

# Newsletter

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## Homer Garden Club

The next Homer Garden Club meeting will be on February 25 at 2:00 pm at the Bidarka Inn, downstairs.

### Board of Directors

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February 2018

## February 25 Meeting will Feature Emily Garrity of Twitter Creek Gardens on Her Farming Techniques

### From the Ground Up. The Ever-Evolving Farm

Emily Garrity of Twitter Creek Gardens will share with us how she built her farm, the systems she uses to enhance production and efficiency, and tell us her favorite foods, tools, and future goals. Emily grew up in Fairbanks and moved to Homer at age 24. Her first solo commercial endeavor consisted of less than ¼ acre of garden space on

borrowed land and a modest table at the Homer Farmers Market. In 2005, she began her first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) season with four subscribing members. Later that year, just over nine acres of south sloping, spring fed, topsoil-rich real estate became home to Twitter Creek Gardens. Today the complex is made up of an acre and a half outdoor garden, three high tunnels, several homemade low tunnels, a passive solar greenhouse, and a root cellar. Using animal rotations, prioritizing soil health and growing in a bio-intensive model allows for approximately 10 tons of food to be harvested off the small plot. The produce from Twitter Creek Gardens can be found at the Homer Farmers Market, through CSA subscriptions, on the Kenai Peninsula Food Hub, and on the plates in several local restaurants.



# Treasurer's Report

by Peggy Pittman, Treasurer

## Homer Garden Club Treasurer Report January 2018

### Income

Membership	200.00	
Aprons	650.00	
<b>Total Income</b>		<b><u>\$ 850.00</u></b>

### Expenses

Venue	150.00	
Program	495.53	
Aprons	1,570.00	
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b><u>\$2,215.53</u></b>

Beginning Balance 1/1/2017	<b>\$17,222.58</b>
Income	850.00
Expenses	<u>2,215.53</u>
Ending Balance 1/31/17	<b>\$15,857.05</b>

## Announcements

**Workshop with author Brenda Adams on Garden Design and Creation** on Saturdays March 24 an 31 from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm at the Kachemak Bay Campus. The fee is \$85. Sign up by March 20th at KBC or online at <https://kbcnoncredit.asapconnected.com/> Brenda will describe the elements of garden design, plan development, cultural requirements of plants, soil preparation and plant selection. Other topics will include use of color, foliage, combinations and northern light, as well as how to reduce maintenance and increase success!

**Homer Folk School is offering a workshop on how to build an earthbox.** Neil Wagner is teaching a workshop where you will learn about, then build and take home an earthbox. An earthbox is a self-watering planter that can help you grow food and flowers more easily. Earthboxes are a great evolution, especially for tomatoes in greenhouses or high tunnels. The class will be held March 3 from 1:00—3:00 pm. The fee is \$32. Register by February 28 online at <http://www.homerfolkschool.org/>

**The Homer Folk School also has other gardening classes** such as fruit tree pruning, building a lasagna garden bed, etc. They are always looking for more teachers and suggestions for new classes. For more information, go to <http://www.homerfolkschool.org/>

Now that I am well-entrenched in middle-age, I take lots of supplements. Every time I head to the health clinic, looking for relief from a tenacious head cold or stiff joints, I walk out with two or three bottles of brightly-labeled supplements and a hearty bill of sale. This morning, after swallowing a handful of turmeric, fiber, multi vitamin, and something with a long list of ingredients for happy gut flora, I got to thinking about home-grown remedies. Could I grow turmeric? And what about cooking up a batch of rose hip syrup as a way to get my vitamin C? The idea of stir-frying with a zest of supplemental turmeric, or pouring a syrup of vitamin-rich goodness over pancakes is much more appealing than downing a dozen gelatin capsules a day.

