

Homer Garden Club

Newsletter

January 2013

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The January meeting will be held January 27, 2:00 pm, at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.

Board of Directors

Jack Regan, President—
235-3650,
regan009@alaska.com

Neil Wagner, Vice President—
235-6953 neil@sustainablehomer.org

Brenda Adams — 235-3763
brenda@GardensByBrenda.com

Peggy Craig — 235-0631
michaelandpeggy@acsalaska.net

Barbara Kennedy — 235-4347 bar-
bara_e_kennedy@msn.com

Kyra Wagner — 235-6953
kyra@sustainablehomer.org

Michael Linden — 235-6632
homerlinden@gmail.com

Jessica Ryan — 299-8811
alyce.ryan@gmail.com

Julie Parizek — 226-3276
jparizek@acsalaska.net

Paula Riley — 435-3983
pauril@yahoo.com

January 27th Meeting to Feature Steve Brown's "Chicken University"



Dr. Stephen Brown is an Associate Professor and District Agricultural Agent for the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Palmer. Brown teaches the Master Gardener classes in the Palmer area and is a frequent garden conference speaker and master of ceremonies because of his expertise and well known sense of humor.

Chicken University is a whimsical but

informative workshop on how to maintain a home chicken flock in Alaska. Topics include breed selection, coop design, nutrition, incubation, brooding, litter management, disease control and chicken psychology...all with an eye towards the special demands of raising chickens in Alaska. Along the way you'll hear funny stories such as "Bingo, T-bone Steaks and Chickens", "Broadway Plays and Bantams", "The Endangered Rhode Island Red of Pikes Peak".



Be sure to check out the flyer for January 12th's Homer Seed Swap on Page 3

A SECOND LOOK AT THE HOMER GARDEN CLUB PLANT SALE

The June Plant Sale has been raising money for the garden club to pay for programs and speakers since the beginning of the club. Plants have been supplied from members' gardens, but recently they have also been purchased from local nurseries. In 2012 many plants also came from the Pioneer Avenue Garden which were removed to reduce a traffic safety hazard. Over the years, the supply of plants from members' gardens has decreased markedly. Meanwhile, a greater share of club revenue has been derived from fees related to Gardeners' Weekend.

As we approach the 2013 growing season, club members will have to

focus on the question of continued viability of the plant sale. There are two main issues that must be addressed if the plant sale is to continue:

- A source of plants from members will be needed
- Plant sale volunteers, especially co-chairs, will be needed

The January 27th Homer Garden Club meeting agenda will include a discussion of these questions. Ultimately, the members must decide whether the plant sale will continue or not. Please bring your ideas to the January meeting and be prepared for a decision on this issue.



Treasurer's Reports

by Peggy Craig

November 2012

Income		Expenses	
Membership	230.00	Meeting	276.00
	<u>230.00</u>	Venue	100.00
Total Income	\$230.00	Program	176.00
		Administration	<u>143.06</u>
		Total Expenses	\$419.06
Beginning balance 12/1/12	\$13,781.68		
Income	230.00		
Expenses	<u>-419.06</u>		
Ending balance 12/31/12	<u>\$13,592.62</u>		

December 2012

Income		Expenses	
Membership	25.00	Program	122.44
	<u>25.00</u>	Refreshments	13.58
Total Income	\$25.00	Newsletter	136.38
		Gardeners' Weekend	<u>844.20</u>
		Total Expenses	\$1,116.60
Beginning balance 12/1/12	\$13,592.62		
Income	25.00		
Expenses	<u>-1,116.60</u>		
Ending balance 12/31/12	<u>\$12,501.02</u>		



Homer's Seedy Saturday Seed Swap

Foundroot Seeds, a new Alaskan seed savers company, and Sustainable Homer are hosting a local seed exchange. Exchange leftover seeds for new ones, connect with community members, and warm up the winter with some 2013 garden planning.

