

Anchorage Chapter



Volume 5, Issue 9

ALASKA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

August 2003

From the President

by Mary Shier

What a summer this has been. Heat stroke has just about taken me out several times. Have you all had the same experience? There seems to be more plant problems and insect damage than normal. Oodles of robins are still in my yard - usually there aren't many after mid summer. They must be too affected by the heat to travel on to where they usually go. I keep telling them to get the bad worms and not my good earthworms. I'm hoping they listen but I'm doubtful.

What a chore to keep up with all the watering! What was watered the day before, where to start today and not forgetting the water is on..... somewhere. If it is forgotten, then hearing the pump start during the night will alert me. Sometimes I have to get up and track it down and other times I just say, 'oh well, that spot needs more water anyway'. It's hardly worth rolling up the hoses anymore since they're just going to be unrolled the next day. It is tiring trying not to trip over them.

Early in the season there were young wilted seedlings lying over on the ground just about every day - their stems severed at ground level. Not in just one area but in many parts of the garden. A few of the culprits were caught, ending their gourmet eating spree. There are large gaps in the green bean section, the peas are few and far between, cabbages and a couple of broccoli bit the dust, and a several varieties of greens have "gapitis". My garden has never been inundated with cutworms prior to this. There was even a nest of eggs found, which was very pleasurable to squash - each and every one.

Then there are the leaf eaters leaving parts of leaves, holes in leaves or no leaves at all. There must be more than one type of these critters. These fellows are very elusive though, a few wormy suspects were captured and taken care of.

As dry as it's been, you'd think the slugs would have given in and maybe dried up. Oh, wishful thinking. There is plenty of evidence of them too. Would you believe it, I pulled some rhubarb just recently and tucked in the concave area where the stem attaches was a colony of slugs waiting out the heat til the evening dinner bell sounded.

Obviously the birds are not earning their keep or I'm watering too well. Hopefully we'll have a more normal winter which will eliminate the over wintering of these garden nightmares. If not that, then the moose and the occasional wandering black bear will have to broaden their diet.



July AMGA Garden Tour Report

Those of us who braved the rain Monday night to tromp through gardens were not disappointed. Linka Klinkhart's garden was full of surprises, including an open fire on her deck! She has a lot of lovely plant material, and tastefully located art work, interesting water features, the whole works.

Dana Klinkhart greeted the wet tour goers with a nice little fire as well. Her garden was lovely, with her now famous wreaths, water features, neat garden art and lots of eye popping plants.

Amelia Walsh also opened her garden up for viewing, since she lives in the neighborhood. Several MG's had the opportunity to get a sneak preview of her garden. One MG's reaction was "WOW!" Amelia has graciously agreed to include her garden in the last MG tour in August for those who missed it.

August AMGA Garden Tour Information August 18, 6 p.m.

Ameila Walsh's garden
12330 Lilac Drive

Directions: Take New Seward to Huffman. Turn towards the mountains, drive up 1.8 miles, turn left on Lilac. Amelia's house is the 2nd on the left.

Amelia has several water features, extensive new & established rock gardens, traditional beds, container gardens, and hanging baskets.

Potluck at Gina Docherty's -
4006 DeArmoun Road

Directions: Take New Seward Highway to DeArmoun Road. Turn towards the mountains on DeArmoun. Drive 0.9 miles, turn right on Fejes Road. The house is the first place on the left.

Gina's garden has lots of perennials, annuals, veggies, vines, greenhouse, raised beds, woodland beds, foundation beds, chicken house bed, ferns, shade garden, garden path, rock garden, etc.

Bring a dish, and enjoy the last garden tour of the season!

Dear Master Gardener,

I am the adult coordinator for the kid's garden in South Naknek. We are in the Bristol Bay region and across the river from King Salmon. I am not sure of our climate zone but I know it is usually colder here than in Anchorage. This is our first year here with the garden. Cutworms(?) have invaded. They are eating up the turnips and radishes. We also grew sunflowers, lettuce, carrots, potatoes, kale, peas and assorted flowers. What can we do to get rid of the cutworms organically?

Thanks - LD

Dear LD,

It sounds like you may be suffering the effects of root maggots, rather than cut worms. While you may not "get rid of" them, at least not in Alaska, you can be quite effective in controlling them and minimizing their damage to your crop. Surprisingly, the most effective control is not chemical, but rather falls within "organic" gardening methods!

