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Homer Garden Club

Newsletter

January
2016

The next Homer Garden Club meeting will be **January 24, 2:00 pm**, at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.



January 24 Meeting to Feature Carole Demers and Brigitte Suter on Vegetable & Flower Gardening

Whether you are a novice gardener just starting to break ground or a seasoned pro well accustomed to the horticultural challenges of Latitude 59, our January presentation is sure to delight. Two of Homer Garden Club's renowned experts, Carole Demers and Brigitte Suter, will be sharing their immense knowledge and secrets to a bountiful harvest of veggies and blooms.

Carole is the queen of high elevation gardening, annually producing an amazing array of vegetables and flowers, despite a severely abbreviated growing season at elevation 1200. Brigitte grows at a much lower elevation, but has conquered the challenges of a steep slope to produce a fairytale garden which was the star of a recent Gardeners' Weekend tour. Together they recently planned and built the amazing soil that is the foundation of the Club's flourishing Baycrest Garden.

On January 24th, Carole and Brigitte will walk us through their methods for starting successful vegetable and perennial beds from scratch, including soil building and warming, composting, and pest prevention techniques. They will provide detailed steps about how to successfully grow and store fall-planted garlic, leeks and onions, share their favorite ornamental and vegetable seed varieties, and give tips about growing in greenhouses, cold frames and hoop beds. With your bountiful harvest guaranteed, they will also be sharing their favorite preserving methods and will provide information about root cellar storage.

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No



Treasurer's Report

by Peggy Pittman, Treasurer

November + December 2015 Treasurer Report

Income:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Membership | \$280.00 |
| Total income | \$280.00 |

Expenses:

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Venue | \$ (150.00) |
| Hospitality | \$ (13.03) |
| Program | \$ (150.00) |
| Chamber of Commerce | \$ (35.00) |
| KPB tax exempt cards | \$ (20.00) |
| Gardeners' Weekend venue | <u>\$ (82.50)</u> |
| Total expenses | \$ (450.53) |

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Beginning Balance | \$ 9,370.85 |
| | \$ 280.00 |
| | <u>\$ (450.53)</u> |
| Ending Balance | \$ 9,200.32 |



Garden Down Time

by Jessica Shepherd

Early January is hard on us gardeners with its short, cloudy days, wind-driven snow- to-rain-to-snow, and icy paths. There are no seed trays of tomatoes on the windowsill, no spears of garlic emerging from raised beds, and no early pansies to brighten up the winter-drab flower beds.

What is a gardener to do when the garden is resting under the snow and the tools of our trade are stacked and hung and coiled up for the winter? Read about gardening of course, and plan ahead for the glorious summer to come!

With the busy holidays behind us, I savor this rare break in an other-

wise brimming schedule, and I'll spend happy hours over the next couple of months pouring over new literary treasures to further my gardening knowledge. This year my inquiry seems to be directed toward seed saving. So to that end I'll offer some suggestions for any of you who aspire to do the same.

The book I am currently reading over coffee and eggs each morning is Will Bonsall's *Essential Guide to Radical, Self-Reliant Gardening*. What I enjoy about Bonsall's book, aside from his wry humor and a light peppering of philosophy, is his back-to-basics style. Here's a guy who has made it his life's work to scrutinize his successes and fail-

ures in order to see what plants need and how to give it to them without expensive fertilizers, plastic mulches and the like. Add to that the fact that he gardens in Maine, with conditions not unlike those we contend with in Homer. If you've devoured all that Eliot Coleman has to offer and you're looking for more of the same but with less reliance on petrochemicals, Bonsall's your man.

