

# Homer Garden Club Newsletter



May 2011

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**The May meeting will be held at 2:00 on MAY 22 at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.**

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## *Dr. Jeffrey Smeenk to Discuss Gardening in Cold Soils and Use of Greenhouses / High Tunnels at May 22 Meeting*

Dr. Jeffrey Smeenk, Cooperative Extension Specialist for Commercial Horticulture and Assistant Professor of Horticulture, University of Alaska Fairbanks, received his PhD in Production Agronomy and Sustainable Agriculture in 2003. Since then his research interests have included season extension through soil-warming and plasticulture techniques, development of potato varieties for the Alaska market and management of high-value crops. His current research programs include soil quality enhancement, non-herbicide methods of weed control, season extension of high value crops and high tunnels.



Dr. Sheenck said it is very difficult to garden in cold soils, so one of our best

strategies is to warm up the soil when it is not cold. His talk has two main thrusts. The first is how to maximize the use of the soil when it is not cold (ie: transplants and using short season varieties). The other thrust is how to use the various season extension techniques to warm the soil and to retain the heat into the fall. One of the neat tricks is that the seed and the root are much more sensitive to temperature than the stem of the plant. Growing the seedling on a heated pad in a relatively cool greenhouse is a great strategy to save energy costs until the plants can be moved into their final location. The various vegetables have differing heat requirements, so proper placement in the greenhouse may allow the greenhouse to operate at lower temperatures, thus saving money on heating fuel.

Don't forget the **Plant Sale** on June 4th at 11:00 in the City Hall parking lot. There are numerous potted peonies, tomatoes, vegetables, perennials and annuals. Something for everyone!

## President's Report

by Jack Regan, President

### LADY BUG, LADY BUG, FLY AWAY HOME...

As we start the season, our garden flats are sprouting with fresh crisp plants that look so healthy and new. Frequently as they mature, garden pests appear, each one requiring its own remedy. When aphids invade the garden space, it can be very disheartening. Some of our precious plants are lost to these predators. Last year, when they appeared on my plants in the greenhouse and the outside beds, I tried to obtain ladybugs to remove them from my plants. Although our local garden stores had ladybugs at the beginning of the season, later on when the aphids

appeared in mid to late summer, the supply of ladybugs had dried up and I could not obtain them. To investigate this situation, I did an internet search



to see if there is a solution to this problem.

A large supplier of ladybugs was found at [www.gardenzone.com](http://www.gardenzone.com). I talked to customer service, who explained that their method of production could supply ladybugs throughout the season, especially at the time we needed them the most. It would be more efficient for the Garden Club members to obtain the ladybugs through one of our local garden stores to reduce shipping costs. By disseminating this information, we may have access to ladybugs this summer and have a way to produce healthier plants and crops.



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Mulch film "solar mulch",  
Seeds of change seeds,  
Seed starting supplies: trays, tray inserts, domes, heat mats, planters, and much more.**

**We are open Tuesday through Saturday  
from 11:00 to 6:00**

Driving across the United States on my recent trip I was impressed again by the vastness of our farm land. Following the frozen Mississippi river south from Minnesota, the northern hill country had a mix of oak forests, dairy herds and corn fields. It was gratifying to see the manure spreaders in the fields recycling the animal waste. Not so gratifying to the nose. Farther south through the flat prairies of Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois the fields seemed to go on forever. The farm machinery grew in scale with forty-eight foot swathes harrowed or planted in one broad pass. Impressive and efficient, but I couldn't help but think that those huge diesel engines and urea tanks of fertilizer are all dependent on oil. Currently about 20% of the corn they are growing gets recycled back into making ethanol.

get one back in food. Rising energy costs directly translate to rising food prices.

Later on in Tennessee and Oregon I visited friends at their small homestead farms. After eating delicious locally grown dinners they proudly showed off their pantries and root cellars with the jams, vegetables, fruit, eggs and meat they grew and preserved. They



on our multitude of greenhouses and gardens. Last week we finished our last cabbage from our root cellar in a salad. Keeping the roots on and setting the cabbages upright in a tote with water last fall kept them as fresh as when they were harvested. Luckily we have started already eating salad greens from one of our greenhouses. Our goal is to see how much food we can grow for ourselves. We are starting a paradigm change. Rising energy costs are changing our world and priorities similar to "living in the bush."

Growing your own vegetables saves money. Across the Homer landscape over one hundred high tunnels are popping up. Like many others, we are experimenting with early vegetables, hot weather crops and extending the fall season with our high tunnels. It's an exciting time. Change is in the spring air as we all plan out and start planting our gardens for another season. We're lucky to live in Homer where we can grow such a variety of vegetables and fruit.

According to author Michael Pollen, in the U.S. it takes about ten calories of energy to get one calorie of food on our dinner plates. Transfer that to Alaska (with 95% of our food imported) and it's over twelve calories to

are trying to separate their food and lifestyles from our dependency on oil. It's hard to do. Like water from the tap or electricity, we take it for granted.