For the best and most helpful information, check out the Alaska Cooperative Extension's free publication on root maggots. You can find it by going to: www.uaf.edu/coop-ext/publications/ and clicking on "Publications Catalog" – then select "Pesticide Management & Control" listed under the "Agriculture & Natural Resources" heading. The root maggot publication is the first one under the "Pesticide Management" section. It's publication # PMC-003300. You will need Adobe Acrobat reader to read it (if you don't have Adobe Acrobat, it is free and easily downloadable).

While you're in the Cooperative Extension site, check out their other publications... they've got some good ones. :-) If you want to go to the root maggot publication without going through the publication list, just go directly to: www.uaf.edu/coop-ext/publications/freepubs/PMC-00330.pdf

You may want to think about a couple of controls – floating row cover and paper collars, say – and make it an experiment that the kids can evaluate for effectiveness.

Good luck - AD

[Editor's note: If you are interested in responding to gardener's questions, please contact the editor: gardener@corecom.net]



Lawn Renovation: reviving a lawn filled with weeds, moss and dead spots.

By Michele Hébert

Alaska is filled with do it yourself builders or individuals, trying to make a place in the world with available resource. These resources often come up short when it is time to put in a new lawn. Commonly, a new home that will not have the lawn planted for several years, if at all. Sometimes when the lawn is planted, not enough money is available for topsoil, the right seed or fertilizer. The result is a weedy, mossy lawn in need of renovation. But do not fret, or get out the rototiller. Most lawns can be revived with a little elbow grease and the right tools. As soon as the ground has thawed to a depth of 2 inches, it is time to get started.

Mow the grass and or weeds, 1 to 2 inches by lowering the mower to its lowest setting. Bag or rake the clippings. Next thatch the lawn to remove all the dead stems and roots that slow down the movement of water and fertilizer into the lawn. Use a thatching blade on an existing mower or rent a power thatcher from a rental companies. Lawns should be thatched annually starting when the lawn is 3 years old. Rake or vacuum the grass brought up by the thatcher. Any weak lawn should be aerated with a power aerator. This machine takes plugs out of the soil. They can be left on the lawn. Now the lawn is ready for soil amendments.

Many Alaskan soils are acid, so start by testing the soil to check the pH. You can buy a soil pH tester at garden centers for less than two dollars. The ideal pH is 6.5 to 6.7. Use distilled water for the test or you will be testing the pH of the faucet water. Broadcast lime to raise the pH and use sulfur to lower the pH. The lime will take up to a year to work.

Top-dress with sand, compost or topsoil if the soil is compacted, has poor drainage or is infertile. The soil amendments will move into the holes made by the aerator. On the shady north side of the house where drainage is poor, add 1/4-inch sand. In sunny dry sites, top-dress with 1/4-inch compost and or topsoil. I find the easiest way to top dress is by throwing dirt with a shovel out of a wheelbarrow.

In the spring the lawn should be fertilized with a low nitrogen fertilizer. It can be applied the same time as thatching and seeding. Apply 7 pounds of 8-32-16 per 1000 square feet. A cyclone spreader will apply the fertilizer more evenly than drop spreaders or hand broadcasting.

In areas that are weak or dead, broadcast grass seed. I sometimes mix the seed in a bucket with topsoil before patching small dead areas. There are two types of grass that over winter in Interior Alaska, Kentucky bluegrass and red fescue. Use bluegrass in dry sunny sites and red fescue in shady sites. Most grass mixes contain both these types of grass seed. It is ok to use a mixture as long as you understand that not everything in the mix will thrive in the specific sites.

Now comes one of the most important parts... water. If you do not water after thatching, it can kill a lawn. Lawns should be watered not more than once a week with an inch of water. Daily watering encourages surface roots and results in a weak lawn that is more susceptible to drought and winterkill.

Another problem to remedy is moss on the lawn. Any time during the growing season, apply a moss control fertilizer that contains iron sulfate. The same nutrients that kill the moss will help the grass grow better and help to control mushrooms. It can be applied annually to keep moss under control.

For one to two years after renovation it is important to fertilize monthly and mow weekly. In mid June, July and August apply 7 pounds per 1000 square feet of 20-10-10. Once the lawn has developed strong deep roots, fertilization can be cut back to twice annually, once in the spring and fall. Fertilizer and mowing will also be the best way to control weeds.





