

Homer Garden Club

Newsletter

April 2011

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The April meeting will be held at 2:00 on MAY 1 at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.

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Dr. Patricia Holloway will Discuss Growing Berries at May 1 Meeting

Dr. Pat Holloway is a horticulturist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Georgeson Botanical Garden. Holloway earned her doctorate in 1982 and has since taught classes, conducted research and has helped jump-start the specialty cut flower industry in Alaska. She is currently working on a project funded through USDA New Crop Opportunities which has the University of Alaska Fairbanks studying berries - raspberries, blueberries, cranberries, even cloudberries and crowberries - trying to learn how helpful the state's berries are to human health. The berries will be juiced and tested for organic chemicals. The level of antioxidants is what researchers will



be looking for. A study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture about five years ago found that blueberries

showed a particularly high potential as health boosters. In addition, deeper pigment in berries seemed to be related to higher antioxidant levels. That fact intrigued Alaska researchers. "Ours sure are purple," Holloway said of Alaska blueberries. "More than the ones in the store." Holloway sees several benefits for Alaskans once the results of the study are known and published. One is that consumers will have solid information on how healthy wild berries are. The study also could reap economic and agricultural benefits, helping makers of Alaska products, such as berry syrups, promote their products.



President's Report

by Jack Regan, President

Many gardeners have experienced the therapeutic benefits that come from being in the garden. Dr Tiffany Kawaguchi, director of occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation services, has been using gardening as therapy for her patients at the Hawaii State Mental Hospital in Kaneohe, Oahu. As I was touring gardens in Hawaii this winter, I was able to contact her and arrange a tour. She has established a delightful garden site in which her patients are able to spend time and enjoy the healing benefits of the garden. Her garden system is more complex than usual and includes combining fish with plants to produce a balanced micro-environment. Tilapia swim in tanks and produce waste that is carried in the water and pumped to adjacent tanks where trays of plant holders float. The Styrofoam plant trays have a series of wells where individual plants grow, their roots dangling into the nutrient rich water. After the nutrients are extracted by the plants, the water is filtered through a cinder particle chamber where it is aerated and then returned to the fish tank. This system was established with assistance from the agriculture department of the University of Hawaii. It is referred to as *aquaponics*.



Besides producing vegetables at an accelerated rate, the system also yields tilapia fillets every few months. The water pump is powered by a solar panel, so there is a full measure of sustainability. Checking the chemical balance of the circulating water, maintaining the pH and nitrate/nitrite ratio, gives the patients additional tasks and allows them to learn new skills.

Of course, Hawaii has a different climate than Homer and the growing season is quite different, but Homer certainly has fish that are suited to our environment, such as rainbow trout, that could provide nutrient to an aquaponic system here. The idea of using complimentary systems with sustainable features is an attractive one that probably deserves a closer look. The idea of incorporating gardening into our community organizations is also a desirable outcome.



Shirley Forquer took this picture of snowdrops on April 8, just a few days ago. And here you didn't think spring would ever arrive! Just to make the rest of us green with envy, she also took the bottom picture on June 1 last year. Shirley lives on Dewberry Place, out on Bear Creek Drive. It is about three miles from town at an elevation of about 300 feet.



Treasurer's Report

by Peggy Craig, Treasurer

March 2011		Expenses	
Income		Meeting	\$ 518.08
Membership	\$60.00	Program	318.08
Newsletter ad	40.00	Venue	100.00
Donation	<u>10.00</u>	Paul Banks Greenhouse	<u>1,150.00</u>
Total Income	\$110.00	Total Expenses	\$1,668.08
Beginning balance 3-1-11		\$11,937.45	
Income		110.00	
Expenses		<u>(1,668.08)</u>	
Ending balance 3-31-11		\$10,379.37	

Baycrest Greenhouse

Opening May 5th



10:00 am to 6:00 pm
Tuesday thru Sunday
2661 Sterling Hwy.
399-2007

**Veggie, herb and flower starts * Hanging baskets *
over 20 varieties of tomatoes, including heirlooms**

Announcements

Homer Farmers' Market Presents: "Dirt! The Movie" Thursday ~ April 21st ~ 6:00pm ~ Homer Theatre. This film is a light-hearted documentary exploring the relationship we have to our soil and is narrated by Jamie Lee Curtis. The Homer Farmers' Market will be running a silent auction around the film and possibly a raffle as well. Admission is free, but donations are greatly appreciated. Come out for the movie and help them gear up for the coming market season!

Local Alaskan Plants Clearinghouse Visit the site with a new and easier-to-remember address: **www.localplants.org**. List plants or related materials, such as compost, that you have to sell or that you want to purchase. You may also post opportunities to salvage plants. Agencies often refer people to this site so be sure that your information is up-to-date. Contact Emily Longbrake, Country Garden Farms, at emily@localplants.org if you have information to add to the site. We thank Emily for continuing to volunteer to maintain this website.

