

# Homer Garden Club



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**The April meeting will be held April 28, 2:00 pm, at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.**

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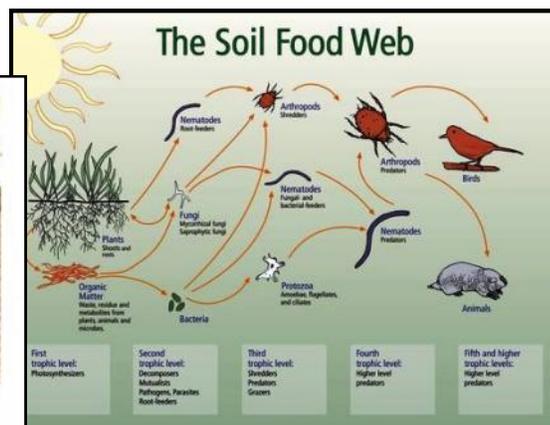
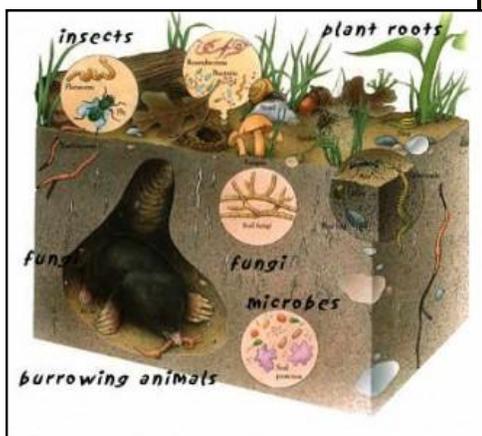
## April 28 Meeting to feature Lydia Clayton Speaking on Managing Soil Quality



Lydia Clayton, Agriculture and Horticulture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Fairbanks, for the Kenai Peninsula District, will be presenting

Secrets of the Underworld. —the microbial food web and building soil.

Healthy soil is a living, breathing, microbe-eat-microbe world! Fortunately, for plants the big punch those little guys carry is just what they require. Reproducing in high concentrations in healthy soil, bacteria ensure fertility, recycling nutrients, elements, and minerals through their bodies, making them available for plants. Through our actions, we soil managers can either help or hinder these important soil processes. Come learn the why and how so as to actively wrangle your soil microbes to improve soil quality and tilth!



### LETTUCE TABLE

In early April, taxes are filed and snow is still falling on the garden, but thoughts are turning to the first plantings. A trick I learned from one of my Homer garden mentors, Dr. Walter Johnson, is to use a lettuce table. This elevated garden bed can be placed at a convenient height and location, such as on a deck close to the kitchen. It has a mesh bottom so good drainage is

achieved. I found plans for this 30" x 58" device in a University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Bulletin. The materials are inexpensive and construction is straightforward. An added feature is a cover made with PVC pipe bent into a hoop shape and covered with plastic film obtained at a building supply store, providing a growing space out of the weather. When your lettuce table is in place, fill it with growing medium. Com-

bine peat moss, perlite, vermiculite, compost, and chicken manure to provide a nutritious substrate. Select your favorite varieties of lettuce and sow seeds 1" apart in rows 5" apart. The plants may require a gallon of water daily. Harvest the lettuce leaves as they develop for continuous production. Replant as necessary throughout the season and enjoy the bounty from your lettuce table.

## Announcements

**Special June Speaker** — Chris Chadwell of the United Kingdom will be giving a talk on "Paradise on Earth: The Flowers of Kashmir" on Friday, June 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm at the Islands and Ocean Center. Chris makes fall expeditions to the high mountains of Nepal, Tibet and Kashmir and collects seed from perennials, shrubs, trees and vines. He sells seed shares prior to collecting, so come see what he encounters and what you could be growing in your garden. Or just come enjoy the beautiful things he encounters. Check out his website at Chadwell Seeds [www.chadwellseeds.co.uk](http://www.chadwellseeds.co.uk)

The Hospice garden is needing volunteers for watering and weeding this summer. Anyone who is interested please e-mail Teena Garay at [garay@acsalaska.net](mailto:garay@acsalaska.net)

## Cookie's Country Greenhouse

2340 East End Road, Homer, 235-8915 or 399-8915

Opening date — April 22



Featuring Proven Winners® plants  
We also carry vegetable starts, organic seed and seed potatoes, as well as farm fresh eggs and red wiggler worms.

