

CONTENTS

Article	Page
Susan Houlihan	1
Mother of Chickens	2
Treasurer's Report	3
Climate Gardener	4

The next Homer Garden Club meeting will be February 22 at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs, at 2:00 pm.

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Homer Garden Club

February
2015

Newsletter

Happy
Valentine's
Day



Susan Houlihan of Alpenglow Skin Care will discuss Using Botanicals at February 22 meeting

Susan Houlihan, owner of Alpenglow Skin Care, will present USING BOTANICALS TO MAKE HEALTHY SKIN AND HAIR CARE PRODUCTS.

Susan and her husband Patrick founded Alpenglow in 1999. Located in Anchor Point, the company uses locally grown botanicals and wild plants, creating a myriad of organic products. Shampoos, soaps, moisturizers and balms are just a few of the items made by hand at their handcrafted workshop. With the help of their two children they grow and store a lot of food, as well as flowers and herbs for the business, in a large garden and high tunnel.

She will discuss a variety of beneficial plants that grow well locally and show how to preserve, extract, and dry these botanicals. Susan will also provide information on how you can use your botanicals to make beneficial and healthy skin and hair care products.

Besides being one of the most knowledgeable people in the Homer area about soap and skin care manufacturing, Susan has taught classes and workshops for local school groups and non-profit organizations. She has been a vendor and board member of the Homer Farmer's Market for over a decade.





Mother of Chickens

by Jessica Shepherd, President

Around here I'm known as "mother of chickens" and if you watch Game of Thrones you'll get the inside joke. We have four hens and a very nice rooster, plus a pair of ducks that are currently overwintering in the high tunnel. (I'll give the ducks their due in next month's article.)

We acquired the chickens last April - two heavy-bodied Buff Orpingtons, one Araucana (who lays green eggs), and one black and white Ancona. They spent the first five weeks of their lives in successively larger cardboard boxes in my upstairs study, and happily fledged into the chicken yard during a warm spell in June. I settled on a spice theme when I named them, so the Buffs are Nutmeg and Ginger, the Araucana is Sage, and the little Ancona is Anise – the spice girls. The rooster, Curry, came from friends Don and Donna Rae. He's an extremely handsome and low-key Golden Wyandotte. He is gentle with the ladies, crows lustily eight or ten times of a morning, and is otherwise quiet, friendly and alert – the perfect traits for a rooster.

Egg production commenced in late August and most weeks we have a steady trickle of nine or ten eggs each week. The two Buffs are the most dependable, delivering one or two clean brown eggs into the nest box daily. Sage kicks out one of her showy green eggs a few times a week, and poor Anise started out hot and fast with an egg a day for the first month of production, but soon slowed to one every three or four weeks - just enough to keep her out of the stew pot.

I love keeping chickens, and unless there's two feet of snow to dig out between the house and the chicken coop, they require no more than ten minutes of tending a day. It's mainly just a matter of filling a hanging

feeder a couple of times a week, and adding a gallon of water to a heated dog dish each evening. For my troubles I get to palm one or two still-warm eggs. On weekends I rinse the dog dish with a very diluted bleach solution or I add a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar, which is reputed to be good for them. I have a light on them for fourteen hours a day to increase egg production, but otherwise they seem to handle the cold weather just fine and are active outside even on our coldest days.

One of the main reasons I keep chickens, aside from their eggs, is



for the compost pile. Chicken poop is just the thing to kick-start your compost. Every three or four months I stop by Small Potatoes lumber yard on my way home and after a chat with owner Steve Gibson, I fill up a couple garbage bags of sawdust and head home. On a non-windy day (think chicken dust coating your teeth) I use a snow shovel to clean out the old litter,

which is nicely inoculated with their droppings. I have a deep plastic sled that I shovel it into, but a wheelbarrow would work too. Then, if it's compost-making season I haul it over to my growing pile of grass cuttings, garden scraps and leaves and fork it in with enough water to moisten it well. This addition of dry spruce shavings and hot chicken manure will result in a hot compost pile within two or three days. In the winter I just spread the chicken litter over a garden bed that's in need a little extra organic matter. By planting time the snow and rain have carried the nutrients into the soil.