If you're like me, you're reading two or three books at any one time. So, true to form, just as soon as my copy of *Bread, Wine, Chocolate, the Slow Loss of the Foods We Love* by Simran Sethi arrived in the

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Garden Down Time
(Continued from page 2)

mailbox I cracked it open and began to read. I first heard Sethi, an Environmental Journalist, on a web-based Ted Talk. I was sold by her engaging style of speaking and, of course, her focus on the rapid loss of diversity in our food crops and in the cuisine we eat. Sethi reported that in the United States four crops, rice, corn, wheat and potatoes, make up 50% of our caloric intake. This dependency on so few crops makes us vulnerable - think Irish potato famine, think obesity. Moreover, three corporations now account for half of the global seed market with one company (Monsanto) controlling the genetics on 90% of the corn and soybean grown in the US. They also happen to be the world's leading developer, producer and marketer of vegetable seeds. That honestly scares me. But as vegetable gardeners we have the opportunity to promote food diversity now and into the future. By selecting and planting lesser-known heirloom seeds and then saving and passing along future generations of these seeds, we can maintain genetic diversity in the crops we grow.

The next book in my reading pile is *The Seed Garden - the Art and Practice of Seed Saving* by Jared Zystro and Micaela Colley. This

was on my Christmas wish list and Santa came through with a little help from the Homer Book Store. This beautiful full-color book compiled by the folks at Seed Savers

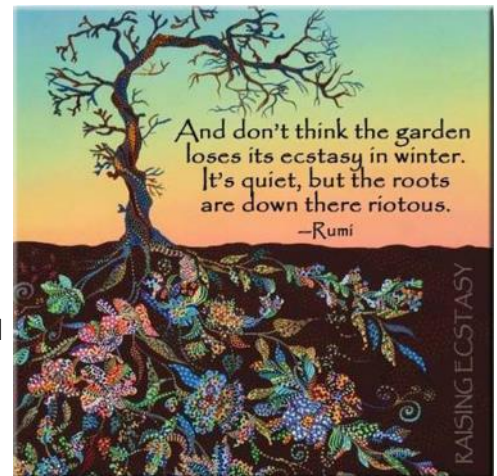


Exchange has in-depth information by species on cultivation, pollination, harvesting, and storage. My New Year's resolution this year is to successfully harvest about ten species of plants. I'm pretty novice at this, and beyond seed potatoes, garlic, and tomato seeds I have little experience. But maybe by this time next year I'll have several little packets of seeds to show for my efforts. And yes, if all goes well, I'll be happy to share.

And finally, with a bow to those of you who are dreaming of crimson poppies and buttery trollies danc-

ing in a warm breeze, may I suggest you also pick up a copy of Tracy DiSabato-Aust's "The Well-Designed Mixed Garden" or "The Well-Trained Perennial Garden." You can read these books with an eye toward renovating your flowerbeds, or you can turn each page, as I did, simply to drink in the images of harmoniously colored and aesthetically balanced flower gardens on a sun-soaked summer day. As you have probably heard by now, Tracy will be our guest speaker during the 2016 Homer Gardener's Weekend. She's a rock star when it comes to gardening, so you can familiarize yourself with her now, and sing along when she's giving her presentations, or you can pick up these works of art at her talks on July 30th.

All of these books are available at Amazon.com, of course, or if you want to support our local friends, you can order them from Sue, Lee, or Jen at Homer Books.



"The color of springtime is in the flowers, the color of winter is in the imagination." ~Ward Elliot Hour

"In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy." ~William Blake

"All through the long winter, I dream of my garden. On the first day of spring, I dig my fingers deep into the soft earth. I can feel its energy, and my spirits soar." - Helen Hayes

"Winter, a lingering season, is a time to gather golden moments, embark upon a sentimental journey, and enjoy every idle hour." - Jon Boswell



President Francie Roberts called the meeting to order at 2:04 pm. She explained that the minutes of the prior meeting are published in the newsletter. Treasurer Peggy Pitman reported \$9,375.85 in the treasury. Peggy also announced that dues for 2016 are now overdue. Barbara Kennedy pointed out that if you aren't current with your dues, you will not receive the newsletter. Membership is a mere \$10 per year, the best deal in town! She showed our book, *Kachemak Cultivating from Seaside to Summit*, to the gathering and said it is available for \$30. This book was written by HGC members and represents an enormous store of local gardening information.

Francie talked about our plan to start having five minute tips at the beginning of each meeting. One of the mini-presentations planned is on High Altitude Gardening. She then invited members to talk about tender plants they are overwintering and how they do it.