Building a Floating Garden

By Michele Hébert

For those of you that are not familiar with the term Hydroponics, it is the science of growing plants without soil. It is not a new growing technique. The Aztecs and Incas were growing floating gardens 500 years ago. The advantage is that growers are better able to control the amount of nutrients and oxygen that roots take up. I have always wanted to build a hydroponics garden but have been scared away by the list of equipment and care required to keep the system going...till now. Last year while attending the International Master Gardener Conference in Orlando, Florida State University showed me how to build a simple floating garden for producing salad crops. It just takes equipment and supplies I have already in the garage or can pick up at a local hardware. All that is needed is a shallow wooden frame, foam board, plastic sheeting, soluble fertilizer and plants. It should take no more than one hour to build the system once you have gathered the right tools and materials. The directions I will be giving below are for a box system that is approximately 4 by 8 feet.

Tools and materials needed

Start by gathering tools including a level, electric drill, 5 gallon bucket, tape measure, and a hole saw. The size of the hole saw will depend on the net or pot size discussed later. Using a 2-inch net pot requires a 1 – 3/4 inch hole saw. To build the wooden frame or box obtain three 2 by 6 inch by 8 foot treated boards and a box of 3 inch wood screws. The frame should be 4 feet, 1 inch wide by 8 feet. This size frame eliminates the need to trim the floating foam. Fasten the boards with 3-inch wood screws in predrilled holes. Wax makes screws go in easier.

Find a level sunny spot free of debris in the greenhouse or outdoors to place the frame. Cover the spot with a ground cloth, such as Tyvar, to protect the bottom of the system from being punctured. Line the frame with 6-mil polyethylene to form a trough for the nutrient solution. Secure one side of the liner to the top edge using 1 by 2 inch furring strips or lattice using small wood screws. Place a 4 by 8 foot, 2 inch thick Styrofoam sheet in the lined frame to test for size. The foam must be able to move up and down freely. Fill the garden with 10 gallons or 2 inches floating garden solution so the polyethylene will form to the frame. Secure the other ends and sides of the liner to the top edge with lattice. Continue filling the box with 4 inches of solution.

Floating garden solution

Every time water is added to the system, it should contain fertilizer. Premix water-soluble fertilizer, such as 20-20-20 at a rate of 2 teaspoons of fertilizer for each gallon of water used in the water garden. Add one teaspoon Epson Salts for each gallon of water. Light rainfalls will have little effect on the water garden; only extensive flooding would require fertilizer adjustment based on the amount of water added by rainfall. Add solution as needed to keep the solution 4 inches deep. Gardeners commonly grow two crops of salad greens in the same solution before changing the entire solution and starting with a new batch.

Plant pots

The plants are grown in pots that are fit into the foam and extend into the solution. It is important that pots do not extend more than 1/8 inch below the bottom of the hole. Two inch hydroponic or "net pots" are available locally at ACE Hardware and Holm Town Nursery. Styrofoam coffee cups, 5 to 8 ounce, with slits cut in the bottom can also be used. Mark the location, and then use a hole saw to cut holes in the foam to place plant pot. Optimum spacing for most plants is 6 inches from the sides and 12 inches between plants.

Place 4 to 6 week old plants directly in the pots. Lean the transplants against the sides or use a toothpick to hold upright. Do not add soil around the transplants because it will keep roots too wet. Crops that work well in this system include romaine, Boston, bibb and leafy lettuces, basil, cucumbers, herbs and some flowers.



Central Peninsula MG News

by Rosemary Kimball

It was 38°F when I got up this morning, the third week of July. Blue sky and sunshine and no rain - I'm about ready to go out to do my "rain dance" by washing the car. It's been quite a summer.

It's interesting to see Pioneer Park at this time of year. Many of the perennials have finished their bloom and without the annuals- Lord love the petunia- the garden has lost it's sparkle. I'd never really considered how valuable a mix of flowers could be until it was brought home so visually. However, don't plant yellow nasturtiums in with zucchini plants because you can't tell when the zucchini start to blossom without sticking your nose into the plants.

Besides the main flush of perennial-blossoming a season indicator is that the aphids have moved indoors to my greenhouse. Why they aren't there when I have all the nice tender seedlings, I don't know. But now on the lower leaves of the tomato plants there are a half-zillion just-born aphids and a few mamas. So far the thumb/forefinger insecticide takes care of them but it's about time to mix a batch of Safers.

After the neat spring programs on composting that were presented this summer there've been some enthusiastic converts. Our ex-park Ramrod, Barb, has built the composting tiers that Mary Shier uses from the plans from Sunset Magazine. Now she's using her grass clippings instead of giving them to me so I have mixed feelings on that! My neighbor has planted his zucchini with no additional soil, directly into last year's grass clippings that he had piled in wire cages. His plants are ahead of mine and are really looking good. He thinks it must be the heat from the decaying matter that has given them that boost. My zucchini had their dose of Whitney Farms fertilizer and are doing too well;

there are only female blossoms, no males. I keep thinking I will "starve" one plant each year to give me the male flowers I need to "play bee" with but never remember until I find myself without them. Sexing the flowers is a good way to see what nutrients the squash plants need- Few female flowers means a hungry plant; no male flowers means too much fertilizer.