It's February -- a good month to plant herbs. I did a little homework, thumbing through gardening books, in search of curative plants to start from seed, and re-familiarizing myself with flowering medicinals that grow wild just beyond the garden gate. In my search, I found several healing herbs and flowers that lend themselves to a backyard apothecary, and grow well here under the right conditions. My own apothecary (from the Latin *apothecia*, for repository, or storehouse) includes **mint**, best if used fresh, as a tea for digestion and heartburn. I also grow a double-row of **garlic** each year, which can reduce heart disease and is said to ward off vampires (for this purpose it's best when eaten raw).

Herbs and flowers that are easy to grow in our cool maritime climate include the following:

**Cilantro** (also known as coriander) is a pleasure to grow. I start them from seed under lights in the house, then tuck them into the rows of broccoli and cabbage

where they'll get lots of light and air. A dainty plant with umbrellas of minute white flowers, cilantro looks something like baby's breath among the brassicas. While cilantro is a required taste, I love it in soups, on eggs, and with anything Mexican. It has several health benefits, and is said to clear toxic metals out of the system. It also contains a number of important vitamins and minerals, including vitamin C.

**Feverfew**, true to its name, helps reduce fevers and may prevent or reduce migraines. Easy to start from seed under lights, they grow into attractive plants on the order of an airy mum, quickly filling out with small scalloped-leaves and an abundance of dime-sized white flowers. I love their citrusy scent. They can reseed heavily, so be prepared to dead-head, or weed out most of the seedlings that reappear next spring.

**Fennel** – lowers blood pressure, detoxifies the liver, and helps to reduce inflammation. It's also a natural source of estrogen, and aids in iron absorption. I grow four or five plants in my high tunnel, and as it matures I pinch off a little for a licorice-flavored snack. Later, when the base has filled out, I bake



it along with other fall staples like carrots and potatoes.

**Lovage** can be eaten like a tender celery. I've never grown it, but having had good success with cel-

ery, I'm apt to give it a try. The leaves are said to make as a tea with "an agreeable odour." It's pleasing to the stomach, and helpful in reducing chills from a fever.

**Thyme**, when pounded and mixed with a sweet syrup, is used to treat whooping cough. As a tea, it's



good for "wind spasms" and colic. Some years I plant the tiny thyme seeds, while other years I purchase young plants in a four-pack from a friendly vendor at the Homer Farmer's Market. I like the second method best, as thyme can be fussy to start. Once established, it will produce a low mound of fragrant foliage. It's easy to pinch off four or five wiry stems and slide two fingers down the stem to knock off the little paired leaves for flavoring a stew. The flowers are good to eat too, as we learned at Ginger Hudson's edible flowers class in January.

You'll recognize that several of the above, along with dozens of other curative herbs and spices, are common additions to our cuisine. This begs the question – did we come to love these flavors thanks to lore-savvy moms the world-over who, long ago, found creative ways to spoon these healthy benefactors into our diets?

Herbs are not generally frost-hardy, but can be grown here if

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they reach maturity during our approximately 120 day growing season. While a greenhouse or high tunnel is great for growing herbs, you can produce an ample supply in a modest-sized container-garden on a patio or wind-sheltered deck. Getting them started inside the house under lights, is the key to successful propagation and short-summer abundance. With an eye toward the cycles of the moon, the next promising time to plant will be February 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, as the moon begins to wax.

Of course, we don't need to grow all of our home remedies. There are dozens of native plants in the woodlands, along braided streambeds, and in vacant lots that can be judiciously harvested for their curing properties. As a gardener, I generally cultivate around these plants, so as to have them close at hand.

I love our native **chamomile**, also known as pineapple weed. They grow in low, fragrant mats along

footpaths, as if offering to join us along the way. The flowers, seeped, make a slightly sweet tea that eases indigestion, insomnia, and sore throats. I can't resist popping off a few flowering heads as I walk by to chew like a breath freshener.

**Stinging nettle** – so named because you'll want gloves when harvesting, is one of the first plants to surface from under last winter's alder leaves. Nettles are spring's tonic. Gather them while the leaves are still rounded, steam the leaves for a minute or two to dissolve the stinging needles, then blend with garlic, olive oil and walnuts to make an antioxidant-rich "Nesto" to ladle over pasta.