Open Monday through Saturday from 9:00 to 6:00

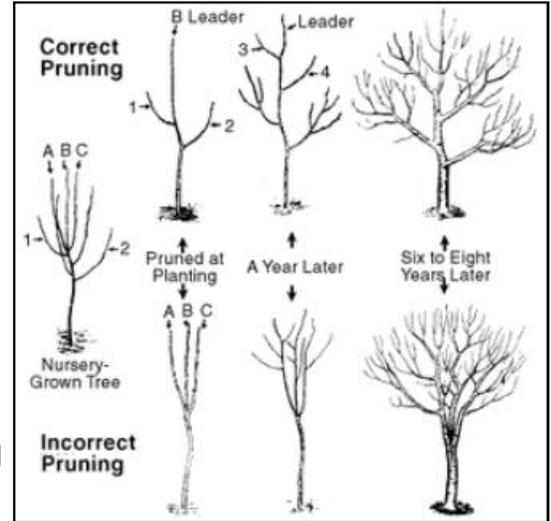


Lydia Clayton, this month's speaker, will also be giving a fruit tree pruning workshop at the Wagner's place on Saturday April 28<sup>th</sup> from 3-5p:m. We have a variety of younger and older apple trees

along with cherry and plum trees that will be pruned. Ground Control has generously donated some pruning tools that will be given away at the workshop.

Directions: Go out East End Rd 1.7 miles from stop light, take a left (uphill) on Williams. Go up to the T where it ends and take a right on Jakes Little Fireweed, go 30 feet then another left up our driveway. You'll pass our high tunnel and see the solar array just to the

right of our driveway. Park on top. 235-6953



Maintain your garden with help from **JUST ASK RENTAL**, featuring mowers, weed eaters, tillers, thatchers, landscape tools and much more.



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Let **ULMER'S** help make your garden a showplace with our great assortment of yard ornaments and planters, as well as all your gardening tool needs.



**Treasurer's Reports**

**Mar ch 2013**

<b>Income</b>		<b>Expenses</b>	
Membership	95.00	Meeting	150.00
Books	408.00	Venue	100.00
	<u>Total Income</u>	Program	50.00
	<b>503.00</b>		<u>Total Expenses</u>
			<b>\$150.00</b>
Beginning balance			
2/1/13	\$12,002.02		
Income	503.00		
Expenses	<u>-150.00</u>		
Ending balance 2/28/13	<u>\$12,355.02</u>		

I moved from Seward to my cabin in Homer on June 7, 2009. Earlier that day I loaded up the last of my household goods, mostly bulky gardening stuff, and drove the 165 miles across the Peninsula. Now, at 10:30 that night, as I stood on my new deck drinking homemade wine gifted to me by Seward friends, a full moon rose brilliantly over Kachemak Bay. Within that shimmering moment coyotes called from the far side of McNeil Canyon, and a great horned owl gave a ventriloque call from some nearby spruce tree. My heart swelled, and a sense of home took root in my heart.

The next weekend I screwed together two 3' x12' garden boxes out of untreated spruce, and began to heap them full of dry alder leaves raked from the edge of the yard, spruce charcoal from a recent bonfire, fresh cut grass, and sawdust from Small Potatoes Sawmill. I layered it all in lasagna style and topped it off with about three inches of Al Poindexter's bagged potting mix. On

June 19<sup>th</sup> I planted seed potatoes, broccoli starts, and seeds for lettuce, carrots, and an assortment of herbs, and a garden was born.

Gardening runs like a rootstock through my family tree. I grew up in Colorado picking black-capped raspberries with my grandmother, eating sun-warmed tomatoes over the kitchen sink, and savoring sweet mouthfuls of home-canned

peaches in February. I have gardened everywhere I've lived. Even in college I found small out-of-the-way plots for a few tulip bulbs and a fringe of lettuce.

So having attempted home gardens in Fairbanks and then Seward with only moderate success, imagine my delight when Homer soil forked over without rocks, without ice a foot down, and with ample light from our southern orientation! Gardening became my passion, and other gardeners became my source for insider information, friendship, and world-class potlucks.

While my 2009 garden was modest, by the end of that summer I had hired Lance Williamson, with Bobcat Construction, to till and terrace my steep lot. I built five new garden beds and put up a six-foot fence to deter the moose. These beds I filled with a combination of rich fishy peat from Jim Van Oss, and a nice mix of sand and peat from Shane Campbell's in Anchor Point.



sundried tomatoes, and learned to can – putting up jars of green beans, carrots, salsa and jam. Fresh potatoes and carrots stored well under the house in an insulated crawl space, and the smallest potatoes went back in the ground for the 2011 garden.

Gardening was even better in 2011,

with a warm spring and all the crops in the ground by the 15<sup>th</sup> of May. This was the summer I ordered a high tunnel, and my new partner Hal and I spent September assembling the 20' x20' structure between picking raspberries, canning, and freezing.

And then there was the winter of 2012, with record snowfall and several collapsed high tunnels around the region. I don't know how many times we shoveled snow off the squat roof of our high tunnel, tossing it onto a berm higher than our heads. I built a weight-bearing trellis out of 4" x 4" cedar posts inside to support the peak against the heavy snow, and slept better after that. The payoff came in March when the sun came out and the high tunnel was 70 degrees inside and smelled of new earth. I planted lettuce, kale and radish seeds directly into the soil and set out eager seedling starts. By late May I was harvesting heads of broccoli the size of a dinner plates and all the lettuce we could eat.