More From the Gardening Cheechako

Paula Riley

Well, this "gardening cheechako" is at it again. I came back from a couple of weeks in Hawaii all enthused with how I was going to really get my garden going this spring. No more of those false starts with finding the season ready and me without a seed started. Of course, last year the greenhouses and Garden Club Plant Sale loved me when I had to buy all my starts from them. This time I got on the ball and planted all my little seeds in the little cups in time to hit the ground running when the weather warmed. Whoops! My seeds sprouted and grew a lot faster than I had planned. We still have a month to go before outdoor planting and my starts are ready NOW.

Of course, since this is me who

planted all of these seeds, I had less than stellar germination results. This poor showing isn't nearly as discouraging as it would have been if I had had more space in my house for the starts. Unfortunately, my best lighting is by the big windows in the living room and I have plants on the coffee table, end tables, cabinets, etc. They are growing by the day and threaten to chase me out of my house before the weather warms. I guess there's nothing too terribly wrong about having plants half grown before you put them outside, but my little Corgi (the same one who ate my peas last summer) has naturally been extremely curious about all this stuff in the living room. I have scolded him, so now instead of eating the plants, he just sticks his nose in them to smell. Some of these are pretty fragile still and this is as lethal as

munching on them. I guess the upside is if none of them survive, I won't have to move out of the house!

The pea starts look especially healthy this year, and the package said they didn't have to be trellised. Sadly, someone forgot to tell the peas cause they are sending out little tendrils all over the place and threatening to smother the adjoining plants. My tomato plants look really pathetic. They seem to require watering and don't take well to extended periods of drought. I hear the Garden Club Plant Sale is going to have some really big tomato starts, so it looks like I'm going to be hitting it hard again this year.

I truly love Homer, but sometimes I get to feeling really, really nostalgic for the gardens I planted in Colorado where I just stuck the seed in the ground and it GREW!



Cheer up ladies and gentlemen. Look at these pictures and remember—spring is on the way! When the cranes arrive in Roni Overway's yard, you know it's here.

Gardeners' Weekend

Roni Overway

The Homer Garden Club's "Summer Gardeners' Weekend" is approaching its 5th year as a two-day event. Participation has

tours have grown considerably, into a gardening event that has become a "not to be missed" weekend on gardening enthusiasts' summer calendars.

to keep to our club's mission statement of providing a learning environment for new gardeners as well as those who have gardened for years, we are open to all suggestions!



As the event has become better known around the peninsula and, for that matter, the state, it has been clear that our selection of gardens representing a broad spectrum of garden types has been

Do you know someone who would welcome visitors to their special gardens? In the past we've featured rock gardens, perennial gardens, vegetable gardens...we've seen plants we might not have known would do well in our climate

grown each year, with 179 visitors in 2007 but 317 in 2009 and, despite sometimes torrential rains, 300 in 2010. This year the committee is planning for 400, just to be on the safe side! Word seems to spread quickly among the gardening community whenever events of this nature are planned, and the popularity of our club's event continues to grow. Visiting speakers, including such gardening luminaries as Eliot Coleman, Stephanie Cohen, Erica Glasener, Allan Armitage and Don Engebretson, have attracted many garden enthusiasts. The Bear Creek Winery reception adds to its popularity. But, by far, the **garden tours** are the best attended part of the weekend.



(remember that fabulous kiwi we saw last year??) We've seen productive cherry trees and peach trees grown inside as well as rare al-pines and stunning containers and hanging baskets. Berries,

the most appreciated and anticipated element of the event. Finding those special gardens, however, presents its own challenges! Over the past 4 years and now, into our 5th year, we have found 29 of them!! But we know there are lots more out there!



shrubs, trees.....they all thrive from seaside to summit but we need to know where they are!!

The Homer Garden Club has presented tours regularly for years. At one time two tours were presented in a casual format each summer but they were only open to garden club members. So, from its humble beginnings, the

Since the committee has not just begun planning for the 2011 Summer Gardeners' Weekend, but is actually beginning to plan for 2012, **we are asking our membership to help us root out those special gardens** that they recognize as gardens everyone would love to see. In attempting

Please call one of the committee members with your suggestions. You can reach Roni Overway at 226-3404 or 242-1966, Brenda Adams at 235-3763, or Barb Landi at 235-1809.

The April meeting is to be held May 1 because of Easter, which occurs on the fourth Sunday of April.



1067 Ocean Drive
Homer, Alaska 99603

(907) 235-1521

Your source for:

*Hydroponic Supplies,
Drip irrigation supplies,
Agribon row cover,
Mulch film "solar mulch",
Seeds of change seeds,
Seed starting supplies: trays, tray in-
serts, domes, heat mats, planters,
And much more.*

**We are open Tuesday through Saturday
from 11:00 to 6:00**

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

