



Homer Garden Club

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The HGC Harvest Dinner has been cancelled.

September 2020

Newsletter

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Regrettably, the Homer Garden Club Harvest Dinner has been CANCELLED due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Members are encouraged to post photos and comments on their gardening season on the Homer Garden Club Facebook page.

Due to the difficulty in setting up the technology for Zoom meetings and the logistics problems of finding a speaker who is comfortable with this format, the Homer Garden Club Board has decided to try for one speaker sometime this fall in a Zoom meeting. Hopefully the restrictions will be lifted by the spring, but, if not, efforts will be made to line up another speaker in the winter or spring.

In the meantime, Jan Peyton has informed us of some great gardening resources already available on-line that all members can take advantage of. She particularly recommends Good Earth Garden School.com based in Anchorage and Grow Your Own! Green Thumb Hands on Course with local Saskia Esslinger. (<https://teach-gardening.mykajabi.com/green-thumb-gardening-course>)

Treasurer Report

by Louise Ashmun, Treasurer

Due to a family emergency, there will be no Treasurer's Report this month.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Memberships: Because of the reduced cost of venue and speakers for the Homer Garden Club meetings, the Board has voted to waive the normal \$10 membership fee for the upcoming year (October 2020—October 2021.) Any new members who wish to join in order to get the newsletter will be asked to complete the registration form and pay the \$10 fee.

Plant Sale: It is hoped the Plant Sale can go forward as usual in May with different organizing to ensure social distancing. This will be re-evaluated in late winter.

Election of Officers: Since election of officers normally takes place during the Harvest Dinner celebration, this year it will be conducted via an email sent to all members later this month. All of the current officers (as listed on page one of the newsletter) have indicated a willingness to serve for another year, except the Media/Website and Publicity chair Julie Parizek. As usual, if you wish to nominate a different individual for an officer position or serve yourself, please contact one of the current officers so you can be put on the ballot for the desired position.

Website/Publicity Chair Wanted!

We are looking for a "techie" to take over the Club website and be responsible for publicity. Our current chairperson has been on it almost from the beginning and is wanting to retire. Don't be put off by the scope of the job! There is no "coding" required but you do need to be comfortable working with WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) software. Our outgoing web person is more than willing to acquaint you with the job as it is now and be available to help solve issues that might come up in the future (she's not leaving town!) Think about it and let Kathy Dube know if you would be interested in taking it over or call Julie Parizek at 299-0343.

October Meeting: The Program Coordinators have looked into a few speakers for the fall and winter. Ellen VandeVisse of Palmer's Good Earth Garden School has agreed to do a Zoom presentation October 18 at 2:00 pm. She is scheduled to speak on composting and will take live questions from the audience. She has published her own DVD on composting and sells it on her website along with her book "**Ask Mother Nature.**" If you are interested in learning more about Ellen, check out the many resources on her site at ellenvandevisse.com.



We are also looking into a hydroponics presentation for winter, so stay tuned for the updates.

BAYCREST GARDEN: A big "THANK YOU" goes out to all the volunteers who pitched in this summer to maintain the Baycrest Garden. Even in the fall their dedication shows in the gorgeous colors of the plants.



Visitor in the Berry Patch

by Jessica Shepard, MFA

It's been quite a year for bears. No doubt you heard about the man in Hope. I don't think anyone knows if he emptied his pepper spray on a brown bear or a black before it took him down.

We have bears in our neighborhood and along the wooded trails where my husband Hal takes the dogs for a run each morning. Several neighbors within dog-hollering distance have reported sighting a plump black bear and two small cubs. Our nearest neighbor, Loretta, took a video from the top of her stairs of the mother bear looking up



from the bottom step. I have yet to see them, but that doesn't mean they haven't seen me.

Last month Hal was fishing for humpies at the mouth of Humpy Creek, with lots of open tidal lands between him and the trees, when he was surprised by a brown bear and her two sub-adult cubs. She was within 12 feet of him when he saw her ears and hump approaching from a low draw. He jumped up and gave, in his words "A Highland cry". She, having not yet seen him, startled and ran backward to her cubs, giving him time to wrestle a can of pepper spray out of his fanny pack. "I knew she'd be back." He was right. She turned back toward him, growled and loped to within six feet before he discharged the five-

seconds worth of peppery mist into her face. She again ran back toward her cubs, giving him a chance to gather up his gear and load everything, helter-skelter, into his kayak and "get the hell out of there." You can imagine my alarm when he, breathless, relayed the highlights to me before paddling the rest of the way home. I've been having bear dreams ever since.

I expected bears in the garden this year. The ferocious fire just east of Cooper Landing last year undoubtedly displaced a number of them. Add that to poor salmon runs and a scant wild berry crop, and my ripe currants, apples and raspberries were bound to look attractive.