I've noticed a big change in my greenhouse. I caused to have hauled out (I'm in a red cast now) 15 gallons of growing medium and replaced it with 15 gallons of two-year-old compost. In conjunction I used Whitney Farms organic Life Link® fertilizer with mycorrhizal fungi and my tomatoes are a good three weeks ahead of schedule, it took longer for the magnesium deficiency to show up and I've had no blossom-end rot (yet). My cucumber indicators, the seed leaves, are big and green so those plants are quite happy with the addition.

Happiness is a visitor who unconsciously bends down and pulls weeds.

Food for Thought

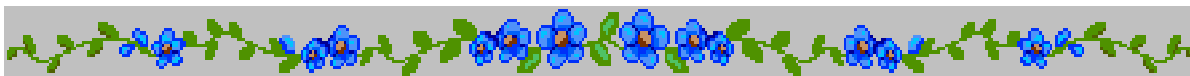


"Tomatoes and oregano make it Italian; wine and tarragon make it French. Sour cream makes it Russian; lemon and cinnamon make it Greek. Soy sauce makes it Chinese; garlic makes it good."

- Alice May Brock

Interested in Showing your Garden to an out of town Master Gardener?

Mary Shier recently had an email from an Ohio Master Gardener who will be in Anchorage on Wednesday, August 13th. Mary has agreed to pick her up and show her some local gardens. Please contact Mary if you are interested in sharing your garden. She can be reached by phone: 345-1562 or email: mshier.anch@juno.com



Bird Chatter

The newest addition to the Hancock Family:
Mina Rae Hancock - 7 lbs even, 19 1/4" long
Cute as can be.

Gardening Rule: When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.

A black bear run through Mary Shier's garden, knocking over a compost bin, and was chased up a tree by her garbage-can-lid-wielding husband, who has been nicknamed "The Gladiator"....

Want to know how to get tall stakes when the stores are all sold out of them about the time your delphineums are falling over? Duct-tape 2 together. Voila! Tall stakes!

Communication

While attending a marriage seminar on communication, Morris and his wife listened to the instructor declare, "It is essential that husbands and wives know the things that are important to each other."

He addressed the man, "Can you describe your wife's favorite flower?"

Morris leaned over, touched his wife's arm gently and whispered, "Pillsbury All-Purpose, isn't it?"



An expert is a man who has made all the mistakes which can be made in a very narrow field.

-Niels Bohr, physicist (1885-1962)

Building the Ultimate Alaska Raised Box Garden

By Michele Hébert

Many years ago I added fresh horse manure to the family vegetable garden to improve the soil texture and add a slow release fertilizer. The manure provided both those benefits but what I did not expect was a chickweed problem. A problem is putting it mildly! Chickweed blankets the soil, sucking up water and nutrients and decreasing growth of desired vegetables. This is when I went from gardening in beds to raised boxes. The boxes are built to make it easier to control chickweed. There are other benefits to raised box gardening. The elevated box makes gardening easier on the back. Also important for Alaska, the raised box warms the soil increasing plant growth. Over the years I have experimented and developed a method for building the ultimate Alaskan raised box. It starts with the right location.

A vegetable garden should get a minimum of 6 hours of direct sunlight, but 24 hours is better. Keep in mind plants make their own food out of sunlight. Find a spot close to a water source, near a house for harvesting and with road access for adding soil and amendments.

Build the raised box out of lumber that resists rot but is safe to use in the garden. Gardeners have two alternatives to the CCA treated lumber, which contains arsenic. There are woods treated with Ammoniacal Copper Quaternary ACQ and recycled plastic lumber. Plastic lumber can be sawed and drilled. Look for these at local hard wares and lumber yards. A good size box is 4 feet wide by 8 feet long by 20 inches high, made from 2 by 12 inches by 8 feet long treated lumber. Every 4 feet, put in a cross brace to keep the box from bowing out. Put 1 to 2 inch closed cell foam in the bottom of the box. This is sometimes referred to as blue board. This type of foam will not breakdown as will white Styrofoam. The foam is very important as it keeps the cold from moving up from the ground during the summer. Next I line my boxes with geotextile fabric or Tytar and attach it to the top edge with a heavy-duty stapler. This keeps the tree



roots, roses, and raspberry plants from growing up into the box to get water and fertilizer.

