

Homer Garden Club

Newsletter

March 2013

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The March meeting will be held March 24, 2:00 pm, at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.

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March 24th meeting will feature Brian Olson of Alaska Berries farm.

Brian and Laurie Olson own and operate a 4 acre berry farm near Soldotna called Alaska Berries.

www.alaskaberries.com

They grow haskaps, saskatoons, blueberries, currants, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries and rhubarb. The farm also has a licensed winery and jam-making facility on the premises where products are made only from fruit grown on the farm. Brian will be speaking about the haskap plants he has been propagating over the last several years. He will also

discuss blueberries and the other berry plants grown on the farm. Brian and Laurie make their own wines, jams and syrups for sale along with Haskap plants.

The name Haskap comes from the ancient Ainu people of Japan. It is recognized as one of the oldest known names given to this plant. It roughly translates to "many presents at the end of branches." The variety that we grow is from the Hokkaido region of Japan. Some confuse this variety with honeyberry. Honeyberry is a



Brian Olson (cont.)

name coined by Jim Gilbert from One Green World nursery for his work with Russian varieties of Blue Honeysuckle. The point to keep in mind is that there are many different varieties of plants from the same Genus and Species. We use the name Haskap to identify our plants and not Honeyberries. As with all plants from the same species, there are many similarities and some differences. Our focus is to not debate the differences, but to describe our Haskaps as best we can.

The haskap has been known to live 50-60 years! How long it will remain productive is subject to many factors such as care, weather, disease, insects, etc., but the fact remains it will produce for basically a



lifetime. The plant grows very well in South Central Alaska. It will grow 4-5' wide and up to 5-6' tall. It does not sucker and has no thorns. The flowers can withstand some frost and the fruit will be ready to harvest by early to mid August. The plant does well in pH ranges 6-6.5, but can also tolerate other pH's. It can withstand 40 below winters. It has survived winters

with little snow cover. We have not noticed any remarkable disease or insect pressure.

Brian and Laurie Olson
www.alaskaberries.com



KACHEMAK BAY CAMPUS PRESENTS NORTHERN GARDEN DESIGN WITH BRENDA ADAMS

Have you seen gorgeous gardens and wanted yours to look that way, but didn't know where to start? Is your garden overwhelming you and taking too long to maintain? Or would you like guidance on how to design and build an inviting, easy to care for retreat for you and your family? Then enroll **NOW** in an information-packed workshop called *Northern Garden Design and Implementation*. National award-winning garden designer, Brenda Adams, will teach this two-day, in-depth, how-to workshop. Gain the confidence that your gardening goals can be achieved and a sense of direction on how to do it.



When: April 6th and 13th, 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Where: Kachemak Bay Campus-Kenai Peninsula College. Fee: \$85

For more information: call Brenda Adams at 235-3763 or www.gardensbybrenda.com.

To register, go to the KBC campus on Pioneer Avenue or online at uaonline.alaska.edu or call 235-7743. **Deadline to Register: March 29th!**



Neil's Notes

by Vice President Neil Wagner

Warm sunny spring days make me a bit antsy, vaguely nervous that I should have more plants started. We just have leeks and onions peeking up from their flats this early March day. I have my regular routine I stick to and debate if it's a rut.



Kyra has hers too. She was out shoveling snow into the two raised beds of her "jungle hut" greenhouse yesterday. It's permaculture philosophy at its best. The greenhouse will provide us our first real spring "greens." The snow will melt down into the beds that dried out over winter. It is a jungle in there. There are some dried tomato and peppers plants, but the lambs quarter thickets dominate. A dried web of dried chick weed lies scattered everywhere. As the days lengthen our crop of nutritious "greens" will start to grow. They taste great and will be the basis for many salads.