On June 1st I added tomato starts, strawberries, and a flourish of raspberry-colored nastursims, and poked seeds into the soil for green beans, onions, lettuce, and carrots. Then I started in on the outdoor beds. In all, I had about 480 square feet of growing space, and despite a cooler-than-average summer, I grew enough food to cut our grocery bill in half from May until February. Even now we have jars of stewed tomatoes, dilly beans, salsa, rhubarb-tomato chutney (which is wonderful on halibut) and sliced carrots, plus sun-dried tomatoes, frozen broccoli, and several types of jams and jellies to carry us through until the garden produces again.

*(Continued on page 5)*

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And now, as the April sun warms the high tunnel to spring-like temperatures, I breathe in the smell of thawing soil and consider the 2013 garden. I have promised myself to reduce the strain on my irritable back, but I'm contemplating a new garden expansion— I want to plant a berry patch.

I recently shared my plans with fellow gardeners Kyra and Neil Wagner, and they suggested that I visit Anne Wieland and Todd Gustafson to see how they've set about growing fruit trees and berries. So to that end, I paid a visit to them on a blustery day last weekend.

Anne and Todd live about two miles west of me - closer to Fritz Creek Store, and thus at a lower elevation. But like me, they contend with wind and snow that lingers late into the spring. When I arrived, Anne invited me into their house, which they rightly call a homestead. They heat with wood, and collect water off the roof in an ingenious filtration system Todd built. The house is small and cozy, with big windows that face out toward the garden and the bay beyond. Anne introduced me to all the tomatoes and broccoli and artichoke seedlings growing verdantly in the light of these windows, and as we talked a ring-necked pheasant cock and hen strode between an artfully designed greenhouse and the garden gate. Anne was delighted to see the pair of them and told me in a conspiratorial tone that the male pheasant is her secret lover. It was clear why she felt

that way – what with his grand way of walking and his bold colors flashing in the mid-morning light.

For the trip to the garden we donned boots, heavy jackets, and mittens and stepped out into a spring blizzard. The first stop was the small greenhouse that Anne had designed. Todd pointed out the carefully calculated angles of the roof and explained a system he adapted from Tim Myers in Bethel to circulate warm air from the apex of the



structure down through the soil with 2" plastic pipes and a couple of solar-powered fans. Then we stepped inside the fenced-in orchard, which felt immediately warmer and calmer. Anne gave credit to Walter Johnson for the design of the enclosure. The north wall was of solid boards, painted white to reflect light toward the trees. The remaining walls were finished in sheets of corrugated fiberglass, which allows in the light to pass thorough but blocks the wind. The fence was six feet tall, and the stout young trees (Norland and Parkland apples among them) were pruned and waiting for spring. Anne reported an impressive yield of fruit last fall. Clearly this system creates a microclimate several hardiness zones above the ambient climate. Anne informed me that strawber-

ries and currents also do better inside these walls.

Back out by the garden beds, covered in several inches of snow, Anne pointed at each smothered shape and told me what she grew the summer prior. Like sculptors who see the form they'll sculpt within a block of marble, we envisioned the flourish of last year's garden and the promise of the coming one.

Once home, I took the dog for a walk in a swirl of snow, and came home by way of the yard on the west side of the house. I looked at this gentle roll of land with new eyes. It gets great sun all day in the summer months, and is somewhat protected from the elements. If I erected a wind-blocking fence to the north and the west this would be an ideal location for an orchard, and would provide some privacy to boot. I could plant a variety of berries and even include an Evans cherry tree or two. Additionally, converting the land to an orchard would reduce the area I mow, keeping with the "grow more, mow less" philosophy and saving my back in the process. Satisfied with this plan, I paced through the snow making the outline of a new fence around a pregnant garden.



# Garden Club Plant Sale to be Held June 1

by Karen Howorth

## Friends and Members

**The Garden Club Plant Sale** will be held on **June 1** this year at the Homer **Chamber of Commerce**. The Plant Sale will open at **11:00 am** and volunteers need to be there by **8:00-9:00 am** depending on your task. Coffee and goodies will be available. Paul Banks Elementary will be selling annuals again, as well as O. Anderson's group for trees, and this year we are adding 4-H with trees. These groups will open at 10:30 am to give you something to do while waiting for us to open. We will also have a garden implements swap/sale area.

**We need your help!!!** Please divide your perennials, repot your houseplants and over seed your annuals (flowers and vegies) and donate the extras to your sale. I will be accepting plants 2 weeks early this year and plants in pots can be left at the chamber one week

early. Monte is looking forward to caring for them. Please call me, **Karen, at 235-5253** for details and help potting. Please label everything!

At the April and May meetings we will have flower pot exchanges. And the **volunteer signup** sheet will go around.

We need a co-chair as I will be gone the first 2 weeks in May. *Please call me!!*

Karen Howorth  
235-5253

*Homer Garden Club  
P.O. Box 2833  
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