Once it became clear that Anise and Sage were not going to amount to much in terms of egg production, I began to hope for a successful coupling between one of the Buffs, Nutmeg or Ginger, and Curry, who has the best qualities I've ever had in a rooster. However, contemporary breeding practices favor birds that lay regularly and don't go broody – which means taking several weeks off to sit on eggs and then raise chicks. But for a backyard birder, having a hen sit on a clutch of eggs for 21 days and then hatch out and rear a little brood of future layers and meat birds is both cost-efficient and easier than rearing the store-bought birds.

So when Nutmeg seemed determined to gather up everyone's eggs and raise a clutch in mid-January I decided to let her go for it. Given the mild winter we'd had so far I figured it was worth a try. Once she had a clutch of four brown Orpington eggs and two green Araucana eggs I put an "x" on one end of each egg. These were hers to hatch, and any that came after I collected. She's a mild

(Continued on page 3)

Mother of Chickens
(Continued from page 2)

-mannered bird and despite a squawk of protest and hedgehogging her feathers, she lets me slide my hand under to count to six. When there are seven or eight I glean the unmarked eggs. If all goes well she'll begin hatching out eggs on Valentine's Day.

Spoiled chicken at our house isn't about lack of refrigeration, it's about making extra popcorn to scatter to appreciative hens and sprouting peas on the kitchen counter for a healthy mid-winter treat. In the summer they get generous portions of garden trimmings, handfuls of chickweed, and of course bugs and worms. But winter is a lean time and while the organic pellets I give them are sup-

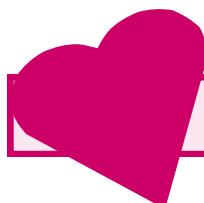
posed to contain everything they need, I like to keep things interesting with treats and kitchen scraps.

A few days back I headed out to the chicken yard give the birds some carrot peels. I unhooked the gate and tossed in the bright slivers and watched them rush the food. Nutmeg was on her eggs and wouldn't forsake them, so that left the other three girls, talking excitedly with their beaks full. I noted that Curry, gentleman that he is, held back and let all of them find some morsel before he too began to eat.

A good broody hen doesn't like to leave her eggs for more than a few minutes a day. And after a week or so hoping that Nutmeg would hop down to eat with the others long

enough for me to check for surplus eggs, I realized that she was determined to keep those eggs warm and safe despite her own hunger. I began bringing her out a small bowl of her own with the trimmings from the evening's sauté, popcorn, and the like. She now becomes very animated when I open the little door that accesses her nest box – eager to eat whatever I provide.

As the "Mother of Chickens", I can attest to the simple pleasure of watching the birds line up in a pre-determined order on their roost at night, or cackle in pleasure with their beaks full of shredded cabbage. And come Valentines Day I'll celebrate the arrival of the next generation, looking on proudly as Nutmeg becomes the mother of chickens in her own right.



Treasurer's Report

by Peggy Craig, Treasurer

JANUARY 2015

Membership	10.00
Total Income	<u>\$10.00</u>
Expenses	
Meeting—venue	150.00
Total Expenses	<u>\$150.00</u>
Beginning balance 1/1/15	\$9,472.46
Income	10.00
Expenses	<u>(150.00)</u>
Ending balance 9/30/14	<u>\$9,342.46</u>

The Climate Friendly Gardener - A Guide to Combating Global Warming from the Ground Up

by Union of Con-

Weather has to be the most crucial factor when it comes to growing plants in any garden wherever you live in the world. Gardeners are finding that well-defined growing seasons are becoming confused.

Our gardens are totally reliant on the weather and what it delivers each day. As extreme weather becomes more prevalent, we will have to be more ecologically sensitive, adapting what we grow and how and where we grow it. Gardeners of old knew how to manipulate microclimate and also use valuable natural resources such as soil, composted garden waste and rainwater to best effect. Selecting the right plant for the right place, growing it naturally, without over-dependence on fertilizers, is an important maxim.

Scientists agree that global warming is well under way, the result of a buildup in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases generated by human activities, including the burning of fossil fuels. Many gardeners already see evidence of global warming in their own backyards. Summers are getting hotter, and generally milder winters mean plant hardiness zones are shifting. These changes can make planning your garden—which plants to choose, how soon to put new seedlings in the ground, and when to harvest vegetables—more of a challenge. While a longer growing season will benefit some gardeners, climate disruption is also projected to increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather and to benefit some pests and weeds, which will further challenge the ability of gardeners and farmers to grow plants successfully.

