

November 2016



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

Growing Winter Squash

with Velma Bittick, the Queen of Winter Squash!

Join us on Tuesday, November 8th to hear Velma Bittick share her secrets of growing beautiful, tasty winter squash on the Central Peninsula.

Velma is a former CPGC board member and frequent presenter at CPGC events. She was raised on a farm and is a local produce and berry grower at Arena Valley Acres. You may have been the lucky recipient of one of her winter squash as a raffle winner at one of our CPGC monthly meetings.

Velma will share with us her experience growing winter squash: planting procedures, squash pollination, and harvest information. She will also take questions from the audience and answer your specific questions.

Join us at the November meeting and bring a friend!



Program Date: Tuesday, November 8 **Time:** 7:00 p.m.
Location: Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association building,
Mile 12.5 K-Beach Road Free and open to the public!
Refreshments: Bring something to share if you can

2016-17

Board Members

President & Publicity

Renae Wall

Vice President & Newsletter

Sharon Gherman

Secretary & Hospitality

Kay Gardner

Treasurer & CIAA Beds

Peggy Morris

Director, Plant Sale, & Historian

Cathy Haas

Director & Tech Committee

Don St. John

Director & Programs

Ron Homan

Director & Special Events

Lee Bowman

Director & May Seminars

Liz Dowler

Director & Summer Tours

Kathy Hobart

Director & Sea Ag sale

Della Bridenburg

Will's Ramblings

Time to Revisit Raised Beds *by Will Hightower*

It is September 29th. October is two days away and October is time to pour cement. Does not everyone wait until October to pour cement? If you come to our house, you will find each concrete pour dated and they are all poured in October. When we lived in Crown Point we even had a November pour, we did not know if the pour had cured or frozen until the next spring.



This afternoon I was spreading gravel for a tool shed floor when a member called me about raised bed construction. She started out by referring to a handout from a class on raised beds that Monti and I presented in the “Neighbor to Neighbor” program a few years back. It blew my mind that someone found it worthwhile to keep a handout that we did.

The member’s question was what to place in the bottom of the box. Gravel was under consideration. They had placed tympar under the raised bed box and thought that gravel in the bottom of the box was needed for drainage. The boxes under consideration are 2 foot tall, with a need for lots of material to fill the box.

I cannot tell you what will work for you, but I can just relate what has worked for me. Many years ago I became tired of “stoop gardening.” My back and knees ached from crawling on the ground and the weeds were winning. I tried raised rows. No real improvement, in fact the weeds did even better.

My first off-the-ground containers were boxes 2 foot by 8 feet long and 2 foot high. This size was arrived at because plywood cuts to these sizes with no waste. I made a 2X4 frame around the outside. The problem with long boxes is they require midpoint support or they will bow out. For me, 2 foot by 4 foot and 2 foot high proved to work the best.

These were/are bottomless with ground contact. At first I would just set them on the ground and fill them up with whatever “dirt” I had. I had them all over the place. At the peak there were 34 boxes around the place.

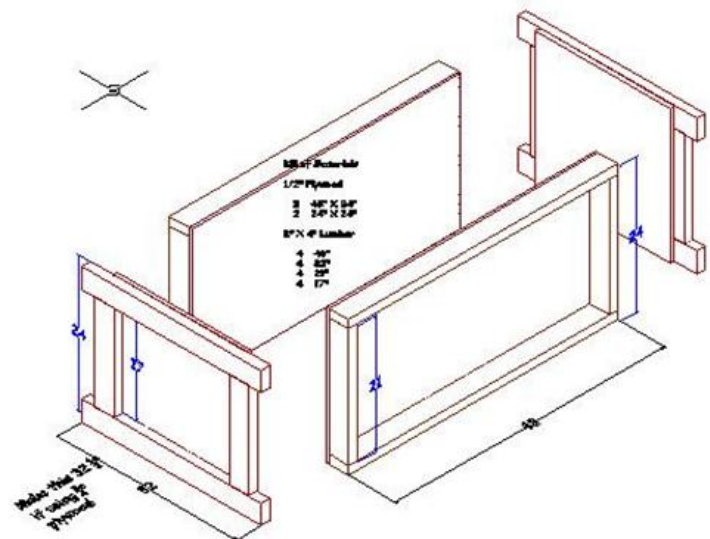
In time, some of the boxes rotted or needed to be moved for some reason. We live at the edge of the woods and I found that the boxes had filled with tree roots. Tree roots also live in the top layer of the ground and will run a long ways to find food. This also explained to me why the boxes did poorer

over time. At this point typar was introduced under the boxes. The typar was extended past the edges of the boxes for weed control around the outside. As far as we have observed, tree roots have not worked their way into the boxes. Now, there may be some very healthy roots living on the drainage liquids going through the typar. The insides of the boxes have not become a giant mass of roots.

