

February 2014

Central Peninsula Garden Club



PO Box 767 · Kenai, Alaska 99611 · www.cenpengardenclub.org

February 11th Program—

USDA Hardiness Zones

Presented by **Velma Bittick, Extraordinary Farmer, Master Gardener & CPGC Board Member**

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What are Hardiness Zones & What Do They Mean?

What's Yours & Why?

Explore Our Zones & What Factors Change & Influence Them

Learn Ways to Locate, Modify, & Exploit your Mini-climates & 'Sweet Spots'

Velma is an amazingly knowledgeable farmer/gardener. One of the board members said after our last meeting at which time Velma expounded on many gardening details.... "I want her to adopt me." She won't be adopting anyone soon, but for the February 11th program, Velma will have zone maps and the opportunity for all to try to identify their individual zones. In our area it is definitely possible to have several micro-climates/zones in close proximity. We are generally a zone 3 area, but then there are 2.5 areas or 3a, 3b, 3c and 4a, 4b, and so on. Terrain, windy coastal areas, shady forested areas, etc. all play a role. Try to figure out how many zones/sub zones you might have prior to the meeting and see how close you come.



Velma with her beautiful cauliflower harvested from the high tunnel garden.

Velma Bittick was raised on a farm and farmed in Idaho where they grew and harvested row crops, forage crops, cattle (beef and dairy), swine, and poultry. She also operated a licensed and bonded custom combining and trucking company and they were certified seed producers.

She moved to Alaska in 1982 and faced new set of farming challenges. Velma said, "I believe anyone who works the soil is a farmer, be it a small garden plot, flowers, or a large farm holding." She continued, "Our connection to the soil is universal. We "farm" two locations, one in the Echo Lake area, and one on the shore of Longmere Lake: different soils, mini-climates and weather conditions."

Continued on page 2.

Velma Bittick *Continued from page 1*

She and husband Tom Gotcher, have multiple large growing areas, large fenced gardens, three greenhouses, a 30x64 high tunnel, a 10x20 mid tunnel, and many raised beds. They also built 3 systems of self watering grow buckets (31 total) and use floating row covers. They work honeybees for pollination and honey, raise chickens for weed and insect control plus valuable manure for fertilizer. The eggs are a wonderful bonus. They also have a large vermiculture system and compost extensively.

Velma's most valuable farming assets are:

- My Husband Tom, carpenter, plumber, electrician, mechanic, partner extraordinaire (Thanks Honey).
- My Son Bo, heavy equipment operator, welder, fabricator, lots of muscle.
- All the growers, friends and sources here in Alaska.
- Our little tractor.
- Everything I learned from my father, and his love of the soil.



Cucumbers in grow buckets.



High tunnel "line dancing" of sorts as Velma identifies their many beautiful vegetable varieties

Velma and Tom's current projects involve completing 2000 feet of 8ft fence around all growing areas, finishing retaining walls on our terraces, erecting a new 20x30 high tunnel for plants that require HOT temperatures plus planting berry plants she has been propagating for three years into new and permanent locations. They are also working toward getting all grow areas set up with drip system watering.

Of special interest to Velma is maintaining a large variety of family heirloom plants from her grandparents and parents farm in Idaho dating back to the 1920's. She stated, "Most have adapted very well. Propagate from the survivors and you end up with a hardy strain." She grows about 95% of her starting plants, and propagates berries and perennials. "I'm an Idaho spud farmer who is now having a great time with 13 varieties of gourmet potatoes (in Alaska)," said Velma. "I want to keep my inputs as natural and organic as possible, as we eat what we grow (85% of our food); I think the ultimate goal is to operate harmoniously and efficiently within the boundaries of your particular system, making it important to know your zones!

Program time: 7pm
Location: Cook Inlet Aquaculture Building, mile 16.5, K-Beach Road.
Open to the public. Refreshments and sometimes door prizes.

A Correction



In the January 2014 CPGC newsletter Board of Director stories and pictures, Lee Bowman's "picture" showed a fabulous cauliflower but only half of Lee. He thought I had played a bad joke on him, and I thought he had sent this half-image as a joke, but not so for either of us. He was very puzzled why I would harass him for his picture (which I did) and then cut his head off!! Cruel, dumb joke, thought he.

For whatever reason, I received his half-image via email, so to set the record straight, here's the wonderful, whole body image of Lee, still holding that marvelous cauliflower. He's a patient man...and a great gardener along with his wife Julie.