Carole Demers preserves fuschias in a damp root cellar. She doesn't cut them back in fall, instead waits until spring when they start sprouting. After cutting them back she moves them out to the greenhouse. She also winters over begonias and said the critical thing with them is to keep them dry and cool, but dry is the main thing.

Tony Burgess keeps a variety of pelargonias through the winter. He especially enjoys the scented ones which he brings in before a hard frost. Then by letting them go dry, he encourages them into dormancy for the winter. Zonals are a little easier to get into dormancy. He keeps both inside on a sunny windowsill.

Brenda explained a technique she learned from an Anchorage dahlia

expert, Amelia Walsh. Instead of keeping the lifted and divided tubers out of soil over the winter, she pots them up in one gallon pots immediately after dividing them. These are then kept barely moist until spring, when they are put under lights and watered to stimulate new growth. These then move to a heated greenhouse until the danger of frost is past so they can be planted into the garden or containers.

Francie called on Gardeners' Weekend (GW) Co-chair, Roni Overway to talk about GW. She mentioned the event will be a week earlier this year to avoid a conflict with Salmonstock. The dates are July 30th and 31st. Please mark your calendars now! She said she was sending sign-up sheets around for volunteers to help with this major HGC event.

Francie asked for folks to sign up for January refreshments for the Hospitality committee, chaired by Jeanette Lawson. Thanks to Ruth Dickerson who brought refreshments this month. Francie also sent around a sign-up sheet for the HGC Baycrest garden requesting volunteers for the new committee charged with the garden's maintenance and management.

Tony Burgess introduced Kyra Wagner, whom he described as a nexus person in Homer gardening, sustainability and other related activities. He mentioned she has a weekly newsletter which he finds very informative. Kyra's earlier career started as a Peace Corps volunteer during which time she was a coordinator for bee keeping in Paraguay.

Kyra took the floor and truly entertained and informed all of us for the next hour regardless of our level of interest in the topic! She explained that when she filled out the skills

form for the Peace Corps she told them she had NO knowledge of bee keeping. That lack of knowledge led to her selection because the bees in Paraguay were Africanized bees, which must be managed much differently than European honey bees, the ones typically found in American hives. She wove the theme of love and fear throughout her presentation. To get bad news off the table, she first addressed the one negative thing about bees. They sting. Bees want you to run away. They sting to get you to leave their area. For some folks a sting is an irritant; for others it can be serious and cause anaphylactic shock and hospitalization. Kyra discussed the importance and health of a person's immune system in what one's reaction will be. Above all, she counseled, don't panic as it will make your immune system response accelerate. Africanized bees – killer bees – are more aggressive in everything – collecting honey, cleaning their hive, and protecting honey. All bees read you. They know if you are fearful, which can make them more aggressive toward you. Therefore, she said, always go into a hive heathy, happy, and well-hydrated. Honeybees die after stinging you one time and leave a bit of their body in your flesh. This bit contains the toxin that causes the reaction. Rather than grab it and squeeze as you pull it out, which pushes all the toxin into your flesh, flick it off with a fingernail.

Wasps (*vespula vulgaris*), sting and bite repeatedly and are more likely to sting you than bees. Wasps are important to gardeners, however, because they are predatory and eat bugs, including aphids.

Honey bees are not native here. They are not needed for garden pollination because we have many

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other pollinators including native bees (*Bombus*). According to a survey study done at Denali, most of our natives are bumblebees (90), about 10% are solitary bees and one was a cuckoo bee. Local bee queens hibernate and come out in spring.

We also have lots of Syrphidae, also known as flower flies or hover flies. One Syrphidae larva can eat hundreds of aphids in a month. Though perhaps not as desirable, mosquitoes also pollinate.

Some interesting honeybee tidbits shared by Kyra:

Honeybees fly up to 2 miles to find nectar for their honey. Wax is made early in the season. It takes three times as much nectar to make wax as to make honey. At 18% humidity honey will store indefinitely.

Each honeybee visits 50 to 100 flowers per flight out of the hive. They focus on one crop at a time (monocroppers) and prefer pussy willows, dandelions, clover, and fireweed.

In Homer beekeepers average

about 60 pounds of honey per hive. Honey doesn't go bad, but can develop spores that babies under one year cannot tolerate.