Having hunkered down since March due to Covid, Hal and I had decided to take an Alaskan road trip the first week of September to visit friends and camp among streams and vistas not our own. In advance of the trip, Hal picked most of the currants and I focused on the expansive raspberry patch. I asked our neighbor Kate to help herself to raspberries while we were gone.

The first text from Kate included an

image of a dark, glistening bear pile on our lawn down by the high tunnel. She sidestepped that and aborted her trip up to the berries, but came back later with pepper spray, bells, and with Loretta for company. The next text had a photo of our wooden and wire fence where our bear visitor heave-hoed herself over and the top board gave way. Inside she found a glory of ripe raspberries and had herself a good snack before hopping over the back end of the fence, knocking the solar light from its post, and leaving a large, berry-studded calling card by the compost pile.

Now, everywhere I go around the yard I expect to see the rounded, ambling approach of a bear. I lean around corners before stepping out, and stiffen at the "plunk" of spruce cones the squirrels snip off from high up in the trees. Yet I welcome this bear and her cubs. Though I call her a visitor, I'm the newcomer here. While I'd rather she use the gate so I don't have to repair the fence, I have berries to share, having already harvested enough for wine and jam. And while I still have not seen these fabled bears who weave in and out of the alders and spruce, I would thrill to sit up on the safety of the deck, shushing the dog to a low growl, and watch this small family make its way in the world.



Photo by Kate Thompson

As the cancellations for my little bed and breakfast came pouring in this spring, I decided to do something that has been on my mind for a few years but hadn't had the time for. I decided to get some chickens and have my own eggs! I checked the city code and found it would be okay as long as the neighbors didn't



object. They seemed to think it was a neat idea. The next item on the agenda was to make a coop and decide where to put it. I finally chose to put it at the end of my back yard near a large spruce tree and next to the compost pile. The chicken run could include the compost pile so I could let my chickens dig and turn it up for me. Theoretically the spruce tree would cover the run and protect the chickens from airborne predators.

Next came the project of actually building the coop. I studied the design of the one my daughter has and decided I would copy it but make it a little bigger as she has two chickens and I wanted three or four. I had some lumber left over from past projects so laid out plans to buy as little additional lumber as I had to. In the end when I ran out of my lumber, I scrounged some assorted lumber and a window from friends and ended up only buying four 2" x 4"s, the siding and two metal roof panels. Of course, there are a few strange quirks in the building that were necessitated by the unusual building materials, but in the end it looked pretty good if I do say so myself.

Halfway through the building project I went to Wagon Wheel and bought three Rhode Island Reds and two Red Sex-links, which are a cross between the Rhode Island Reds and White Rocks. What happened to my theory of having three or four hens? They got to live in a dog crate in the house while I was building their new home. A friend came by and asked "Paula, you have worms composting in the bedroom and chickens in the kitchen. Do you miss your ranch?" I guess I must, but I do draw the line at putting cows in the back yard!

When I put the chickens in the coop, they were thrilled with the extra room, but refused to go out into the run. The coop is on stilts and I had built a ramp to get down into the run, but the chicks were having none of that. I tried pushing them down the ramp and they would fly right back up into the coop. I ended up having to pick them up one at a time and put them in the run, but then had to catch them in the run at night and stick them back in the coop. This involved crawling around under the coop on my hands and knees to catch them. Not fun. After a couple of times of this, I was about to give up when one little gal figured it out and would run up the ramp and call the others to join her. Even she had a time coaxing them up that run, but they finally gave in and now run up and down the ramp like it's a racetrack.

I haven't selected names for them yet except one is Houdini for obvious reasons. She got out of the coop twice due to a little hole I had missed in the construction. (I told you the coop has some quirks.) Anyway, she

ended up in the area behind the fenced portion of the backyard and into the pushki and devil's club back there. If it weren't for my Corgi I probably never would have found her as she was too scared to even call. Corgis were bred for cattle dogs, but this one makes a pretty good chicken dog. Unfortunately, he still wants to herd the chickens and charges up to the run fence every time I go out. This makes the hens run and he thinks he's doing a great job.

Every day I pick some chickweed as well as assorted scraps from the garden and toss it in for the chickens. They love the greens and now come when I call them. I really hadn't planned for five hens but now I'm glad I got an extra as it has become obvious one is a rooster! I fear my neighbors would not be nearly as understanding about my chickens if a rooster started crowing at five in the morning. I will be rehoming him to someone in the country with the understanding that if he ends up as Sunday dinner, they don't have to tell me. It will still be a few weeks before they start laying, but I am looking forward to having those fresh eggs. Of course, I calculate if they were to lay three dozen eggs every day for three years, I would just about break even financially. But who can put a cost on enjoyment?