~Marion Nelson

Something to Consider (as heard on NPR)

Soil, Weed killers & GMO's
 When Numbers don't tell the Whole Story—
<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2014/01/24/265687251/soil-weedkillers-and-gmos-when-numbers-don-t-tell-the-whole-story>

"My skeptical inquiry into statistics on herbicide use, soil erosion, and the production of fruits and nuts."

By Dan Charles, Jan 27, 2014

January 14th Program - Dart AM Farms

January 14th program presenter, John Robert Dart, is shown telling about his energy reduction plans at Manley Hot Springs. His unique geothermal influenced farming efforts and engineering plans were extremely interesting to the large audience. John enjoyed presenting his program to our club and the warmer-than-North Pole temperatures here.

We'll post a link for his presentation material, available in a month or so. If you want a DVD disk of the John's presentation, contact Linda Dunn, 283-7857.



Book Review: *Guns, Germs and Steel*

Author: Jared Diamond. Published 1999, W.W> Norton & Co. New York and London

The book attempts to provide a short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years. Why did history unfold differently on different continents?

In Part 2 of the book, the author talks about the rise and spread of **food production**. He gives an historical account of where many of the original food groups began and the causes of the spread of food production. Why did food production spread at different rates on different continents? In some areas the peoples failed to domesticate plants which put off their production for thousands of years. He also talks about wild mammal species that were domesticated and those that were not.

The book goes on to describe the histories of the oldest continents and their expansion. It is a very interesting perspective for farmers and gardeners.

~ Contributed by CPGC member, Liz Dowler Ph.D., CPE, OT/L, CRC; dr.liz.dowler@gmail.com; (our very own PHD Ergonomist!)

The No-Vole Gardener by Brandy Nelson

We decided it was time to get a cat when we noticed large populations of voles had taken up residence in the flower beds.

We tried unsuccessfully to rid them ourselves but they were stubborn to say the least. We also noticed they were stealing my peas as they poked out of the ground after being planted. I'm sure they were a tasty snack. We went to the Homer Animal Shelter and my daughter chose a long haired fluffy female kitten. She was and still is adorable. The boys decided to name her Cooter and it stuck. After getting her settled in and healthy, she became the best mouser we could imagine. We played hunt & chase games with her so she would have a strong desire to hunt and chase.... those voles -and it paid off as we no longer have a vole problem!

She loves our chickens and will hang out with them occasionally.

She is antsy to get out in the garden again and start hunting this spring. Cooter is wonderful cat and great gardening helper!



Will's Ramblings by Will Hightower

Cooking

It is time for me to come clean. I like to cook and I watch cooking shows. Combining cooking with raising more of our food has made me a fanatic. A fanatic is something I have never wanted to identify with. My motto is 'moderation in all things,' but here I am. It is January 23, 2014 and this morning, for breakfast, we ate hash browns from potatoes julienne prepared last November. This evening I created a homebuilt spaghetti sauce using the last of the season's tomatoes, harvested yesterday.

Last year Monti happily carried home the "Multi Slicer," a gadget that slices and juliennes (thick and thin) produce. Remembering that we had at least one slicer on site, my first thought was there was room on the shelf beside the pasta maker that arrived a few years ago and has never been never used. Bad for a husband to think such thoughts.

You could say I'm into potatoes. I maintain that I'm not fanatical, but each year we have a more than ample supply of potatoes. During harvesting, some spuds are injured but still useable. Last November I was salvaging potato parts, but what to do with them? Hash browns, they could be made into hash browns - one of my favorite ways to have potatoes. Of course, any way potatoes come is very likely the way I like them.

From my "vast" experience, I knew that French fries or hash browns take a long time to fry from raw stock and are often not the best end product. So, I whipped out that gadget "juliener" and made potato strings. After slicing, I would mound a pile of 'strings' on a plate and micro zap the pile for 3 minutes. Breakfast sized portions were placed in plastic bags and frozen. When needed, the contents of a bag is placed in a frying pan with some olive oil. The potatoes are even better with some chopped onion and still better with chopped, leftover meatballs. A bag of meatballs is often in the fridge, but that is yet another story.

Each spring we have a large tub of potatoes in storage that 'takes up sprouting', which results in very substandard spuds. I can envision the freezer with many bags of "potato strings." Potato food security at its best!