They don't fly when temperatures fall below 50-55 degrees. They try to keep their cluster in the hive at 90 degrees.

Remember, you are not keeping bees; you are keeping hives. Each hive will behave a little differently and is very location specific.

For more information to get started keeping a hive, contact: South Central Beekeepers at <http://sababeekeepers.com/>



Butterkin Squash Orange Squares Recipe

by Jeanette Lawson

First I would like to say thank you to Marylou Burton for her local flair dessert bars which contained watermelon berries, nagoon berries and high bush cranberries.

At our last Garden Meeting I was asked to share the recipe for the desert bars that I brought. I will gladly share this recipe with the disclaimer that this is 'not' a health food item, but then desserts are not meant to be main courses. I like to think of desserts as 'sometime treats' that are meant to be shared with others, this effectively removes most of the calories from my own kitchen and effectively shares these morsel of decadency with the least amount of damage to all participants. Now that being said, I fully intend to make this enticing, mouthwatering silky decadency again..... no regrets.

I love any excuse to put myself in the kitchen, especially when it comes to cooking a tried and true family recipe or trying a new twist on an old favorite. Thankfully, my husband allows me to play with my creative spirit without complaint, and always seems especially grateful when the experiment turns out as well as my last escapade with the Butterkin squash. I saw this smoothed skin beauty and fell in love with the name 'Butterkin', I mean who could resist a cute little name like that.....but the real test would be in the kitchen, would it hold up to its name. Butterkin has the smooth creamy texture of Butternut squash with the sweet soft orange flesh like a pumpkin. Once you skin and gut the little guy, simply chop into small squares, and with a couple tablespoons of water, 'slowly' let the squash cook down to a soft and easy-to-mash thick pulp and let this cool before you make the squash bars.

Enjoy and Share!

Butterkin Squash Orange Squares w/ Cream Cheese Frosting

TOTAL TIME: Prep: 15 min. Bake: 25 min. + cooling
MAKES: 48 servings

Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour (WW can be used)
2 cups sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon salt
4 eggs, beaten
2 cups mashed Butterkin Squash
1 Tsp Vanilla
2 Tsp Fresh Grated Orange Rind
1 cup canola oil

Cream Cheese Frosting:

1 package (3 ounces) cream cheese, softened
2 cups confectioners' sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 Tsp fresh grated orange rind.
6 tablespoons butter, softened
1 tablespoon fresh squeezed Orange Juice

Directions

In a bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. Stir in eggs, orange rind, squash and oil; mix well. Spread into a greased 15-in. x 10-in. x 1-in. baking pan. Bake at 350° for 25-30 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool on a wire rack.

Meanwhile, for frosting, beat together cream cheese, confectioners' sugar, orange rind, vanilla and butter. Add orange juice; stir until smooth (use only what you need to form a creamy easy to spread consistency). Frost cooled cake. Cut into squares. Yield: 4 dozen.

Originally published as Winter Squash Squares in *Country Woman* July/August 1992, p31

Soil Workshops 2016

Location: KPC/Kenai River Campus & Kachemak Bay Campus,

Cost \$5.00 per session

Brought to you by NRCS, UAF Cooperative Extension, Homer/Kenai Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Pre-Registration Requested -- Call Cooperative Extension at 262-5824

January 21st 2016,

6:00 – 8:30 PM

Understanding Soil Management Practices

Why does pH alter nutrient uptake? How do nutrients enter the plant? Why is air as important as water for plant growth? These questions and more will be explored in depth in our soils series for the home gardener or market producer.

February 18th 2016,

6:00 – 8:30 PM

Soil Test Interpretation

What do those numbers mean? How much calcium do plants uptake? How much nitrogen or phosphorus is too much? What should you know about variability between laboratories or what testing methods are used? All things soil testing will be discussed in this portion of our soils series for the home gardener or market producer

March 24th 2016

6:00 – 8:30 PM

Soil Fertility Management

How much compost is a good thing? When should it be added? Do you have to use a commercial fertilizer mix or can you make your own organic blend for optimum plant growth. Understanding fertility management can help provide you the tools needed for healthy plants and vibrant crops. This final session in our soil series will offer you the details needed for the growing season.



