clear lid to hold in humidity during the early stages.

An alternative to using the kits is to purchase biodegradable pots that break down in the soil. You can plant them right in the garden and so avoid disturbing the young plant's roots. Some are shaped from organic wood fiber or peat, or you can make your own from newspaper. Don't confuse

these with biodegradable resin pots; those will break down in a landfill or, eventually, in a compost heap, but you can't plant them directly in the garden. Burpee offers a range of fiber pots and a kit for making pots from newspaper.

How Much Light?

Seedlings need lots of light or they will be spindly and feeble. A very sunny, south-facing window may do just the thing for a handful of plants if you are not too far north, but artificial plant lights can ensure that your plants will get the light they need even on cloudy days and during those shorter winter days. Burpee offers a range of lighting options for gardening from platinum LED lights that you mount from the ceiling to light carts with LED or T-8 light bulbs, to our smallest tabletop Ultimate Grow Light with CFL bulb. All these lights have the broad spectrum range of light rays needed by plants. They are adjustable in height so you can raise them as your seedlings grow.

A timer can be helpful to turn the lights on and off so the plants get the 16 hours of light they need every day, and a good rest at night. You want to keep the lights just 3 to 4 inches above the plants.

How Much Warmth Do Seeds Need?

Seed-starting happens in two stages: germination and growing. Germination is the sprouting stage, when the root and leaves emerge from the seed. You won't need light at this stage because it occurs under the soil, but you will need gentle warmth (not harsh heat). You can provide heat by using special heat mats. These will keep your seedlings about **10 degrees F warmer than the air temperature**, allowing the seeds to germinate faster, leading to healthier seedlings. Once you see green sprouts about half an inch tall, you need the plant lights.

You can remove the heat mats as long as the room temperature is between 60 and 70 degrees F.

How Much Water Do Seeds Need?



Plants consist mostly of water to keep them turgid, and they need it for the photosynthesis that gives them energy to grow. Water is also what starts the germination process. But **while water is essential for plant growth, overwatering is the most common cause of seedling failure.**

Sow your seeds in an evenly pre-moistened mix. It should be moist but not soaking wet. Cover the container to hold in humidity while the seeds germinate with the cover from your kit, or a clear plastic wrap. Try to allow for some air circulation, however.

Once they sprout, uncover the containers and water them from the bottom by pouring water into the tray. Make sure air circulates freely so humidity isn't trapped around plants.

How Often Should I Check My Indoor Seeds?

This is the secret ingredient to successful seed-starting: **you should check your seeds daily.** Check to see if the seeds have sprouted so you can remove the cover when it's time and make

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Indoor Seed Starting
(Continued from page 5)

sure the seedlings have light; check to make sure they stay properly moist but not too wet; check your reservoir if you have a self-watering kit; check the seedlings' growth and raise the lights so they stay 3-4" above the plants; and check to make sure the lights and timer haven't malfunctioned. If you are starting a few seeds on the windowsill, turn the plants every day so they don't bend toward the light.

As you plan your seed starting, factor in your convenience and habits.

Will you really remember to check seeds in the basement daily? It might be wiser to start seeds in the guest room or kitchen where they will be handier, even if you have space for fewer seedlings.

As your seedlings grow, watch the weather. Although a few crops can go outside earlier (refer to the seed packet), most should stay indoors until after the last frost date for your area has passed and your soil has warmed. If your area is having a cold spring, hold off. Gardeners are always eager, but many a carefully nurtured tomato seedling has been killed by a May frost or simply

slowed down by cold soil. Protect your investment of time and attention by planting later rather than earlier.

Finally, introduce your plants to the sun gradually, a process called "hardening off". Expose them to sunlight for one hour more each day for a week. During this time bring them to a protected location outside when they are not in the sunlight. If there will be a frost at night, bring them inside. After a week or so, they will have acclimated to the outdoors and will be ready to transplant.

Homer Garden Club
P.O. Box 2833
Homer, Alaska 99603