Two days ago, maybe three, Monti gently reminded me that the plants on third floor needed watering. This is where we grow the main tomato crop. Last spring I set up a "self watering" container operation. The whole system worked fairly well. We got a good crop of tomatoes and a few cucumbers. The problem was the flavor of the tomatoes was not the best and the plants were indeterminate. Picking fruit twelve feet up in a gable ceiling is a problem! When the holidays hit I wrote off the growing operation for the season. Monti was not in this information loop. Another problem was I never quite completed the watering system. Yesterday I lugged two buckets of water to third floor. When I arrived the watering system was dry and the plants very dehydrated, still a little green. There were a number of ripe tomatoes, still in good shape. I placed the tomatoes in an empty water pail and displayed the harvest to Monti. Her reaction was "I hate to see them go to waste". They could have joined their frozen comrades languishing in plastic bags in the freezer, I suppose. Instead I spent the evening in the kitchen developing "Will's Spicy Spaghetti sauce". Very tasty over whole grain spaghetti - not from the pasta maker. I wrote up a recipe, but next time I'll cut back on the cayenne pepper!

At last, I think, the 2013 garden is closed out. I have ordered strawberry plants and am fighting over a high tunnel, so the saga continues, it's just labeled 2014.

**Refreshing Libations
for Your Next
Garden Party!**



Country Liquor
140 S. Willow St.
Downtown Kenai
283-7651

Preparing for Spring Hydroponically By Cheryl Beeson

Gardeners love to gain knowledge that they can apply to their gardening, but they also love to learn in a general sense. So I hope that my description of how we get ready for spring will appeal to that general interest in growing plants.



Cucumbers growing in Nutrient Film Technique system and melons growing in vertical system in Steve & Cheryl Beeson's hydroponic greenhouse.

We are blessed to have a heated greenhouse, which we operate hydroponically. All seeds are started without soil in perlite. This week I started pepper seeds, and will start the rest of the seeds in late January. The seedlings are kept under fluorescent lights until they are large enough to transplant into the greenhouse and they are fed with liquid solutions. We don't use pesticides but do use chemical fertilizer solutions developed for specific plants. We used to transplant into the greenhouse in early March until 2006, the year the Peninsula hosted the Arctic Winter Games. That March it was 20 below at night with a high of zero during the day. The plants survived but the heating bill was crazy. Now I look at long term weather forecasts before planting, but we still transplant sometime in March.

We grow tomatoes, cucumbers and lettuce in adapted sewer pipes using the Nutrient Film Technique. The plants sit in styrofoam cups in holes in the pipes with their roots in a continuously flowing nutrient solution. Peppers and squash grow in tubs in hydroton (inert clay balls) using an ebb and flow technique, where pumps flood the tanks with a nutrient solution about six times a day. Herbs are grown in a vertical sewer pipe with a rotary sprinkler continuously misting the roots. Plants grow quickly, have large leaves and produce prolifically.

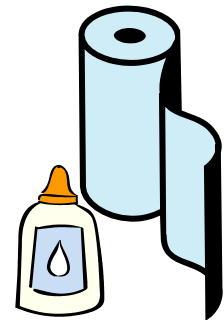
In October the construction of our high tunnel was completed and because we had such a warm fall, we were able to transplant strawberries, blueberries and apple trees into the high tunnel before the ground froze. Hopefully they will all survive. We are excited to begin—we'll be growing familiar plants (carrots, potatoes, broccoli, cabbage, kohlrabi) and attempting new plants (asparagus, artichokes, corn). We mixed soil until our piles froze, using Don St. John's soil recipe. It feels like a huge learning curve but we're so excited to get going, and we so appreciate the way everyone who has gone before us willingly shares what they've learned!

Make Your Own Seed Tapes by Nikiski Master Gardener, Margaret Simon

Ready to dig in the dirt? Me, too! How much longer?

Being a gardener who finds it difficult to thin any row of vegetables that have had the energy to emerge from the ground no matter how 'thick' the rows are, I wondered if seed tapes might work for me. The only problem, I couldn't find my favorite seed varieties available in tape. Could I make my own? That is precisely what I did on a few snowy days last winter. You know what? It worked beautifully for me. I didn't have to thin and was rewarded with an abundance of nice-sized root vegetables last summer.

If you are one of those who finds it hard to thin those rows, then end up with undersize, stressed veggies, try this technique. Here's how. Get a biodegradable roll of paper towels, a bottle of nontoxic Elmer's glue, and your seeds. Since I have raised beds which are 4' or 8', I cut strips of paper towels that length. One inch wide will do. Using the tip of the glue bottle, dab 'dots' on your strips spacing appropriate to whatever seed you're using. With a tweezers, drop one seed per drop of glue. Place another strip of paper on top. Carefully press the two strips together. Let dry. When dry, roll up, and store in a cool, dark, moisture-free place until you're ready to plant in May or June. Good luck.