Container Cultivation

submitted by Julie Parizek from *Mother Earth News*
April/May 2008, author Ed Smith

If you don't have the space or time to have a garden in the earth, you still can grow a significant amount of healthy, tasty food ... in containers. Any sunny spot will do, whether it's in your yard, on your patio, deck or balcony, or even inside your home or apartment. Not only is container gardening possible, but it's fun and fairly easy to grow virtually anything grown in a conventional garden.

In some ways, gardening in a container is easier than gardening in the ground. Container-grown vegetable plants have slightly smaller yields than plants grown in the ground, but there are fewer, if any, weeds. Some pests are less likely to be a problem, because your container garden is in a location that

pests don't expect to find food. Diseases also are easier to avoid, because your potting soil is less apt to harbor them than ground soil. You need few tools beyond a trowel, and you don't need to cultivate the soil. Containers, at least the smaller ones, can be moved around and brought indoors when frost threatens. And you can set your garden at whatever height is comfortable and convenient; you can even garden sitting down if you like!

A Garden in a Flower Pot

There are two container options. The first is what I'll call traditional containers, which consist of anything that can hold some soil and has a hole in the bottom to drain excess water. The second option is self-watering containers, which ar-

rived on the market a few years ago. They have a reservoir for water that is connected to the soil in the rest of the container, which ensures that the water is continually available to the growing plants. As long as there's water in the reservoir, soil throughout the container is evenly moist.

For vegetable plants, most of which are larger than the flowers typically grown in containers, a suitable container can be either a large flower pot, or something originally meant for some other use: an old wash tub; a pail or sap bucket; half of a whiskey or wine barrel; or a plastic bucket that once held doughnut filling or sheet rock compound. And because they can be recycled objects, traditional containers often

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are inexpensive or free. Just avoid containers that previously held chemicals.

Choose a container large enough for the plant you want to grow — the bigger the plant, the bigger the pot. A large tomato plant needs about 30 to 40 quarts of soil; a pepper or eggplant can make do with 15 to 20. Fill the container with moist container soil (see “Selecting Soils,” below) and add water. Then add more water.

You can grow large plants such as corn or squash in containers, but make sure your container garden site has full sun. The same is true for tomatoes, peppers and eggplant. You can get away with partial shade for spinach, lettuce, bok choy and other leafy greens.

Water, Water, All the Time

Because vegetable plants tend to be bigger and grow faster than most flower and herb plants, they need much more water. And they need it all the time in order to grow well and produce tasty and nutritious vegetables. The soil in even a large traditional container simply cannot receive and hold as much water as many vegetable plants need on a daily basis.

If you use traditional containers, plan to water at least once a day, and more often for large plants or during hot, dry or windy weather. A mature tomato plant needs a gallon of water a day. There’s no wiggle room here; vegetable plants that don’t get enough water when they need it become stressed, and don’t produce as well. This means that a traditional container gardener has to be available to water the garden once a day — or more than once — every day.

Traditional containers are best watered just before they need it. You want to avoid stressing the plants by letting the soil go dry, but don’t want to water more frequently than is necessary because you *do* have other things to do. In my experience the critical variable here is time; it takes a certain number of

hours for a plant of a certain size in a container of a certain size to use up the available water. Because water use varies with the age and size of a plant, I usually water everything whenever the thirstiest plants need water, just to keep things as simple as possible.

Gardens That Water Themselves

Looking for a way to cut back on how often I had to water my container garden, I tried self-watering containers and found that I needed to water much less often. Self-watering containers with big tomato or squash plants, or closely spaced lettuce or mesclun mixes, needed water every three or four days, but younger, smaller plants got by with water once a week. No plants needed daily watering. These containers make it possible for the container gardener to have a life beyond the garden.

I also got a nice surprise: I found that virtually all the vegetable plants I grow in my regular gardens grow at least as well in self-watering containers.

Some grow better. Artichokes or eggplant can’t be conventionally grown in my area due to the short season, but in a self-watering container, they grow fast enough. Why?