Another favorite, **yarrow** – abounds in the wild with friendly white flowers, or in the flower garden in a pallet of pleasing pink-to-peach. This is the 'field medic' of flowers. Every part of it offers something. When seeped in hot water, the flowers (fresh or dried) ease a sore throat and may thwart a cold at that first tell-tale tickle. The leaves, I've been told, contain a blood coagulant - a frilly bandage of yarrow leaves will help stem the bleeding and act as an antiseptic at the same time. And then there are the roots, which, when chewed, temporarily numb tender gums or ease a toothache.

Finally, there's **Wild sage**, aka wormwood or *Artemisia*, used in salves to heal cuts or wounds, and to sooth sore muscles. I've

also heard said that the sharply pleasant smelling wormwood, cut fresh, can be slipped inside a pillow case to stimulate dreams.

Herbs take up so little room in the garden, it seems like a shame not to plant more of them. The choice



between a handful of seeds, or a handful of expensive supplements seems obvious.

I've barely hinted at all of the herbs that nature provides for us, but if you want to learn more, two resources that I consult again and again, are *Discovering Wild Plants* by Janice Schofield (now back in print), and a more recent publication, *The Boreal Herbal – wild food and medicine plants of the north* by Beverley Gray. A great website, with British flavour, is <https://botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/comindx.html>.

## Notes From the Prez

by Francie Roberts, President

We are all set to hold our annual Plant Sale on May 19th @Homer Chamber of Commerce at 11 am! We need all to think about planting some starts (with labels!) and keep our Sale in mind as you divide or replace plants in your garden.

Aprons will be available at next meeting for \$25 for members, \$30 for non-members! Perfect attire for your days in the coming sunshine.



Aprons are available in dark green or burgundy.

## Homer Garden Club General Meeting Minutes

January 28, 2018

The January 28 meeting of the Homer Garden Club was called to order at 2:10 PM by President Francie Roberts, who began by welcoming visitors/new members and having them introduce themselves.

Treasurer, Peggy Pittman, provided her report. The club currently has \$15,502.58 in its account.

Committee reports were then provided:

Jeannette Lawson, co-chair with Brenda Adams of Gardeners' Weekend, advised that we have lost a garden from our slate of five and encouraged members to help identify other options. Signup sheets for G. W. volunteers would be available after the meeting in the back of the room. Jeannette, who also serves as Social Secretary, thanked those who had brought refreshments to the meeting, including Denice Clyne and Sherri Hartley who brought refreshments even without having signed up. She said we still need folks to bring food to the March meeting. Again, signup sheets would be available after the meeting.

Kathy Dube', co-Vice President with Tim Quinn, and Francie advised who had been engaged as speakers for upcoming meetings. They are Emily Garrity of Twitter Creek Farms - February, Lori Jenkins of Synergy in March.

Francie updated the club on the garden apron project and modeled one of them. Aprons are priced at \$25.00 for club members and \$30 for non-members. They were to be available for sale after the meeting.

The next order of business was an update on the progress being made to revise and update *Kachemak Cultivating- From Seaside to Summit*, the Homer Garden Club's gardening guide. Many of the chapters have been completed, a few are still outstanding. With difficulty in finding a company to produce the books in their current small format, including the company which did the previous printing, Francie asked for raised hands to signify whether members would like to keep the books in their current size or consider an 8 1/2 by 11 format, still in a 3-ring binder. Members seemed most supportive of the larger book, primarily because they could easily add to it. They also preferred the larger font in an Arial style.

Francie announced that a Homer Folk School class on Permaculture would be held in March as well as one on pruning fruit trees. Additional information is available from Kyra Wagner at 299- 4920. Brenda Adams announced that she will be teaching a garden design class at the college on March 24 and 25th.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the HGC will be held on February 25 at 2:00 PM.