Participate in demonstrations on:

Basic seed saving

How to plan an Alaskan seed saving garden

Year-round vermicompost

Permaculture methods

Foundroot will have Alaska-Friendly Vegetable Seeds available for purchase

Date: *Saturday, January 12th, 2013*

Time: *3pm - 6pm*

**Place: *Kachemak Bay Community Center*
(at the corner of Bear Creek Dr and East End Rd)**

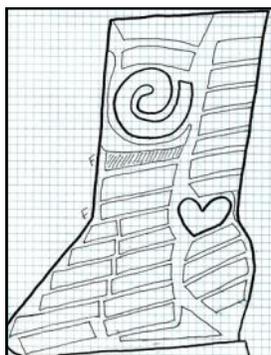
Find More Information at: www.foundroot.com or call: 907-414-3077 or 235-6953

It's that time of the year again. Gray January days with rain dripping from the eaves. Ho Hum. It's time to get inspired or I'll leave for a garden tour of New Zealand. It's time to start planning our gardens and I have a new inspiration. During a flightseeing trip this past summer with guests we took an aerial photo of our house. It has much



better detail than using Google Earth software. First we cropped a close up of just the garden part of the picture and printed it out. Then we, -OK Kyra, traced the beds on graph paper on top of a light box. We scanned that with our printer and now we have a permanent map of our garden layout. This is especially handy with our beds of various sizes and shapes. From the master copy I can easily make more copies and write the bed dimensions on them. We'll have a new map each year so I can easily compare and plan my crop rotation around them.

Now that we have been gardening on this land for several seasons, we are getting a feel for how much food we need to grow. We try to grow and harvest (with seafood & berries) 75% of the food we eat here. The high tunnels and greenhouses really help. The tradeoff, of course, is it's a lot of work. That's why I'm inventorying our root cellar, freezer and jars of vegetables. It's good to know how much we need to plant.



We always seem to have a couple of interns and friends over for lunch in the summer. We grow plenty of food for these wonderful meals where we celebrate the bounty of our work and gardening. It's a great time for learning and sharing ideas about who we are and how to grow vegetables.



As this is the planning season and you are the garden club readers, - I'd like a little feedback. The Central Peninsula Garden Club in the Kenai/Soldotna area has a variety of workshops over the season. I'd like to start this same sharing of knowledge by starting with a few at our place. I've been asked about how to grow corn in a high tunnel. It's not that hard, but there are a few tricks. For the beginning (and some more advanced gardeners), everything is a bit of a mystery. As you advance in skill levels you start



picking up and gaining a more sophisticated level of understanding. Gardening is a vocation that always improves with new ideas and experiences. If you are interested in attending some of these workshops and have ideas on what you'd like to learn about (or teach about) send me your ideas. neil@sustainablehomer.org

Did you know that UAF has hundreds of publications available online for FREE? You can find them all at www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs/catalog/

'Tis the Time of Year for Seed Starting

by Lydia Clayton, Agriculture & Horticulture Extension Agent, UAF

Starting your own garden plants from seed is one of the most fun, exciting, not to mention economical, ways to go about getting all those little seedlings you just can't live without. It also affords you the opportunity to try varieties you can't find at your local retail garden store or greenhouse. However, it can be one of the most disappointing experiences if a few simple rules are not followed.

A few of the must follow rules include:

- Always use sterilized seed starting mix,
- Consider the minimum germination percentage,
- Follow the seeding depth instructions on the package,
- Give 'em bottom heat and moisture.

You get what you pay for.

'Why can't I just use any ol' potting soil I can find?' is a question often asked by the new seed starter. The answer is because nothing is more disappointing than rushing to check on your newly emerged seedlings (if they ever even come up) to find them looking like the cat sat on them. Furthermore, you'll feel awfully guilty for punishing the cat, only to find out later that it wasn't the cat at all but rather some pesky, unseen, silent killer. Commonly referred to as 'dampening off', this plant disease is often caused by one of the numerous *Pythium* oomycetes (formally fungi), but sometimes the less typical fungi culprits of *Rhizoctonia* or *Fusarium*. Though often not noticed until newly emerged seedlings topple over from stem tissue decay, dampening-off can rot seeds before they germinate, leaving the seed starter won-

dering: 'who's to blame, me or the seeds?'