Adapting (or Try to Bloom Where You are Planted)

by Kathy Dube'



longer to start our normal programming given the amount of uncertainty surrounding things right now. We are hoping to find a speaker who can do an online Zoom presentation this fall, and we will consider in-person meetings in the future if things are looking more positive (if we do hold in-person meetings, we will provide a way for members to participate online if they do not feel comfortable attending gatherings). See the articles in the rest of the newsletter about the following programming changes:

- No Harvest Dinner this year
- No in-person meetings this fall, but we are working on an online speaker
- No dues for current members for 2020-2021 season! (New members \$10)
- Look for an e-mail later this month with a ballot to elect officers for 2020-2021
- AND, please consider volunteering for the publicity/webmaster position – it is easy if you are at all familiar with computers and we will train you!

While it is often easy to see all the negatives when we find ourselves in situations that aren't ideal, let's keep trying like those little nasturtiums on the right to flower and spread joy as best we can. (And yes, I will be replacing the soil in my deck pots!)

Adapting (or Try to Bloom Where You Are Planted)

I started a packet of nasturtiums seeds this year as I always do, despite the fact that for some reason they are usually aphid magnets under my care. Some of the young plants I put into my new flower garden (see photo of amazingly healthy and abundant plants above left). Some of the same starts went into pots on my deck (see photo of bedraggled-looking plants above right). Both plants did their best to grow and flower given the circumstances they found themselves in. Most of us are used to conditions like the plants on the left, and we grow and flower abundantly, enjoying life and spreading joy to those around us. But sometimes (like the

plant on the right, or most of us this past year) we find ourselves in a situation that isn't ideal. So we do the best we can given the circumstances and try to flower and spread as much joy as possible, even if it's not the same as most years. The Homer Garden Club is feeling a bit like the plant on the right this year. COVID-19 has kept us from being able to continue to offer our in-person programs and flourish as much as we would like. We sadly were not able to have Gardener's Weekend, and we do not feel comfortable holding the annual Harvest Dinner or in-person meetings this fall. I know there are many opinions on whether or not we should be continuing with programs as usual, but the Board felt that it would be best to wait a bit

Best Bulbs to Plant in the Fall

written by Amanda Shiffler, 8/8/19, "Gardening, Home and Garden"

Soon, summer will wind down. The weather will turn colder, the leaves will change colors and begin falling, and many of us feel sad our gardening season is wrapping up. It doesn't have to

be that way! Fall gardening can include more than yard cleanup and winter prep as gardeners can get a jump start on early spring flowers by planting bulbs in the fall months. When temper-

atures begin to climb in the spring colorful blooms will open up to bring life back to our yards!

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Planting bulbs in the fall is the primary way to ensure early spring color in the garden and flowerbeds. Some flowers bloom so early in the spring season it's nearly impossible to get them in the ground quickly enough after it thaws (or warms up in general) to blossom in time. Many bulbs also need to be exposed to cold soil temperatures to force or encourage flowering.

Let's start by talking about some of the best bulbs for fall planting. Some of these are spring-flowering bulbs while a couple bloom a bit later in the season.

Daffodils – Members of the narcissus family, daffodils erupt in shades of white and yellow in mid-March to announce the arrival of spring. Historically, the yellow daffodil symbolizes rebirth and new beginnings.

Iris – Hardy, reliable, and easy to grow, irises make beautiful arrangements of cut flowers and help to attract butterflies and

hummingbirds to your yard.

Tulips – A later bloomer than other spring-blooming ornamental, the iconic tulip still helps to announce warm weather has arrived. Most tulips wait to bloom until after the grape hyacinths and daffodils have made their appearance.

Lilies – Known for their sweet, strong scent, lilies are a staple in many landscapes. These beauties bloom for weeks in the summer, adding color after other fall-planted bulbs have stopped blooming.

Anemone – Symbolizing fragility and love, anemone are similar in appearance to some varieties of poppies but are much easier to grow. Coming in many flower forms and colors, they make great cut flowers.

Crocus – Available in shades of purple, blue, pink, yellow, orange, and white, the tiny crocus is one of the first of all flower to blossom. Plant them by the dozens for a great show of color.

Grape hyacinth – The intensely fragrant grape hyacinth blankets

the landscape with compact carpets of bright purple in early to mid-spring. Tiny flowers stand about 6" tall and easily spread.

Snowdrop – One of the first flowers to show in the spring, these little white bells often push through a light layer of snow. Hence, their name!

Scilla – One of the few bulbs that will survive in partial shade, scilla can be planted under shrubs or trees, providing waves of brilliant blue color in early spring.

Winter aconite – Another yellow beauty, the winter aconite pops up in later winter or early spring to a diminutive 3-6 inches tall. They are deer resistant and self-propagate through spreading seeds.

Allium – The allium family includes veggies such as onions, shallots, and garlic. Plant ornamental allium to add rodent and deer-resistant plants that require little care and thrive in dry, sunny spots in your yard.

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