Remember that the growing zone of a garden is the top 8 inches of the soil, no matter whether the 8 inches are at ground level or 2 foot above grade. This leaves me with 16 inches of fill that will not be used by anything growing. There is no gain to fill the 16 inches with good garden soil. I have filled this area with brush, sand, old garden pots, etc. I even filled two boxes with junk wool that Monti could not salvage. Depending on physical characteristics of the fill material, you want to fill the container right to the top. When the garden soil is added and watered, the whole mass sinks. In fact, the soil mass will sink during the first growing season leaving room to add new compost.

The boxes that I filled with brush or wool have been moved and when opened there was no sign of the fill material, just dirt. The boxes also act as compost bins. If you do not have tree roots, you might have rich garden soil.

At some point all my boxes have been unloaded of their dirt; if I had used gravel in the bottom then I would have to deal with dirty gravel and subpar garden soil. You know how it is when you use rocks in the bottom of flower pots. Water will drain through typar into the ground (got to feed those tree roots.)



Of more interest in the bottom of a bed is a cold barrier: Alaskan soil stays cool all year. People who practice Lasagna gardening have mitigated this problem somewhat by first laying down a thick layer of newspaper. In a couple years the paper will be gone but the wood pulp will act as a barrier. This is also called recycling.

When filling my boxes I have started with a thick layer of paper, followed by brush, hay, grass, leaves, whatever might be put into compost. This might be followed by a thin layer of newspaper to keep the stuff above from dribbling through the brush too fast. Next I place a layer of sand, which in time will be mixed into the dirt. The next to the last layer is the homegrown compost. This comes from my discarded old boxes or wherever. There might still be some material not yet broken down. Last, but not least, is my good soil. To me the boxes are a never ending cycle of soil rotation, but the weeding is way easier. My back thinks that is great.

Oh, the November cement kind of froze and was gone in three years. Just flaked away.

Composting Through the Winter

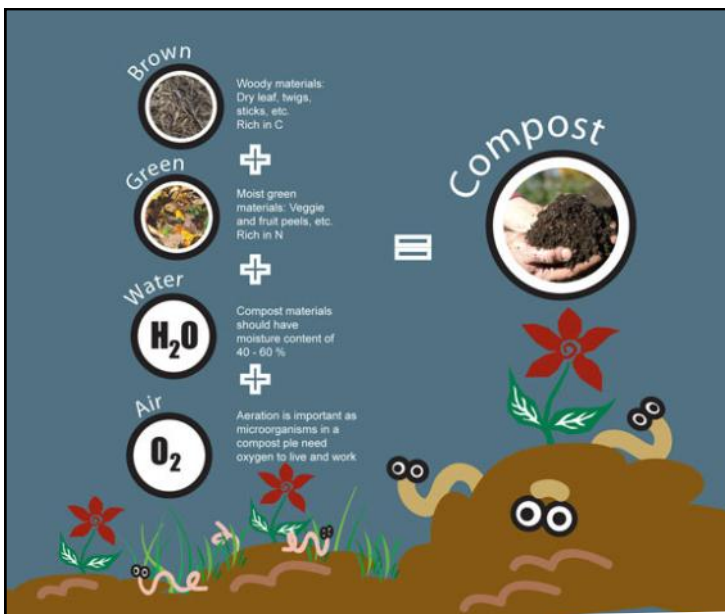
By Sharon Gherman, CPGC Newsletter Editor

Composting is rotting or decomposition, plain and simple. When temperatures reach “refrigerator temperatures” (35-40 degrees) in the compost bin decomposition slows, and when freezing temperatures arrive composting stops. That means that outdoor composting on the Kenai Peninsula doesn’t continue once freezing temperatures arrive.

Composting here has always taken more attention than in the Lower 48 where the weather remains above freezing throughout the winter. And although composting here through the winter can be challenging, it can be done.

Here are some basics if you’re just getting started composting:

Think greens and browns – you’ll need a combination of green plant parts and dry, brown plant parts. Greens can be fruit, livestock manures, alfalfa pellets, veggie or plant trimmings. Greens provide the heat in a compost pile. Browns can be dry plant parts or shavings, newspaper, and just about any product made from plant parts. Browns provide the bulk in a compost pile.