The seed starter has a few tools to avoid this hassle. They can start simply by using a STERILE potting media. While any sterile material that can be kept uniformly moist will



work (think vermiculite, sphagnum moss, sand, or perlite); a potting media light in texture that will allow for excellent drainage is often the best. Sterilized potting media can be readily purchased; alternatively, the out-going seed starter can sterilize potting soil. To do so, simply moisten and bake in the oven at 140 °F for 30 minutes. Additionally, seed starting containers should be cleaned prior to each and every use. A 30 minute soak in 9:1 water:chlorine bleach solution and then air-dried is sufficient. There are also many resistance varieties available and seed treatments can be used to further prevent 'dampening-off'.

The Secret's in the Labeling.

Another simple rule to minimize future problems is to make sure new seedlings have plenty of fresh air and light, and paying attention to a few details provided on the seed packet will often ensure that new

seedlings get just that. The germination rate, often referred to as the *minimum germination percentage*, gives seed starters a hint as to how many of those seeds planted will eventually grow-up to be seedlings. At 100%, every seed results in a seedling, below that 'may' result in less. We say 'may' because the germination percentage given on the seed packet is the minimum and you 'may' get lucky with a few additional. Below 100% minimum germination, the seed starter has two options to make-up for the missing: 1) plant more than one seed in each space or 2) plant additional seeds in additional spaces. Option one, allows seed starters to efficiently use all their possible planting spaces without crowding the newly emerged seedlings, while the second

reduces the ever painful process of determining who lives and who doesn't through thinning.

If your seed packet doesn't come with a germination rate, no sweat, you can always figure it out yourself. The Wet Towel Germination Test is an easy and reliable method for determining what the minimum germination rate is. The University of Alaska Fairbanks even has a handy publication to walk you through the steps! You can find and download the publication, *Procedures for the Wet Towel Germination Test*, through the web address at the end of this article.

Once the number of seeds to plant is determined, it's finally time to stick them in our sterile planting media! Good seed planting is that fine line between good seed to soil contact, ensuring that seeds stay moist throughout the germination process,

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'Tis the Time of Year for Seed Starting

and not planting too deeply. Experienced seed starters will often start by filling planting spaces with soil, place the required number of seeds (as determined by the germination rate) in each space, and then cover seeds with more planting media to the appropriate planting depth (you can find this on the seed packet too!). While 1/8" vs. 1/4" doesn't seem like much to us, to a small seed it means the world. Remember from high school biology, inside a seed contains all the energy it has to germinate, push out that cotyledon, head for the surface, and produce its first chlorophyll. Only then can it harness sunlight for photosynthesis and start producing its own food. If seeds are planted too deep, they run out of energy before they finish that process.

A word of caution, don't estimate the depth! Whether you decide to follow the method above or another, measure the depth you're seeding to. Humans are notorious over-estimators when it comes to seeding depth and again while 1/8" isn't much to you, it's the difference between life and death for the little seed.

Fast growing seedlings are happy seedlings.

Plants are their happiest, healthiest, and most able to fight off diseases and pests when they're actively growing. Active growing seeds and seedlings need adequate light and moisture, loose soil, so their fragile roots can grow, and warm soil.

Planted seeds need essentially two

things to make sure they come shooting out of the soil: heat and moisture. Typically placing containers in an area that is approximately 70 °F is adequate; however bottom heat will hasten the germination and emergence process. Heating mats with an electronic thermostat to regulate the temperature is the easiest way to bottom heating; however there are many other methods out there. While pretty much all seeds prefer bottom heat, which increases soil temperature, to just



warm air, they don't all like the same temperature. One of the handiest publications for determining the correct temperature is *Soil Temperature Conditions for Vegetable Seed Germination*, from Alabama Cooperative Extension. Moisture, the other essential element for seed germination, can be best applied by two methods, constant and frequent misting from above or bottom watering through capillary action. This second method is best for avoiding dampening off by keeping the soil surface relatively dry and helps to reduce soil compaction allowing for easier root growth. Either method will meet the seeds need for constant and consistent moisture, softening the seed coat and allowing for germination.