For years, once our spring transplants came up we set the trays on improvised wood stands by every south window in the house. We'd spin them around when they listed over towards the sun and then they'd list the other way. Warm house temperatures and directional sunlight tend to de-evolve tomatoes, brassicas or anything into vine plants. Last year we bought a 4 rack stainless steel shelf unit on wheels. It can be split into 2 sets or stacked together making them 6 feet tall. Each shelf fits 4 of the standard plastic transplant trays. Then I bought a couple 46" fluorescent lights with 4-54watt T-5 bulbs in each. We hung them from

the shelf above the trays. They worked so well we bought another set of shelves and another 3 lights.

We move our plants to the closed-off top floor in March because we are able to keep it cooler. Then by early May our plants are usually getting too big so we move them to our unheated basement where it's around 50 degrees. Cooler temps seem to make better plants. By mid-May I move the starts out to my insulated greenhouse where they can get full sun. I have backup heat there for frosty nights. I'll add a rotating fan this year for a bit more stalk strength.

Rachael Lord has started a 3 year study with a SARE grant where she will be monitoring 12 high tunnels for temps & humidity. She is currently looking for more High tunnels to put monitors in. The study will show the differences between single- and double-walled high tunnels at different altitudes. We all will be benefitting from the knowledge that is coming from research like this. Some 250 individuals who have high tunnels are experimenting to see what they can grow. Pick your dream seeds and try your own experiments. That's part of the fun of gardening!



Treasurer's Reports

by Peggy Craig

February 2013

Income	
Membership	40.00
Total Income	\$40.00
Beginning balance 2/1/13	\$12,511.02
Income	40.00
Expenses	-499.00
Ending balance 2/28/13	<u>\$12,052.02</u>

Expenses	
Dues to AK Botanical Garden	\$150.00
Meeting	349.00
Venue	\$100.00
Program	249.00
Total Expenses	\$499.00

Peggy and Michael Craig live in a cedar Pan-Abode house above the bluffs to the west of Homer, Alaska. They have one of those stop-you-in-your-tracks views that encompass the whole of outer Kachemak Bay with its backdrop of snowy peaks, plus the sparkling beyond that is the Gulf of Alaska. Peggy is the gardener in the family and maintains a number of garden beds inside a large fenced area on the south side of the house. Michael provides the needed muscle.

They are one of those couples that finish each other's sentences, and talk over each other like two kids eager to share what they know. I've come to them looking for a story on gardening, and to start things off they feed me.

Nearly everything on the menu is local. Peggy has fixed halibut from the bay, slathered in some kind of zesty sauce and dredged through finely ground corn flakes. This is sautéed lightly in butter before it goes into the oven. Michael lifts the lid of a large pan to check on a batch of steaming kale and onions from their garden, and lights the stove under a pot of broccoli, also from the garden. As they cook they talk.

They met in California over a college algebra book. Michael was going to college and working. Peggy had graduated from UCR with her teaching credential, but was improving her math skills. He was 25 and she was seventeen years older, had four grown daughters, and a lame-duck marriage. That was 41 years ago. Their age difference is apparent, but not glaring.

"And it's really worked for us" Peggy says. "Well, it's worked for us because we talk" Michael adds.

"My kids think you walk on water" She says, twice for emphasis.

"Only when it's frozen" he quips. Over the years, Michael worked his way up the corporate ladder in the nuclear power industry, eventually working as a shift manager at the Diablo Canyon Power Plant. He retired at 55. He assures me that it wasn't anything like "The Simpsons". Peggy worked as a teacher and bookkeeper. And with each transfer and move there were new gardens. Sometimes small raised beds in community garden plots, and sometimes large gardens with fruit trees and chickens.

Peggy was an organic gardener back when *Rodale's Encyclopedia of Or-*

ganic Gardening was just a pamphlet with staples along the spine. I ask her what led her to organic gardening when the rest of the world was moving toward chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

"It's because I feel so strongly about the Earth." She explains, and gives me an impassioned look. "I've been organic gardening for 62 years." She is sitting at the kitchen counter, her white-blond hair in her eyes. Her left hand is in a red cast from a recent surgery on her thumb. Michael sits across from her and pours Cabernet Sauvignon into fluted glasses for each of us from a gallon-sized bottle. Bailey, a Siamese cat, is curled in my lap, and Layla, a slim grey mackerel tabby watching with interest from the top of the nearby dining room table. There's a sign over a doorway that reads "Dogs have masters. Cats have staff."