The plants roots and annual tillage will be in the top 10 inches of the soil. The bottom 10 inches can be for a rich nutrient reserve. Fill the bottom half of the box with fresh manure, compost, worm casting or other rich forms of organic matter. Fresh manure is especially good, as it will provide bottom heat as it decomposes. Because of the concern with weed seeds be sure not to disturb this bottom layer when turning the soil in the spring.

Fill the rest of the box with a potting or garden soil. A good mix contains 50% peat, 30 percent coarse sand and 20% garden loam or silt. Now it is time to add to the soil the nutrients and good bugs, bacteria and fungi that help the plants grow. Incorporate several inches of organic matter such as compost or well-rotted manure. Add natural fertilizer that releases nutrients slowly. Rock phosphate, green sand, dolomite lime, wood ashes, and sulfur are good choices. Add 5 pounds of lime, 5 pounds of rock phosphate, 3 pounds of green sand, 1 quart of wood ashes and 1 pound of sulfur per 100 square feet of bed. Be sure to mix these powders thoroughly through the box of soil. The beds are now ready to plant.

Once planted, I cover my boxes with 3/4 inch PVC arches and Visqueen. This provides added protection in the early days of summer. The plastic can be left on all summer for warm season crops such as cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers. By mid June it will be time to start mulching with a weekly light applications of grass clippings. Be sure not to use grass that has been treated with herbicides such as weed and feed. As the clippings decompose, they will release nutrients into the soil. This system keeps the fertility of the soil high enough to support good growth. Manure teas or weak soluble fertilizer solutions can be used during transplanting to bathe the roots in nutrients. Fertilize midway through the growing season with soluble fertilizer. Experiment to find out what works best for you.



For information about membership or upcoming programs, contact:
Cooperative Extension Office
2221 E. Northern Lights Blvd.
Anchorage, AK 99508
Phone 786-6300
Fax Line 786-6312

Gardening Calendar

August 2-3

Anchorage Garden Club: 60th Annual Flower Show- Free - noon-9 p.m. Saturday, 9 a.m. - 6 p.m., Sunday, ABG. Public is welcome to place entries. Call 566-0539

August 7

Anchorage Garden Club: "Pests and Beneficial Organisms of the Anchorage Community Forest" presented by Corlene Rose; Pioneer Schoolhouse, lower level; located at 3rd and Eagle Streets; 7:30 p.m. Programs are free and open to everyone.

August 9

Alaska Botanical Garden Second Saturday - gift shop open, Master Gardener/I PM Clinic, special presentation, Alaska I kebana Society @ 1 p.m. - 770-3692

August 12

Alaska Rose Society Meeting - 7 p.m. Centennial Rose Garden on Delaney Park Strip. Contact Lonnie Chace, 345-5725

August 14

Wildflower Garden Club meeting, "Water Gardening in Ponds and Bogs," 10 a.m. Meet at Sally K's, 7435 Old Harbor Ave., 333-8237

August 18

AMGA Garden Tour - Amelia Walsh's garden, followed by a Potluck at Gina Docherty's - [see article page 2]

August 24

Herb Study Group meeting- 7:30 p.m. - meet @ the ABG herb garden. Contact Mary Shier, 345-1562

Sept 4

Anchorage Garden Club: "Potentially I nvasive Garden Plants to Handle With Care" presented by Julie Riley; Pioneer Schoolhouse, lower level; located at 3rd and Eagle Streets; 7:30 p.m. Programs are free and open to everyone.

Sept 10

United Way "Day of Caring" Cleanup day at the ABG - 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Volunteers needed. 770-3692

Sept 11

Wildflower Garden Club meeting - Gardening for Wildlife - Julie Riley, CES, will speak on how to encourage "wanted" wildlife into your garden. Central Lutheran Church, 277-7150



The Anchorage Chapter of the Alaska Master Gardeners Association welcomes letters, opinions, articles, ideas and inquiries. Contact the editor, Gina Docherty, at:

Mail: 4006 DeArmoun Road
Anchorage, AK 99516

Phone: 345-4099

Email: gardener@corecom.net

AMGA Web Site: www.corecom.net/~gardener
(The Newsletter will be on-line in living color!)

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Anchorage Chapter
University of Alaska Cooperative Extension
P.O. Box 221403
Anchorage, Alaska 99522-1403**

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