Once seedlings have emerged they need light and lots of it. Fluorescent or grow lights can meet their

initial light requirements, but they need to be close! How close depends on the light source used and the wavelength emitted. In general light sources should be no more than 6"-8" away from the tops of seedlings. Light sources that are too far away result in long, leggy, and weak seedlings. Additional information can be found in the *Fluorescent Lights for Plant Growth*, publication from the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service.

Happy Seeding!

University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service Resources:

Seed Starting and Transplanting, HGA-00032,

<http://www.uaf.edu/files/ces/publications-db/catalog/anr/HGA-00032.pdf>

Procedures for the Wet Towel Germination Test, FGV-00249, <http://www.uaf.edu/files/ces/publications-db/catalog/anr/FGV-00249.pdf>

Fluorescent Lights for Plant Growth, HGA-00432,

<http://www.uaf.edu/files/ces/publications-db/catalog/anr/HGA-00432.pdf>

Additional Resources:

Dampening-off Diseases in the Garden, UC Davis Pest Note 74132, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74132.html>

Soil Temperature Conditions for Vegetable Seed Germination, ANR-1061, <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1061/ANR-1061.pdf>

Will Hightower's Chicken Ramblings



(You may suspect several intended puns in this piece).

1. Cost may be a deal breaker. Shelter, livestock purchase, feed and time all need to be considered in the start-up costs.

2. Eggs are always a positive selling point: fresh, free range, no chemical eggs. Figure out how many beautiful eggs you use daily. That is the starting number for hens needed - one egg per hen per day. That is top production, so add at least 40% more hens. Hens do not work every day. You most likely will start by raising chicks, so double the number because half the chicks will be roosters. (It is extremely difficult to tell the difference between girls and boys unless you are another chicken. Hatcheries are much more accurate than they used to be). This brings us to point 3.

3. Meat is what happens to the roosters. One lucky rooster will get to live for happy hens producing eggs. This reminds me of Sherman, a big, dumb, slow rooster we had in Nebraska. Sherman was a master of the sneak attack on hens. If you are thinking "cost effective" by raising your own meat, you have never raised chickens. Agardening quotes
nd, you have never butchered chickens. It is easy to get chick-

ens dead. After that comes the time consuming cleaning. When all costs and time are figured, the package of chicken from the store is a real buy.

4. Chicken fertilizer is the top of the compost heap. It is so "hot" that it needs to be spread thin on the garden. A chicken is a compost machine. Hardly anything, including seeds, gets through a chickens' system intact. I know about the alleged health benefits of home raised chicken, but your free range chickens can and do eat some strange things!

5. Weeding is a chicken's highest skill. Look at a chicken yard, can you find a weed?

6. The "chicken tractor," to me, is the wave of tomorrow for keeping small chicken flocks. A two story model is the best for flock management. In the two story tractor the flock is protected from weather and vermin (from the air or on the ground). The top story is for nest boxes, feed and water. Ground floor is the "chicken yard." Hinged stairs connect the two floors. When it is time to move to new ground, raise the stairs to lock the chickens upstairs, then wheel the tractor to a new location needing weeding and fertilizing.

~Will Hightower

Will was asked by Marion Nelson of the CP Garden Club to ramble about chickens last month. He graciously allowed us to reuse this article.

My reaction was I didn't have a single thought on chickens. Not one single, caring, thought about chickens. Did you ever have a dream about chickens? Tuesday night I dreamed about chickens, talk about weird. It has been years since Monti and I have had chickens. But I have been reading about and thinking about trying them again. My thinking has centered around a chicken "tractor". There is no one point that can make the case for keeping chickens, but a group of points may give wings to keeping chickens.

A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows.

~Doug Larson

Gardening requires lots of water - most of it in the form of perspiration. ~Lou Erickson

What a man needs in gardening is a cast-iron back, with a hinge in it. ~Charles Dudley Warner

Don't wear perfume in the garden - unless you want to be pollinated by bees. ~Anne Raver

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:
Homer Garden Club, P.O. Box 2833 Homer, AK 99603

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Homer, Alaska 99603*

