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# Homer Garden Club

The Homer Garden Club meeting will be held April 23 at 2:00 pm at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.

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April 2017

## April 23 Meeting to Feature Jenni Medley & Beau Burgess on Aquaponics

Spring is here and many of us have our summer greens and vegetable starts already planted indoors, but are you still dreaming of growing glorious fresh vegetables in the cold, dark winter months? Yes, it is possible, even here at Latitude 59! Find out how when the crew from Blood, Sweat and Food Farm joins us on April 23rd for a very special presentation on aquaponics.



Jenni Medley and Beauregard Burgess from Blood Sweat & Food Farms will describe how to get year-round herb and greens production in an aquaponics system. Aquaponics is a hybrid technology combining aquaculture and hydroponics, in which microbes convert waste produced by fish into nutrients for plants, which in turn purify the water for the fish. Blood Sweat & Food Farms has used their home-designed system for three years to grow greens that have been sold to local restaurants year-round. That's

right—fresh greens in January! The presentation includes the scientific background of aquaponics growing, an overview of their system, and advice for growers who want to build their own aquaponics systems.

Blood Sweat & Food Farms LLC (BSF) was created in 2014, selling greens from their aquaponics greenhouse and high tunnel. Now activities include pastured heritage-breed poultry, pigs, and rabbits. BSF is an employee-owned business. The members, combining diverse backgrounds, include Jenni Medley, Beauregard Burgess, Tony Burgess, Aryn Young, and Lanae Smith. They are dedicated to growing healthy animals and plants which they can share with the community as they build systems that ally animals, plants, soils and people and allow each to be celebrated.



# Treasurer's Report

by Peggy Pittman, Treasurer

March 2017

## Income

Membership	160.00
Book	120.00
Newsletter Ads	75.00
Non-income Refund	29.95
<b>Total Income</b>	<b><u>\$ 384.95</u></b>

## Expenses

Venue	150.00
Harvest Dinner Venue	135.00
Speaker Honorarium	50.00
Hospitality	19.95
New Computer	349.99
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b><u>\$ 704.94</u></b>

Beginning Balance 3/1/2017	<b>\$10,431.34</b>
Income	<b>384.95</b>
Expenses	<b><u>704.94</u></b>
Ending Balance 3/31/17	<b>\$10,111.35</b>

**REMEMBER:** The Homer Garden Club meets the 4th Sunday of the month, NOT the last Sunday, so the April meeting is April 23.

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# Spring Tonic

by Jessica Shepherd

Despite the light dusting of snow the last two mornings, I am happy to report that spring is finally here! After an unexpectedly cold and snowy winter, I am thrilled to feel the warmth of the sun on my up-turned face and breath in the smell of tree sap and damp earth. In the distance, the first Varied Thrush of



the year delivers an off-key call. Something inside of me splits open like a long dormant seed.

Weather aside, it has been a particularly difficult winter for us. My husband, Hal, and I are coping with an elderly father who's lost his inner compass, an adult child kicking in a noose of his own making,

and the black cloud of potential job loss under the new Federal administration. Stress rides my shoulders with an iron grip.

Consequently, I've been a little slow gearing up for gardening season this year. My young starts are spilling over only half of the counter space and wide window ledges they normally do by this time of year. Given the long stretch of arctic chill all through March and the snow that still covers my garden beds, I've had trouble getting motivated. My inner seasonal clock had yet to strike spring. Until today.

Today, under blue-bird skies, I take a tray of seedlings and a bucket of water down to the high tunnel and begin my spring planting. At first I do so begrudgingly, motivated more by a desire to avoid transplanting young broccoli, kale, and leeks into larger pots than out of any pleasure in the task. I consult the bed rotation plan I drew last fall to see where each sturdy plant should go. Then I choose somewhere else entirely.

They will grow up among tender asparagus shoots. In my mind's eye I can see them come mid-summer, full of ruffled leaves and tender broccoli heads. As I sift through the soil I cleared and smoothed last fall, I feel tension slide away, like the sweater I shed in favor of shirt-sleeves.

The loam in the center bed, where I plant, is frost-free and moist. The young plants, liberated from their pots, seem to wiggle into their new holes and lift up shining leaves to the gentle watering I give them. In another bed I draw a furrow with my favorite diggy tool, gently lay in the grass-like leek shoots I started in late January, then use my hands to firm them in and prop them upright. Already I'm thinking of potato leek soup with a hint of sage and a crumble of bacon on top.