Back home again now we are working

*Treasurer's Report*

*by Peggy Craig, Treasurer*

March 2011		Expenses	
<b>Income</b>		Newsletter	96.18
Meeting	\$20.00	Meeting	
Newsletter Ads	<u>80.00</u>	Program	50.00
		Venue	<u>100.00</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	\$100.00	<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$246.18
	Beginning Balance 4-1-11	\$10,379.37	
	Income	100.00	
	Expenses	<u>(246.18)</u>	
	Ending Balance 4-30-11	\$10,233.19	

Dan Hinkley is at once a well-respected garden writer for such popular gardening magazines as *Fine Gardening* and *Horticulture*, a much sought-after speaker on the subject of most things horticultural, as well as a horticultural consultant, whose various commissions can easily fill a full page rendered in single-spaced Times New Roman, font-size 8! The founder of Herronswood Nursery and Garden in Kingston, Washington (founder and co-owner 1987-2000), and a consultant to such luminaries as Martha Stewart and for such horticultural institutions as the Washington Park Arboretum and the Smithsonian Institute, Dan brings to Homer his presentation, "Exclamation, Accentuation, Punctua-

tion" which uses digitally altered images for comparison, stressing design elements in the garden, including textural foliage, repetition of color and form and the importance of the vertical element.

Dan has been a consultant as well to PBS NOVA Television and has written three books, "*The Explorer's Garden: Shrubs and Vines from Four Corners of the World*", "*The Explorer's Garden: Rare and Unusual Perennials*", and "*Winter Ornamentals*". In addition, he has been profiled in such garden-related periodicals as *Horticulture Magazine*, *Gardens Illustrated*, *Who's Who* and *Fine Gardening*.

The Homer Garden Club feels fortunate to have lured this illustrious guest to our Cosmic Hamlet By the Sea. His presentation should be everything we seek in our Gardeners' Weekend program speaker: an engaging and entertaining speaker as well as a learned member of the world's gardening community. Join us in welcoming Dan back to Homer for what promises to be an informative as well as lively presentation.

We do still need more volunteers to fill in some gaps in staffing. Call Roni at 226-3404 or Brenda at 235-3763. If you prefer to be a hostess, call Saraphine at 235-1402.

## **Be Part of the World Famous Homer Gardeners' Weekend**

12 more volunteers are needed to be Hostesses/Hosts for the 6 featured gardens. No horticultural knowledge is necessary – just 3 hours of your time (11:00 to 2:00 or 2:00 to 5:00) on Sunday, August 7<sup>th</sup>. You will greet visitors, have them sign in, offer parking help if needed and direct them to the entry of the garden, if needed. You will still have 3 hours to explore all the gardens on the tour. Please help if you can.

## **Cookie's Country Greenhouse**

Featuring Proven Winners® plants

We also carry vegetable starts, organic seed and seed potatoes.

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



When I joined the Homer Garden Club about five years ago, I knew practically nothing about perennials. Over the years I'd planted some annuals and hanging baskets. The little house we bought in Anchorage in 1996 came with a few hardy perennials, but my focus was always the vegetable garden. In the backyard, there was a large clump at the base of a trio of birch trees consisting of a dense wad of Siberian iris, tall blue campanula, and shasta daisies. I didn't even know the name for those campanulas back then. They were pretty in bloom, but then looked like a patch of weeds the rest of the summer. I didn't understand that they were re-seeding themselves into that cement-like mass of tangled plant matter either.

There were lots of ferns, plus a friend gave me a couple of bleeding hearts which never did very well. I even purchased a couple of "coral bells" from Bells Nursery. One didn't survive the first winter, and the other died the second winter. One of the houses in the neighborhood had a large patch of enormous hostas in front. I remember they looked dreadful in bloom.

Yet for some reason, I planted a few hostas too. They looked OK until slugs devoured them. That sums up my experience with perennials. I didn't understand why anyone would care to bother with them. Probably some of you can relate?

In 2005 I moved to Homer and started going to Garden Club meetings. I wanted to learn about the climate here, which vegetables were possible, and maybe some tricks and techniques from the locals. I learned those things and so much more! The world of perennials opened up before me, and I finally "got it." Not only do they come back every year, but many grow and spread, creating divisions to share with friends. There are so many different varieties, each with unique attributes and particular kinds of beauty. They bloom at varying times, enabling the gardener to plan a display where something is always in bloom. Some don't bloom at all, with unique foliage being the main attraction. Every

year I learn more, there is so much to know. I'll never know it all, and that's a good thing!

PS: One of the club's best learning opportunities is the annual garden tour. We still lack ONE garden for our tour in August. Please think about your friends' and neighbors' gardens and let us know if there may be a "secret garden" of special merit that should be on our tour. Even if not this year, it could be on the tour in the future. Maybe even YOUR garden! In any case, DO volunteer to help out before and/or during the tour. No knowledge or experience is required.