Michael retired on February 1st, 2003, and by May of that year they had relocated to Homer. They'd been coming up to Alaska for vacations nearly every year since 1987, spending several weeks at a time and getting to know folks. Michael first came to Alaska in 1967 when he spent three years at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage, and knew even then that he wanted to end up in Homer.

Peggy and Michael were visiting Homer during the summer of 1995, the first year the Farmer's Market opened.

"I said to Michael, 'oh, let's stop'. We had our camper and we ate real food. We weren't eating out. I met Anne Hackett and I asked her if I could learn to garden in Alaska. The first year I was here I worked out at Anne's and learned how to be an Alaskan gardener." Peggy explains, as Michael pulls the fish out of the oven. "I just can't emphasize how much I've learned from the local gardeners."

Dinner is lively. We eat at the kitchen counter. Everything we eat tastes fresh. "Is the broccoli from your garden

too?" I ask. It's February, and I'm surprised at the firm texture and deep green color. Peggy assures me that it is and she explains how she quickly immerses the freshly harvested broccoli and kale in hot water before she vacuum seals and freezes them.

I ask them what their objectives are in raising a garden.

"Dinner" Michael says simply.

Peggy explains that they try to grow as much as possible of what they eat. Everything else they buy in bulk. "If it



isn't organic we don't buy it." Peggy adds.

After dinner Peggy invites me downstairs. The house is built on a hill, so that the north side of the house appears to be one story. But the south side of the house has a walk out basement that is flooded with light during the day. Peggy has floor to ceiling shelves fitted with grow lamps for starting vegetables and a bench in front of a large window where a dozen or so plants, artichokes among them, wait in dormancy for spring. But even more impressive are the three huge chest freezers and one upright refrigerator they use to store the food they put up each summer. Michael lifts the lid of a chest freezer that's at least eight feet long and three feet high. It's filled with neatly labeled and arranged airtight packages of peppers, onions, broccoli and cauliflower. All of it ready to scissor open and empty into a skillet. All of it is organic, and most of it is grown in the garden just beyond the windows.

Peggy and Michael's garden and the resulting cache of food are inspiring. Envious even. (Continued on Page 5)

Food for Thought

(Continued from Page 4)

But let's face it, gardening is hard work, and it takes time and some capitol to erect fences that will deter moose and bears, build raised garden beds, amend the soil, and acquire the garden carts, hoses, broad forks and other tools of the trade.

When I ask the Craig's what advice to give would-be gardeners Michael is quick with a flippant "don't do it." And if you're looking strictly at the bottom line, after cost and labor, it's probably not worth it, at least not during the first year or two or three. But if you take the long view there's much to be said for raising your own food.

Consider the greater issue of food security. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 98% of the food Alaskans eat is shipped up from the lower 48 and beyond. Apples from Washington are trucked up 2,500 miles, lettuce from California makes a 3,000-mile journey, and oranges from Florida cover 4,500 miles. The food that reaches our grocery store shelves could be weeks old by the time we squeeze it, bag it and put it in the shopping cart. Most produce loses a significant amount of nutritional value within the first few days after harvesting. And then there's the hidden cost of carbon emissions re-

leased in transporting food from one end of the country to the other.

And what happens when a link in the chain that bringing us a steady supply of everything from milk to mustard breaks? Alaska's grocery stores and warehouses contain only enough food for an estimated three to ten day supply, leaving us vulnerable to any slowdown. An earthquake in California, a terrorist attack involving our transportation system, food shortages from a prolonged drought like we saw last summer, or a sweeping flu epidemic could reduce our food resupply to a trickle. Grocery stores would empty out overnight.