To stave off the cold nights ahead, I use plastic cloches over the broccoli and kale, and spread a double-thick layer of Remay over the leeks. When everything is done I find that I don't want to leave. It's so pleasant in here, so ready for

*(Continued on page 4)*

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*Spring Tonic*  
(Continued from page 3)

busy hands to deliver spring one transplant at a time.

Gardening is as close to religion as I know how to get. I kneel before these garden beds with hope and reverence in my heart. I give an internal prayer of thanks for each new green shoot that resurrects from the ground, each flower that

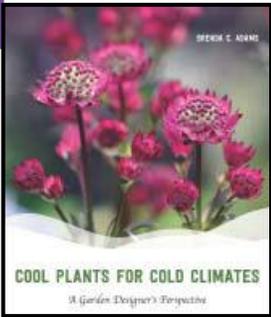


delivers me from winter's gloom

with joyous colors, each succulent strawberry that passes through my lips. To devote oneself to a garden is to engage in a sacred act.

As I close the high tunnel door, empty watering bucket in hand, and walk back up to the house to start dinner, I feel lighter, happier. Gardening has worked its miracle on me, offering me a spring tonic I was in much need of.

**“Cool Plants for Cold Climates” by Brenda Adams** Book Review by Sheila Toomey in Alaska Master Gardeners Anchorage Newsletter, April 2017



Here is an easy-to-use reference to a wide variety of vigorous plants that thrive in our climate-challenged gardens.

Adams' goal is “to provide you and other cold-climate gardeners with enough information about a wide variety of exceptional plants so that you will be able to create a

gorgeous, gratifying and dependably hardy garden, a garden filled with selections you adore.”

Sections include advice on how to shop for plants (surreptitiously pull suspiciously large “starts” out of the pot to see how root-bound they are), how to put plants in the ground and treat them at the end of the season, how to evaluate them for impact, utility, dependability and whether they will thrive in your space.

This is all good stuff, but what lifts this book above other decent advice books is the hundred or so pages of

recommended plants with stunning photographs showing them in a variety of groupings illustrating how individual choices fit together.

Maybe it's the four feet of snow piled in my yard, or the single-digit temperatures every night into late March, but Adams' practical advice about both familiar and unfamiliar plants -- and the photo illustrations -- had me redesigning my garden in my imagination, over and over. I like my garden, but I started it the way most people do, according to Adams: I bought pretty plants and stuck them in a hole and watered them. I didn't get my soil tested. I didn't figure out what micro-zones exist in my yard. I neglected to notice that leafed-out trees were going to block the light. And so on. That was years ago. These days I'm smarter about planning but my garden still isn't as beautiful as I want it to be. Adams understands this longing. The purpose of a garden is to bring you pleasure, she writes. At every step, ask yourself, “Do you love it?”

I don't love my garden yet. But I love this book.

## Cookie's Country Greenhouse

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# March Meeting Minutes

by Roni Overway, Acting Recording Secretary

The March 26th meeting of the Homer Garden Club was called to order at 2:00 PM by President Francie Roberts. The March 26th meeting of the Homer Garden Club was called to order at 2:00 PM by President Francie Roberts. She began the meeting with the introduction of two visitors who had not attended a meeting before.

Francie asked if anyone in the audience had started seeds yet. A few had with plants that included clematis, and "Love in a Pot" (started by the day's speaker, Rachel Lord).

It was announced that Brenda Adams' design class at the college had been postponed. It will be held on April 1 and April 8. Potential participants were urged to call Jenny Roush at the college for an update or to register.

Peggy Craig announced that her husband, Michael, would be making his annual trip up to the valley to acquire fish bone meal. They bring 2 tons back and 1/2 ton has already been spoken for. Members were invited to sign up with her if they wanted in on the order.

Don McNamara said that he had seed potato starts available at the Wagon Wheel.

Treasurer Peggy Pittman provided her report. The club has \$10,556.34 in the

treasury at this time. She also mentioned that there were HGC gardening guides, "Kachemak Cultivating, Seaside to Summit" for sale. The regular price for the books is \$30.00 although there are a few available that are slightly damaged for \$15.00.