Photo by Roni Overway

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garden supplies, fertilizers, soils, chicks,  
and more!**

**Monday -Friday 9:30-6:30, Saturday 9:30-6:00, Sunday 12:00-5:00**





Baechler was encouraged to not only build a bigger greenhouse, but one that could be utilized for longer during the school year.

Baechler was encouraged to go to the Homer Garden Club to try and solicit both financial support and wisdom from the

In the waning school weeks most students' minds wander into the blooming summer so tantalizingly close. This year, thanks in part to the Homer Garden Club, the students at Paul Banks Elementary have an opportunity to connect to the wonder of the summer and the gardening season with their new greenhouse.

This week will mark the completion of the greenhouse over a year in the making. Pre-Kindergarten teacher Shere Baechler has been planning and building support for her greenhouse project since early 2010. With initial funding coming from an Alaska Division of Agriculture grant, Baechler began planning a small kit greenhouse last fall. As the project gained interest

vast breadth of experience of the Club's members. Fortunately, she got both. Members of the Garden Club worked with Baechler and Paul Bank's principal Benny Abraham on ensuring a design that could have electricity for both light and some heat, and a covering material that would be more insulating than a simple plastic film.

With the additional funding Baechler and Abraham worked with Homer High School teacher Josh Brege on designing and framing the structure. Brege assigned several of his students to frame the greenhouse starting in March in their shop. After the last of the snow cleared, the students set up the greenhouse at Paul Banks and will finish covering the structure with a

durable polycarbonate that will last several years into the future.

Support for the project has been growing in the last few months and material donations from Anchor Point Greenhouse, Baycrest Greenhouse, Steve Gibson and Linda and Jim Reinhart have really expanded the potential of the project.

In anticipation of the completed greenhouse, students from four Paul Banks classes started mixed greens and radishes indoors in mid-April. This week the flats of greens will make the journey out into the greenhouse and students will get their first of many experiences inside of it. With two weeks remaining in the school year, the students will enjoy the fruits, or vegetables, of their labor before heading home for the summertime.

While the bulk of students will go home for the summertime, the greenhouse space will not lie fallow. Before school lets out, students will start seeds and transplant starts to be maintained by a devoted group of volunteers over the summer for the students to enjoy when they return in the fall. Additionally, the greenhouse will be tied into the summer school curriculum as much as possible with early season crops going to summer school students and the surplus going to the food bank.

Don't forget to divide your perennials and bring your extra starts to the Plant Sale June 4. For any questions, contact Barb Kennedy, 235-4347, or Michael Linden, 235-6632.



## War on Weeds

by Brenda Adams

Please join us at the Homer Public Library gardens for the second annual **War on Weeds Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup> anytime between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm.** Come for an hour or two or stay the whole day. We'll have a bucket full of hand trowels and plenty of trash bags. If you have a favorite tool or prefer working with a long-handled one, bring it along. This year we plan to have everyone work in the restored gardens rather than struggle with the weeds embedded in the grass on the south side. It should be much easier going and provide a lot better sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. All are welcome regardless of horticultural knowledge. There will be plenty of folks to provide guidance – and applause. Put it on your calendar now – **WOW, May 21<sup>st</sup>, Homer Public Library!**



Photo by Brenda Adams

Questions? Call Brenda Adams 235-3763.

## High Tunnels on the Peninsula

by Kyra Wagner

The conversation about high tunnels continues. This Tuesday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, another High Tunnel Round Table gathered producers together to discuss the different aspects of purchasing, building and managing. As the crowd shared different experiences and questions, people were able to get to know some of the local experts as well as getting some of their own questions answered.

Part of the evening the participants broke down into smaller groups to discuss more specific topics. These meetings have been important for those trying to order new high tunnels from the lower states. Ty Gates led one of the conversations on Tuesday night, focusing on the different brands and possibilities for group orders from those companies. Shared shipping has saved many of the producers hundreds of dollars, whether they order from Farm Tek, Rimol, Oregon Valley or Golden Pacific. It also creates a connection that introduces individuals to others who have the

same type of tunnel and will therefore be facing the same problems.

There are many problems and concerns that face high tunnel users, whether they build the tunnel themselves or order it through this popular NRCS program. One of the conversations focused on site preparation. No matter how you do it, the tunnel needs to be



level(ish) and needs to have drainage. Eivin Kilcher shared his experience on the subject and offered his expertise and equipment for hire. Another con-

versation table talked about irrigation while another discussed concerns about snow load and wind problems.

Others were curious about growing. Rita Jo Schultz led a conversation table on planting berries and tree in tunnels. Other conversations about growing too much or what varieties to grow had small groups because most of the producers are too new at this to imagine yet having too much.

The buzz about high tunnels is spreading, and the experts are starting to come in. The weekend of the next Garden Club meeting will be an active one of high tunnel tours with agronomist Jeff Smeenk from the Palmer experimental station. In June the NRCS state agronomist, Craig Smith, will also be coming down from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup>.

There are a lot of people with lots of excitement to share!

# FRITZ CREEK GARDENS

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