Practices that maximize carbon storage without generating too

much global warming pollution in the process can help slow the pace of climate change. As a gardener, you can lead the way in your own yard.

FIVE STEPS TO A CLIMATE-FRIENDLY GARDEN

Step 1—Minimize Carbon-Emitting Inputs

The kinds of tools and chemicals you use in the garden can affect the amount of heat-trapping gases your garden absorbs or emits.



Gasoline-powered tools such as lawn mowers and leaf blowers are obvious sources of CO₂, but common garden chemicals can also contribute to global warming.

Synthetic fertilizers—especially nitrogen-based ones—require a lot of energy to manufacture. Even organic nitrogen-based fertilizers (compost, animal manure) can create additional heat-trapping gases, especially if the timing and amount of fertilizer are not precise. Studies have suggested that fertilizer overuse on home gardens and lawns can be a source of nitrous oxide—a

heat-trapping gas 320 times more potent than CO₂.

Pesticides also contribute to global warming as they require a lot of energy to manufacture, package and transport, especially herbicides like weed killers. Glyphosate—the active ingredient in Roundup—is among the most carbon-intensive.

Step 2—Don't Leave Garden Soil Naked

When plants are not actively growing, bare soil is vulnerable not only to erosion and weeds but carbon loss as well.

The use of cover crops—grasses, cereal grains, or legumes—is a mainstay of organic farming systems because it helps develop healthy and productive soil that would otherwise remain bare.

Cover crops have been described as a “winter blanket” for the soil because they are often plants in fall. They suppress weeds, buffer the soil from rain and wind and increase the soil’s water-holding properties. Most importantly, when cover crops are turned under in the spring, their organic matter improves the soil, which will store carbon for years while providing nutrients for subsequent plantings and a variety of beneficial organisms.

Choose cover crops that will germinate and become established quickly in your local climate, will provide enough shade to prevent weed growth, and will be easy to work into the soil in the spring. Combining a legume with a grass or cereal plant is a good strategy in many parts of the country.

Winter cover crops should be sown in late summer or early fall, after

(Continued on page 5)

vegetables have been harvested or summer flowers have faded, but temperatures are still warm enough for the seeds to germinate and become established. In some cases, sowing shortly before harvest (between rows of growing plants) does not interfere with the harvest and gives the cover crop more time to become established.

Step 3—Plant Trees and Shrubs

If you have space in your yard, planting and maintaining one or more trees or large shrubs is an excellent way to remove more heat-trapping CO₂ from the atmosphere over a long period of time. All plants absorb CO₂ through their leaves, storing the carbon in their tissues. But trees and shrubs, because they are large, woody and long-lived can store larger quantities of carbon than other plants for longer periods of time.

Step 4— Expand Recycling to the Garden

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, yard trimmings and food waste together make up about one-quarter of the country's municipal solid waste. When these organic wastes are disposed of in landfills, much of the carbon is stored underground, but the waste that breaks down releases methane—a heat-trapping gas 23 times more potent than CO₂.