Francie reminded members that the club has a Facebook page and encouraged folks to check out both the FB page and the website for current news.

Barb Kennedy provided information on the upcoming Plant Sale which has been a traditional source of income for the club for the last 31 years. The date of the event is still under discussion; moving it to an earlier date this year has been considered in light of the last few years' warm winters and early springs, but with the cold, snowy winter of 2016 and 2017 that date is yet to be determined. Still, now is the time to plant extra starts! She explained a couple of changes that will be made this year. Instead of an 11:00 start, it will begin at 10:30 for viewing, coffee and donated food. Shoppers will be allowed to wander and check out the plants before being asked to go back behind the ropes for the start of the sale. Members are encouraged to donate any of their extra pots as soon as possible. They can be brought to the next meetings or dropped off at Barbara's house.

Jeannette Lawson, co-chair of the 11th annual Gardeners' Weekend, and Roni Overway talked about this year's event. Roni acquainted members with this year's speaker, Cisco Morris and provided information about his presentation titled "Everything's Going to Pot." Jeannette emphasized the importance of the volunteers, without whom the weekend could not be held. She lured volunteers with a promise of "chocolate" on a table in the rear of the room where the signup sheet would be after the meeting. The sheet was passed around and then made available at a "G.W. Question and Answer" table.

Barbara also explained her membership list has old information about what activities people signed up for with their prior year membership forms. So, the signup lists may contain old data; please cross your name off the list if you no longer wish to be contacted about that activity and the database will be updated. In the future, all activities will be cleared from the database (in January) and only the new membership information on volunteer activities will be recorded.

Co-V. P. Joan Splinter also put out a call for volunteers to help with maintenance of the club's Baycrest Garden. Another signup sheet is available for that purpose. Garden cleanup will be

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*March Meeting Minutes*  
(Continued from page 5)

scheduled for May. Thereafter, two volunteers per week will be needed for regular weeding and deadheading. She will try to schedule experienced gardeners with those who are in learning mode.

Francie announced there was to be an apple grafting workshop in Anchorage at the Dimond Greenhouses on April 15. The cost is just \$3.00 to attend. There was a question about whether this pertained to members of the Fruit Growers group, but it was thought that it was open to the public.

Tim Quinn, co-V.P., then introduced the day's guest speaker, Rachel Lord of Alaska Stems, a business she runs with her husband, Ben, selling cut flowers.

Rachel began with statistics related to the percentage of cut flowers which come into the U. S. from other countries. There was a huge drop in domestic production between 1971 and 2003 and, although the amount now being produced in the U. S. is rising, 79% still come in from outside the country.

Alaska Stems keeps to organic practices as well as possible, shying away

from damaging pesticides and the like. During her presentation she focused on what plants fit into the cut flower market: those with long vase life, long stems, aesthetic appeal and that don't shed pollen. She advised shopping for big blooms, unique textures, flowers serving as "fillers", buds and branches, greenery and grasses. In her business they use netting that is gradually raised up its supports as flowers grow, thus keeping the stems straight. It is also important that there be a means of keeping rain and wind off of the flowers if possible. In their business high tunnels do that job well.

Flowers she grows commercially include Dahlias, Amaranth, Zinias, Scabiosa, Bells of Ireland, Campanula, Cerinth, Delphiniums, Godetia, Asiatic and LA Hybrid lilies and many, many others. She emphasized the importance of pinching back to encourage more branching and more flowering.

Rachel also advised what is needed at home to extend vase life: Clean vases (as well as tools and water) a period of rest and hydration prior to putting flower into their vases, and re-cutting stems immediately before putting them in water. Placing them out of direct sunlight will also extend their lives. Flower food helps vase life in some

cases but not all. She typically doesn't use it.

Alaska stems has a refrigerated area (Cool-Bot) kept at 38-40 degrees for storing cut flowers. In that environment they will last as long as three weeks in water filled buckets.

Growing tulips was another of her topics. Her business does not hold bulbs over but starts fresh each year.

Other tips included using traps for voles, pulling the stamens from lilies to avoid pollen shedding and to extend their bloom time. She advised not to mix daffodils with other plants unless they've been hydrated for 24 hours, otherwise they will spoil (poison) the other flowers. She mentioned that Sweet peas are poisonous and that Peonies should be harvested when they are "marshmallow" soft. Some flowers will stop blooming as soon as picked (i.e. dahlias) while others will continue (Peonies) once they're brought inside...some will even continue to grow!