Composting no-no's: include grease, fat, meat scraps or bones (except for fish), domestic animal manures (dog and cat), weeds with seeds, and anything treated with poison (like pressure-treated wood).

There are several options that will allow you to continue recycling plant matter into valuable garden compost through the winter:

Add plant matter to your outdoor compost pile throughout the winter with the understanding that it won’t begin to decompose again until temperatures rise to above freezing. You should have any outdoor compost pile located inside a sturdy moose- and bear-proof fence to keep critters from raiding the frozen goodies on top of your pile before warmer temperatures arrive.

An alternative to this method is to freeze small quantities of kitchen waste in your freezer and turn them into the compost pile outside once it’s decomposing again.

If you have a high tunnel, *composting inside the tunnel* during the winter will give you a significantly longer period of decomposition on both ends of the growing season. An added benefit is that once planting time arrives, your compost is right where you need it without having to haul it.

If you have a high tunnel, *composting inside the tunnel* during the winter will give you a significantly longer period of decomposition on both ends of the growing season. An added benefit is that once planting time arrives, your compost is right where you need it without having to haul it.

Compost in black trash bags. This works especially well for leaves. If you rake your leaves into black trash bags, tie them closed and stack them on the south side of your garage or house, they

will turn into leaf mold, aka “black gold” by planting season next year.

Compost indoors – in a bin either in your house or heated garage or workshop. This is the method I use most often.

Composting indoors uses worms instead of heat to decompose plant matter. It’s a cooler method of composting – the worms eat, digest and eliminate the waste matter into worm castings rather than heat doing the decomposition job as it does in a larger pile outdoors.

Although you can purchase a variety of “worm composting factories” at your local feed store or online, worm composting doesn’t have to be expensive or complicated:

Start with a covered tub: I use a large Rubbermaid bin with a lid, but you can use any container that has a tight-fitting lid. Drill 3/4” holes around the top of the sides, and add five or six 3/4” holes through the bottom of the bin. I set my bin on several bricks inside a cement mixing pan so any liquid will drip through.

Once your bin is ready, add a layer of shredded paper or newspaper to the bottom. Add a cup or two of water and mix it up. Now you’re ready to add worms.

Composting worms can be bought online for \$20 – \$30 a bag, and the local feed stores usually carry them. Worms bought online may appear to have a lot of dead worms in the bag when they arrive, but add them to your moistened paper anyway since the bag is also full of worm eggs that will hatch and populate your bin. If the worms arrive in a cloth bag, turn the bag inside out and bury the bag with the worms – it will decompose.



Once worms have been added, you’re ready to begin adding green and brown matter to the bin. During the winter my indoor compost bin consists mostly of leftover trimmings from the kitchen plus shredded paper from my office.

Keep the lid on the bin (worms escape!) and keep the contents moist – but like a wrung-out sponge, not soaked. Each time I add trimmings, I dig a hole in the existing compost and bury my trimmings, then cover them with a bit of shredded paper. If the bin is looking dry, I add an inch or so of water to my kitchen compost pail before I dump its’ contents into the bin.

Using shredded paper also helps keep the little gnats at a minimum. Gnats are bothersome (and they are why my compost bin isn’t located inside my house), but with shredded paper on top of the bin contents, they’re manageable.

You can continue to add trimmings all winter. When spring planting arrives, I dump my entire bin (including worms) into one of my raised beds. Then before digging the compost into the garden bed, I return a shovelful of the compost and worms into moist shredded paper in the bin as a “starter” for next time. Then it begins all over again. I’m able to add a full bin to the garden at the beginning of the summer and again at the end of summer.

Happy composting!

What's New at Kenai Soil & Water?

SOIL HEALTH - We have collected the first year of data from 4 area farms to show how mixed cover crops (oats, field pea, buckwheat and forage radish) with two different fertilizer treatments improve soil health. The District is doing this project in collaboration with UAF Cooperative Extension agent Casey Matney and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Public presentations are in the works. Stay tuned for details!

MARKET SURVEY - Starting in November, the District will survey farmers, local retailers, restaurants and other wholesale buyers as part of a systematic effort to understand the Central Peninsula market for locally grown produce. Funding for this project comes from USDA Rural Development.

FARMERS & CHEFS - On Tuesday, Nov. 1 at 6:30 pm, come to a panel discussion and conversation about getting more locally-grown food into area restaurants. The event is at Odie's Deli in Soldotna and co-sponsored by Kenai Soil & Water and the Farm Bureau.