<p>KENAI FEED & SUPPLY  www.kenafeed.com MILE 14.5 K-Beach Rd. 907-283-1929</p>	<p>HIGH TUNNELS ORGANIC FERTILIZER PEAT • SEEDS FENCING LIVESTOCK & PET FEED/SUPPLIES PRODUCE</p>	
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Hot Tips on Tomatoes!

Here's the list of favorites from CPGC Board members, Cathy Haas, Velma Bittick, Lee Bowman and Don St. John. I can taste the BLT's right now.

1. Lee Bowman

Orange Paruche - Orange cherry, best flavor for eating

Campari - Medium red, grows well, prolific, good flavor

Principe Borghese - Small Roma style, great flavor, very prolific, stores very well in the fall

Rutgers Large Red - Very prolific, good flavor, good for sauce

Long Keeper - Large red, good production and flavor, stored very well. We still have a few in the basement.

2. Cathy Haas

Tomato Berry - Red cherry, indeterminate variety. Source, Park Seed.

Orange Paruche - Orange cherry indeterminate. Source, Park Seed.

Nugget - Very sweet, oblong orange cherry, indeterminate. Source Park Seed –through Don Adams.

(I don't have a recommendation for a larger tomatoes yet, but will keep trying.)

3. Don St. John

Black Cherry, 64 days to maturity; open pollinated

Large, sprawling, indeterminate, regular-leaf, vigorous tomato plants that yield abundant crops in huge clusters of 1", round, deep purple, mahogany-brown cherry tomatoes. Fruits are irresistibly delicious with sweet, rich, complex, full tomato flavors that burst in your mouth, characteristic of the best flavorful black tomatoes. Once you try it...you want MORE.

4. Velma Bittick

EARLY GIRLS—HYB, SLICER, 55-70 days, RED med size fruit, indeterminate and bush varieties, prolific, taste is not spectacular, but is a good reliable producer, and I grow a few plants every year. Good for beginning tomato growers because it ALWAYS produces tomatoes.

LEMON BOY— HYB, SLICER, 70-75 days BRIGHT YELLOW med size fruit, indeterminate, wonderful flavor, heavy producer, I love this tomato

EVA PURPLE BALL— HEIRLOOM< OP, SLICER, 75 days, round 4-5 oz fruit RED FLESH, Indeterminate, very good flavor

BURPEES JUBILEE— HEIRLOOM< OP,SLICER, 75 day DEEP GOLDEN ORANGE, Indeterminate,mild flavored 3 inch globes. Some fruit have a bit of red at the blossom end. An All American Selection tomato.

BLACK FROM TULA— HEIRLOOM <OP, SLICER, 75-85 days. This is not a pretty tomato, good yields of flattened reddish brown globes,8-14 oz. Superb, rich full flavor. Indeterminate.

PURPLE CHEROKEE— HEIRLOOM< OP, SLICER, 85 days, DARK PINK FLESH, purple shoulders, Fruits are large but few, complex flavor that I love so I always grow a plant or two. Indeterminate

TIGERELLA— HEIRLOOM<OP, 55-65 days,RED-ORANGE STRIPED SKIN, Rich tangy flavor, Indeterminate, 2-3 in globes, high yields

BOX CAR WILLIE— HEIRLOOM< OP, 80 days, RED FRUITS,high yields, better than most hybrids, 8-14 oz, old fashioned sweet, tart flavor, crack resistant, disease tolerant. Indeterminate

PEAR TOMATOES— HEIRLOOM< OP, CHERRY TYPE, 70-75 days Vigorous,long term producers, good flavored cut-ies. Indeterminate

SUNGOLD— HYB, 65-70 days, CHERRY TYPE, ORANGE fruit sets on long trusses, productive, have a sweet sweet tomato flavor. I love this one.

CHOCOLATE CHERRY— HEIRLOOM< OP, 70 days, 1inch fruits, round with dark purplish brown skin, complex flavor. Indeterminate.

TINY TIM MINIATURE CHERRY— 55 days, 12-18 inches tall, bear cherry size RED fruits, Like to tuck these into small odd places, containers and hanging baskets.