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 PM.

Spring prunings from the apple orchard of the late Walter Johnson are available for scion wood grafts. If interested, contact Judith James at [jamesj@eou.edu](mailto:jamesj@eou.edu)



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# Gardeners' Weekend

by Roni Overway

Volunteers are paid in six figures...  
**SMILES**

~Gayla LeMaire

Gardeners' Weekend produces a multitude of smiles but it doesn't happen without the unselfish actions of a multitude of VOLUNTEERS! We are hoping that you will become one of us ....the Smile Producers!

Putting on our signature event requires the help of many. And, this year, because of some changes at the winery and because we've needed to make some changes ourselves to accommodate increasing participation, we do need more helpers than ever. Remember that this event helps immensely in our ability to fund speakers throughout the year, and its success is directly proportional to the

commitment of the volunteers who make it happen. Kudos to those of you who sign up every year. You know how appreciated you are. You do make the difference between a stellar event and one that might be ho-hum!

Although it's early in the spring and Gardeners' Weekend seems far off ~July 29th and 30th~ for those who plan and carry it out, the time is NOW! With only two more regular club meetings during which we can pass around the sign-up sheets, we need to know who is willing to help and in what capacity you would like your talents utilized. Will you hostess in a garden? We need 6 more. Help in the kitchen with getting the food out at the winery? This year we will also need people checking IDs at the winery entrance and even opening wine bottles! How about preparing

some of the food (with ingredients and recipes supplied by the committee)?

We promise to answer any and all of your questions about what might be involved in those positions that might interest you. We'll be set up at the back of the room at the April meeting and we're even happy to take phone calls! So if you have questions about what instruction you'll get along the way, about exactly how much time might be involved, PLEASE ASK US. We understand that it might seem hard to plan that far in advance, but give it a try! It's just a day...maybe even just an hour or two. Call Roni at 226 3404 or Jeannette Lawson at 854 9065!

Thanks from the Gardeners' Weekend Committee!

## Extension Releases New Gardening App UA Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service

Heidi Rader describes the new Grow & Tell app and website she developed as "essentially Yelp for gardeners."

The free app, which was released Tuesday, allows gardeners in the United States to see what vegetable varieties grow best in their areas based on what other gardeners say. The app also invites gardeners to act as citizen scientists and rate the varieties that they have grown for taste, yield and reliability.

Rader teaches gardening and farming as the tribes' Extension educator for the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service and the Tanana Chiefs Conference. She also reaches gardeners and farmers

*Available Now!*

# Grow & Tell

**Whether you're an expert gardener or new gardener, this app is for you!**

Use the app to:

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- see what other gardeners near you are growing
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For more information, contact  
**Heidi Rader at [grow.andtell@alaska.edu](mailto:grow.andtell@alaska.edu)**

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(Continued on page 8)

**Extension Releases New Gardening App**  
*(Continued from page 7)*

Vegetable variety trials conducted in Fairbanks show what grows well here, she said but not in other areas of the state.

“That works pretty well for me but not for people, say, in Arctic Village or Nome,” she said.

Rader hopes that lots of gardeners will rate crops, which will make the app more useful for others. “It’s citizen scientists conducting variety trials where they live,” she said. The app is available on the App

Store for iPhones, Google Play for android phones or as a website at [www.growandtell.us](http://www.growandtell.us). Development of the app was funded by a grant from the Extension Foundation to promote innovation in the Cooperative Extension Service. To keep the app free, Rader said, Extension will seek sponsorships to pay for updates, fixes and regular maintenance. Additionally, event advertising can also be purchased and targeted to app users locally, by state or nationally.

Rader hopes to expand the app to capture ratings on other plants

used in the landscape and garden, including trees, shrubs, flowers, fruits and berries.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks recognized Rader with a 2016 Invent Alaska Award for her work on the app. Cornell University contributed ratings that it had already collected as well as lessons learned from operating a similar citizen science project. A Boston-based company, Geisel Software, built the app. For more information, contact Rader at [grow.andtell@alaska.edu](mailto:grow.andtell@alaska.edu)

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