Kathy Dube', along with co-V.P. Tim Quinn, and who is tasked with finding speakers for our meetings, then introduced the day's guest speaker, Ginger Hudson, whose presentation was titled: Edible Flowers from the Alaskan Landscape and our Gardens.

Ginger's talk began with a recognition of the late Verna Pratt and her contribution to the knowledge base and allure of Alaska's native plants. She talked about flowers' impact on the arts and as gifts to the world of medicine. She is currently writing a book titled: *The Life and Legacy of Verna Pratt* and read an excerpt

from it.

Her presentation then moved into the world of edible plants and she provided a wealth of information on many varieties of plants which can be eaten fresh, added to salads, dried and stored or processed in other ways to keep them available year round. She showed a jar of fennel flowers which had been crystallized with sugar. Flowers provide not just their color and nectar, but vitamins and even minerals. Her primary warning, however, was that it is essential to KNOW exactly what you're eating. With some plants, flowers, stems and leaves are edible, with others it might just be their leaves, others the roots. Basic knowledge is a must. The USDA has a category into which these plants fit: GRAS, or Generally Regarded As Safe. When in doubt, it is suggested that just a touch of something on the tongue, as with mushrooms, will often reveal whether they are safe or not. However, researching is most encouraged. Ginger provided handouts which included resources to aid in identification. Also, "A "Starter Kit" of Edible Flowers for the Garden and Table" is a leaflet available from the Cooperative Extension Service (CES).

Wild chives, alliums, garlic and wild onions can be used fresh in salads or used to flavor oils and vinegar (generally white vinegar). Other plants from your garden that are edible include: borage, calendula, cilantro, dill, fennel, geranium (and pelargoniums), lilac, plants from the mint family, nasturtiums, roses, squash, strawberries, violas and pansies. Those from the wild include coltsfoot, columbine, dandelion, elder, fireweed, geranium, Labrador tea, nagoonberry, pineapple weed, spring beauty, red clover, rose and yarrow.

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Plants Ginger highlighted in her talk included: borage - provides omega fatty acids, vitamin c (flowers only), calendula - used in skin creams but also baked goods, cilantro - fresh or as flavoring in oils and vinegars (flowers as well as leaves), dill and fennel - fresh, oils, used with fish, hyssop - fresh, used in cough medicine and tea, Lemon Gem marigold - citrusy used in seafood and fresh, monarda (bee balm - of the mint family)

tea with citrusy flavor, nasturtiums - fresh, spicy, seed pods can be pickled and have the flavor of capers, squash flowers (males only) either zucchini or other summer squash, lilacs - sweet water, fresh or for flavoring, thyme- flowers only (no greens) - waters.

The CES has studied the health benefits of our plants versus those of the other states and have found that ours provide a higher quality of anti-oxidants.

Fireweed flowers can be used in jams and syrup, geraniums may be used fresh, candied, or for perfumed water, elder flowers (only) hot tea, roses - rose water when boiled and distilled (no green) and can be candied, yarrow (native white) as insect repellent (leaves) and as a blood coagulant (leaves). Even fuchsia flowers are edible!

Ginger's presentation was appreciated by a large and enthusiastic audience. The meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM.



\*\*\*\*\*Our Membership Year is October 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>\*\*\*\*\*

## THE HOMER GARDEN CLUB MEMBERSHIP FORM

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Membership Type: Basic(\$10) \_\_ Supporting (\$15) \_\_ Business (\$25) \_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

You will receive the newsletter by E-Mail. This saves us printing and postage costs. Plus, the E-mailed version is in fabulous color!

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

**How would you like to participate in the Garden Club *this Membership Year*?**  
(please check any activities in which you would like to help)

Meeting Refreshments    Board of Directors    Nominating Committee    Newsletter  
 Spring Plant Sale    Harvest Dinner    Baycrest Garden    Gardeners' Weekend

**Suggestions for future Topics or Speakers** \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to "Homer Garden Club" and mail along with this form to:  
Homer Garden Club, P.O. Box 2833, Homer AK 99603  
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