PRINCIPE BORGHESE— HEIRLOOM<OP, 75 days RED PLUM, 1-2 oz, meaty with few seeds, excellent flavor and yields, great for drying. Determinate

NOTE from Velma: ED HUME SEEDS carries OREGON SPRING, SIBERIA, SILETZ, STUPICE, SILVERY FIR TREE, and LEGEND tomato seeds. They were all developed in Oregon for colder areas. For those who have no indoor facilities to plant tomatoes, these do well outside in a protected area (wind sheltered south exposures next to a building) with cover available when temps drop into the 40's.

Upcoming CPGC Events & Volunteer Opportunities!

Volunteers Needed:

Volunteers Welcomed & Appreciated! It's your club.....

-Special event booth staffing, workshop host, few times a year: Home Show in April, Workshop Weekends -May, Ninilchik Fair - August. Contact Cindy Barnes, alaskancindy@yaho.com or 262-1395

-Program Committee. Meets occasionally. Contact Marion, mmkn@ptialaska.net

-Publicity Volunteer. Help with flyer distribution or PSA's. Contact Velma Bittick, velee@acsalaska.net or 252-7579

-Hospitality Committee. Help with registration desk, clean up, room set up, refreshments. Contact Juanita Owens, - samowens0969@yahoo.com or (318) 557-9876

-Backup Videographer/photographer for programs and workshops. Contact Linda Dunn, lindadunn78@gmail.com or 283-7857

-Tech backup. Power Point programs and mike set up for programs, occasional workshops. Contact Don St. John, 394-4474.

-Sea Ag Fertilizer Fundraiser Order pick up on Saturday May 10th. Volunteers needed for 3 hours. Contact Don St. John, 394-4474.

-Occasional guest speaker lodging. Great opportunity for more expert information. Contact Marion, 283-4632.

-June through September – Weekly summer flower bed maintenance and clean up at the Aquaculture Bldg. Light weeding and some planting. The entrance bed plantings are a thank you to CIAA for meeting room use throughout the year. We appreciate this valuable contribution. Contact Peggy Morris, 262-8374.

Programs:

-February 11: ZONES! Velma Bittick, Board member, Master Gardener, extraordinary local farmer.

-Date TBA: Alaska Flour Company from Delta Junction Barley growers. Might include a workshop.

-March 11: TBA

-March 29: Get Ready For Spring! Half Day Event. Location, Kenai Visitor Center. Round Tables with many topics.

-April 7: Cut Worms, Root Maggots & Slugs! What to do About Them and How.

-April 12-13: Home Show booth. Contact Cindy Barnes to volunteer for booth staffing.

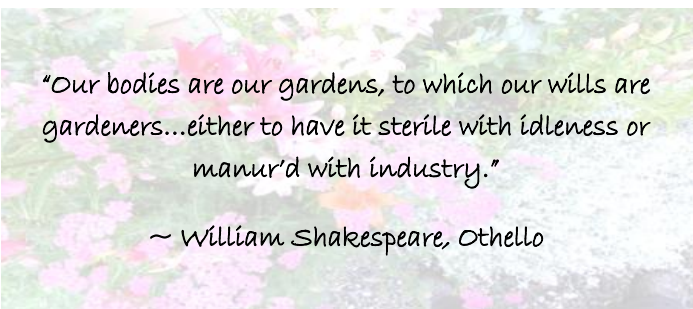
-May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31: Workshop Weekends! 4-8 workshops every Saturday. Help host, schedule, present a workshop. Contact: Liz Dowler - dr.liz.dowler@gmail.com, Juanita Owens- samowens0969@yahoo.com, Marion 283 4632

-June 14: Annual Plant Sale! Early plant drop off evening of 13th and then pre sale plant drop off on the 14th.

-June, July, August: Local garden tours. Ideas welcome.

-How about a tour to another part of Alaska? What gardens do you want to visit?

To place ads, submit stories or pictures, contact Marion Nelson, 283 4632 or mmkn@ptialaska.net
 Newsletter layout/production—Pam Voeller & Becky Holloway



Treasurer's Report, January 2013

Beginning Balance:	\$15,823.34
Income:	
Dues	\$800.00
Expenses:	
Monthly Program	(\$74.50)
Tech/Equipment	(75.67)
Ending Balance:	\$16,473.17
Submitted by Peggy Morris, Treasurer	

Heads Up on the Annual SeaAg Fertilizer Fundraiser Sale

March-April-May with Delivery May 10th

No Price Change! Yay!

Alaska Granular Fish

10# Jug \$25
 50# Bag \$40

Kelp
 1# Bag \$25