NOMINATIONS OPEN - Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District's core purpose is nurturing healthy soil, water and agricultural practices. The District has been in operation since statehood. We're a locally-controlled, public entity governed by a volunteer board, and we get things done -- with no state funding at present. We are accepting nominations to the board through Nov. 21.

For more information on any of the above, contact Heidi at kenaiswcd@gmail.com or 283-8732 x 5 or stop by at 110 Trading Bay, Suite 140 in Kenai. "Like" Kenai Soil & Water on Facebook to stay abreast of new events.



-- Submitted by Heidi Chay, District Manager, Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District

TAKE THE \$5/WEEK ALASKA GROWN CHALLENGE

By spending \$5 a week on Alaska Grown products, you'll help local farmers, boost the local economy, increase Alaska's food security, and eat better too.

Homer Garden Club to Meet

Les Brake will be presenting at the Homer Garden Club monthly meeting at 2:00 this coming Sunday. Like our monthly meeting, they welcome guests, so feel free to attend! The meeting will be held at the Best Western - Bidarka (downstairs) from 2:00 - 4:00 on Sunday, 575 Sterling Highway in Homer. Enjoy!

KENAI FEED



HIGH TUNNELS * NRCS FINANCING
ORGANIC FERTILIZER
HEIRLOOM SEEDS
DRIP IRRIGATION & FENCING
LIVESTOCK & PET FEED
WWW.KENAI FEED.COM
SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER!



MILE 14.5
K-Beach Rd. **907-283-1929**

Summer Garden Tours Recap *by Kathy Hobart, Summer Tours Chair*

Jeff Babitt's Alaska Homegrown

On August 2nd the Central Peninsula Garden Club Summer tour went to Jeff Babitt's Alaska Homegrown. We learned about his operation supplying lettuce greens to a local restaurant and other locations. There were many



tunnels in various stages of growth. The other tunnels contained more family crops such as beans both green and purple, cucumbers, and tomato. Pigs and goats were in several other tunnels. Next year Jeff is planning on having 2 acres under plastic, he has modified the tunnels to meet his needs. Thank you so much Jeff for all your time and effort giving us all a delightful tour.



Program Recap: Tuesday, October 11

Jodie Anderson on SOILS

Those of us who attended Jodie's May Weekend Workshop on Soils and Understanding a Soil Analysis Report knew we were in for a treat at the October meeting, and Jodie didn't disappoint!

Jodie Anderson is a soil scientist and former director of the Alaska Community Horticulture Program with the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She has done research on fish composting, and potato viruses in non-commercial growing environments. After working on her PhD in soil biochemistry, Jodie is now a consultant in Palmer. She gives presentations and workshops around Alaska on topics such as compost, potato, and soils, and she's an informative and entertaining speaker.

Jodie's presentation covered the basics of soil – its texture, chemistry, and biology. Once you understand these things about your soil, a soil test can reveal the specific problem(s) with your soil.

If you missed the October meeting, you missed a great presentation. We hope to have Jodie back again for May Weekend Workshops next year, so plan to attend!

Thanks, Jodie, for a great presentation!

Call 252-5064

LANCASHIRE FARM

Garden Supplements:

Mulching Wool \$150/1b	Brown Hay \$5 Bales	Sheep & Chicken Manure 5 Gallon Bucket \$500
------------------------	---------------------	--

Summer 2016 Treasurers Report

Beginning Balance: **\$ 25,495.17**

Income:

Dues	\$ 350.00
Sea-ag	\$ 1,865.00
Donation	\$ 86.00
Saturday Seminars	\$ 545.00
T-shirt	\$ 25.00
Plant Sale	\$ 3,135.00

Expenses:

Historian	\$ (13.90)
Expenses for Conference	\$ (412.92)
Sponsor Montessori School fruit trees	\$ (495.00)
Soldotna Chamber dues	\$ (75.00)
Sea-ag	\$ (3,934.13)
Web Hosting	\$ (300.00)
Home Show	\$ (10.15)
Printing	\$ (323.04)
KP Fair	\$ (500.00)
Homer Garden Club	\$ (200.00)
Kenai Food Week	\$ (500.00)
Plant Sale	\$ (265.00)
Saturday Seminars travel/materials	\$ (774.63)
NSF Check	\$ (111.00)
4-H Salad Bowl Project	\$ (250.00)
Storage Rental	\$ (330.00)
Chef at the Market	\$ (600.00)

Ending Balance: **\$ 22,406.40**

Submitted by Peggy Morris, Treasurer

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



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