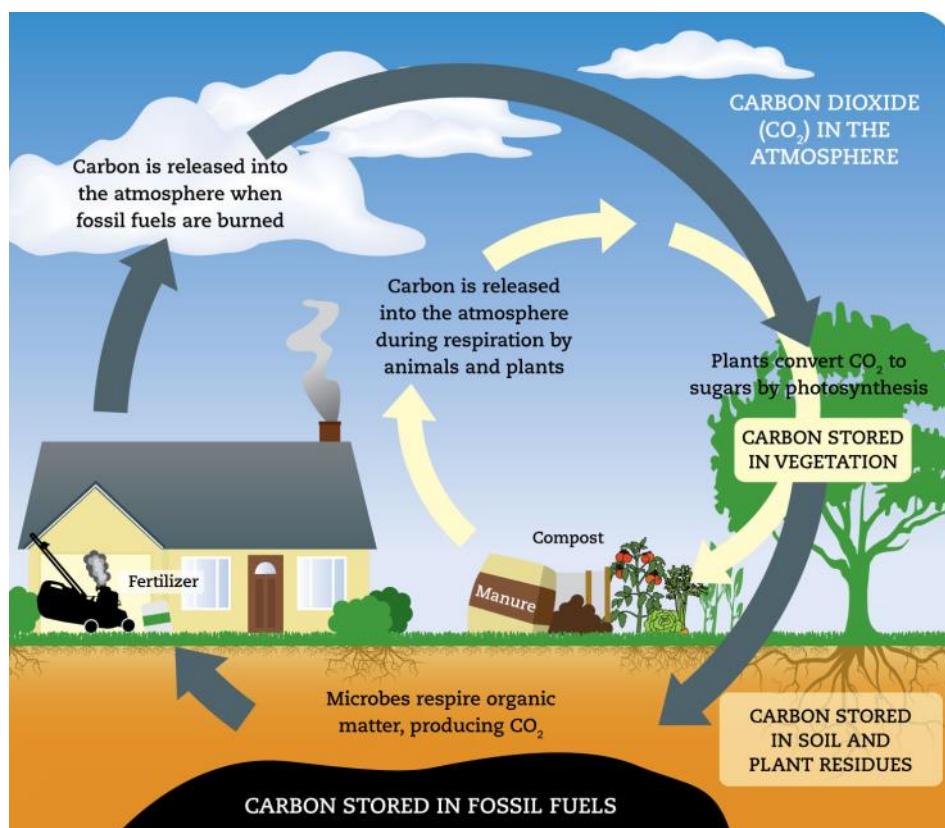
Gardeners can help reduce the global warming pollution associated with waste disposal by turning leaves, grass, woody garden clippings, dead garden plants and kitchen waste into mulch or compost, then using it in the garden. "Recycling" these wastes will not only reduce methane emissions from landfills but also improve your garden's soil and help it store carbons.

Compost, which can be any mixture of decaying organic materials, is created by a natural process in which bacteria, fungi, and other organisms break down wastes into a nutrient-rich soil amendment.

The most efficient composting process provides microorganisms with the correct ratio of carbon- and nitrogen-containing materials (carbon serves as the microbes' energy source and nitrogen supplies the building blocks for proteins). A carbon-to-nitrogen ratio ranging between 25:1 and 30:1 is optimal. Remember that carbon-rich materials tend to be dry and brown (leaves, straw wood chips), while nitrogen-rich materials are usually wet and green (fresh grass clippings, food waste).

Turning or mixing your compost regularly exposes the decomposing materials to oxygen, which makes the process more efficient and minimizes the production of methane. It also helps the compost heat up to a temperature that kills weed seeds and disease-causing organisms.

Compost is finished when it looks dark and crumbly and smells pleasantly earthy. Master gardeners recommend anywhere from one-quarter of an inch to three inches of compost per year on your garden.



While composting does produce global warming gases, studies indicate that the best practices for creating and using compost have a smaller climate impact than landfills. That's because efficient composting takes place aerobically (in the presence of oxygen), which minimizes the formation of methane. By contrast landfills lack oxygen circulation, so organic materials are broken down primarily by bacteria that thrive in the absence of oxygen and produce methane.

Step 5—Think Long and Hard About Your Lawn

A growing body of research indicates that soils covered in turf grasses can capture and store significant amounts of carbon. On the other hand, a small number of newer studies have shown that lawns have the potential to generate heat-trapping nitrous oxide. Some have found these emissions to be signifi-

(Continued on page 6)

cant, others have not. Although the science is unsettled, it appears that practices designed to maximize lawn growth and health with minimal inputs of fertilizer and water may achieve the best balance of carbon storage and nitrous oxide emissions.

TODAY THE BACK YARD, TOMORROW THE NATION

Gardening practices alone won't

solve global warming. As with switching to more efficient compact fluorescent lightbulbs or reusable shopping bags, cultivating a climate-friendly garden or lawn is just a small piece of the puzzle. But together, the 81 million U.S. households that own a small piece of the outdoors can play an important part in the fight against climate change by storing carbon in their soil and trees, and reducing heat-trapping emissions from pesticides,

fertilizers, and garden waste and equipment.

Moreover, home gardeners can point the way to climate-friendly practices on a much larger scale: our nation's farms. With their 900 million acres of intensively managed soil, U.S. farms and ranches have an opportunity to play a truly significant role in curbing global warming.

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