Here's another argument for producing, or purchasing local foods – it keeps our money circulating locally. If I buy five pounds of Idaho-grown potatoes at Safeway, much of that money flows to corporations outside the State. If I buy five pounds of potatoes at the Farmer's Market from Bob, I put the money in his hands and he in turn spends it at your restaurant, or donates five dollars to your kid's hockey team, thereby fueling our own economy.

And lastly, here's something that should concern all of us. Fewer than five percent of America's farmers are under 45 years old. The trend in Europe is the same. There is no next generation of farmers

rising up to take the reins and absorb the wisdom from the current, greying generation. Next time you're at the farmer's market, look around. How many grey heads do you see on the other side of the table? Makes you think, doesn't it?

The solution is simple. Grow your own. Peggy grows Mokum carrots, which do well in Homer's cold soil, Provider green beans, Specked Trout lettuce that goes way back and garlic that practically peels its self called Music. She raises chickens and composts their litter and uses it in combination with fish bone meal produce in Palmer for fertilizer.

As I'm pulling on my jacket and stepping into my boots I ask Peggy what words of advice she'd give to someone starting out, and she says without hesitation "Talk to a knowledgeable local gardener. Have a back in the family" (this is a reference to Michael). And after a moment's consideration "take time out to really plan your garden before you do anything else."

As I pull away, studded tires biting into the icy road I am beginning to plan my own garden, and something akin to hope makes me forget the snow banks and upcoming winter storm. I am dreaming of summer days in the garden.

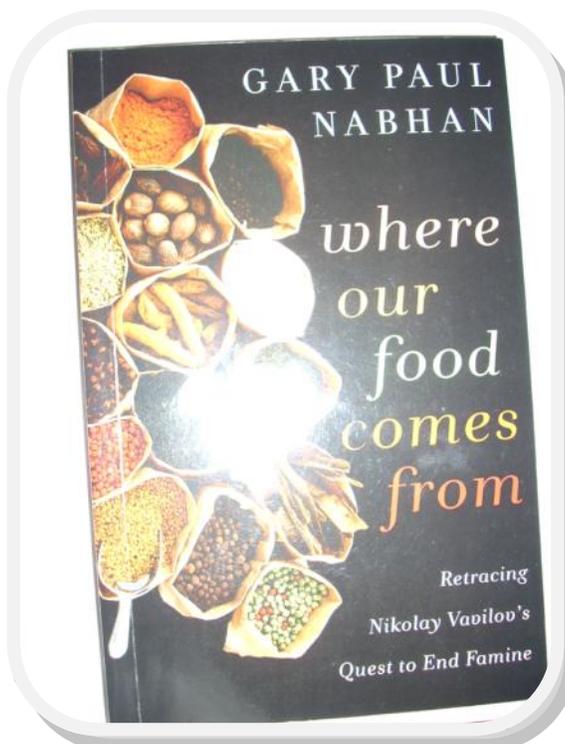
President's Report

by President Jack Regan

The Spring Garden Conference presented by the Alaska Botanical Garden is an important rite of spring for Alaska Gardeners.

Ethobotany was the focus of this year's conference, the relation between a region's plants and the culture of the people in the area. Guest lecturer Gary Paul Nabhan provided the attendees with a fine discourse on the subject as well as examples of his own reflective poetry.

Several of his books were on display and for sale and he was available between sessions to discuss his work.



One practical example of ethobotany was the presentation about the community garden project at the village of Tyonek on the west shore of Cook Inlet. This garden project is already having some success in the first year.

In addition, there was some interest in networking with other garden organizations and a site visit by representatives from the Homer Garden Club would be welcome. Stay tuned for further developments.

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President's Report

(Continued from page 5)

There were also many presentations in plenary sessions by horticulture gurus familiar to Homer Garden Club members from recent presentations at our monthly meetings. It was difficult to decide which lecture to select and which ones would be missed.

Overall, it was a treat to experience such an intense level of enthusiasm about gardening.



Homer Garden Club
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