It appears that water is the key. As long as there is water in the reservoir, the soil throughout the container is always moist, and the plants growing in it always have enough water, but not too much. In a traditional container, the soil contains as much water as it can hold only for a short time after watering. From then on, the soil — and the plants growing in it — have progressively less water available. Plants become stressed and suffer some interruption of growth when-

ever they have insufficient water, and self-watering containers eliminate that possibility.

Most self-watering containers are rectangular plastic, in some shade of green or brown. But there also are round, square and hanging containers in many other colors. They have various ways to get the water from the reservoir to the soil, and different ways to add water to the reservoir and register the water level. And, in my experience, they all work, although some inexpensive containers advertised as self-watering have reservoirs that are too small to offer any advantage over traditional containers.

The critical differences have to do with size: How much soil can it hold (and how deep is the soil?), and how much water? Big plants need big pots (I like about 40 quarts of soil for artichokes or summer squash). Soil 8 inches deep satisfies most plants, and 5 or 6

inches is enough for salad greens, but carrots need 12 inches. Reservoirs need to be big enough to allow at least three or four days between waterings. I like at least 1 quart of water for every 8 quarts of soil, but more is better. Self-watering containers are available from the suppliers listed below, and you also can make your own — see “DIY Self-watering Container,” below. Self-watering containers greatly simplify things. If there is water in the reser-

voir, there’s enough water in the soil, period. Simply refill the reservoir before it’s empty — unless rain is in the forecast. If excess water flows out the overflow hole(s), it will take valuable nutrients with it.

Selecting Soils

Soil in either a traditional or a self-watering container provides plants with water and food. In a traditional container, the soil needs to receive and hold as much water as possible. In a self-watering container the soil needs to be able to absorb wa-



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ter from the reservoir and disperse it evenly throughout the container. Both tasks are best accomplished by a soil containing peat moss and some perlite and/or vermiculite. Peat has a unique ability to absorb and hold moisture. (*Yes, there are questions about the sustainability of this slowly renewable resource, but we think limited use of peat for container and seed-starting mixes is OK.* — *Mother Earth News*)

I like to recreate as nearly as I can the conditions that work best in my regular garden, so I use soil that contains about 50 percent compost. I've had excellent results using a 50-50 mix of good compost and sphagnum peat-based potting soil. If you have any doubts about the compost quality, add about a cup of balanced organic fertilizer per 40 quarts of soil mix. I make my own fertilizer blend: one-third cup each of green sand, rock phosphate or bone meal and a nitrogen source such as alfalfa or soybean meal. I add a tablespoon of Azomite — a rock dust that provides micronutrients and trace minerals.

Note: When peat-based soil dries out, it does not re-absorb water well, and it does not properly wick water. A dry traditional container must be watered, then watered again in a few minutes, until the soil is evenly moist. A dry self-watering container needs water on the soil surface until even moisture is restored. Then fill the reservoir. Best of luck with your new versatile, low-maintenance container garden!

DIY Self-watering Container

You can make your own self-watering container from a couple of 5-gallon plastic buckets. (From our food co-op, I've scored free buckets that had housed peanut butter and other such things.)

Materials:

2 5-gallon plastic buckets
1 plastic funnel (from hardware or home supply stores)

Tools:

Drill with a quarter-inch bit
Saber saw

Fit one bucket inside the other bucket. The space between the respective bucket bottoms is the reservoir.

Mark an oblong hole in the side of the outer bucket about an inch high and 2 inches long, so the top of the hole is even with the bottom of the inner bucket. Cut it out with the saber saw. This hole serves triple-duty as the fill hole, the overflow hole and the place to stick a finger to gauge how full the reservoir is.

Cut a hole in the bottom of the inner bucket large enough so the funnel will project into the reservoir all the way to the bottom.

If necessary, cut the bottom off the funnel so it is about a half inch longer than the space between the bucket bottoms.

Drill a dozen or so holes at random in the bottom of the inner bucket.

Fit the inner bucket into the outer bucket; insert the funnel. Fill the top bucket with moist container soil, making sure that the funnel is filled, but not packed with soil. Fill the reservoir, and you're ready to plant! (See "Selecting Soils," above.)

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