MAT-SU MASTER GARDENER'S NEWSLETTER

Mar 2014

President's Patch

By Rhonda Bowman, President

I can't believe how fast this winter has flown by. It certainly has helped getting out of state a couple of times this year. I recently went to the Phoenix area and was a little shocked all the brown landscape. Sometimes I think we take it for granted how beautiful our scenery is in Alaska even in the winter.

Planning for our spring planting is certainly on my mind and have already received some seed packages in the mail. I am also starting some flowers for my friends and Mom so I've gotten extras. The last newsletter had a great article from Deb Blaylock on starting seeds and transplanting. No matter how much you plant it is always good to go over this information because we all get caught up in the excitement of planting. Now is a good time to look over your tools, rakes and hoes to make sure that they are in good shape. Wooden handles should be wiped down with a wood oil and tools need to be clean and rust-free. If you do have rust you can use naval jelly to remove it or your handy grinder if it's surface rust. If you use knee pads or a kneeling pad make sure that they are in good shape or invest in a new one. This little item I received as a stocking stuffer has been one of the most appreciated items when I am weeding or planting.

Our new website name now appears as www.matsumastergardeners.com and please make sure you look it over. It is amazing. We really appreciate all the hard work that Eva and Steve have put into making it a success.

Hope to see you at our March meeting on the third. I also wanted to thank you for your input during our meetings and your support.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER MEETINGS
FIRST MONDAY OF THE MONTH

NEXT MEETING
MONDAY, MARCH 3, 7:00 PM
LOCATION: MTA CONFERENCE ROOM, PALMER
DO NOT HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO ATTEND

MEETING AGENDA

- TREASURER REPORT
- MINUTES
- OLD BUSINESS
- NEW BUSINESS
- QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

SPEAKER:

STEVE BROWN, MAT-SU CES AG/HORT AGENT

Topic: Fertilizers and Soil Amendments

PEASANTS PERSPECTIVE

By Curt Mueller, Master Gardener

To paraphrase an oft quoted truism, "You may take a peasant out of the country but you can't take the country out of a peasant." This peasant has spent a fair part of his life wrestling the steering wheel of a tractor, well before the days of power steering and other user-friendly machinery innovations. When our present neighbors moved in across the street from us they brought with them a Farmall Cub. For years it sat in the same spot, silently rusting away, the tires going flat, no cap on the fuel tank; it was forlorn indeed.

It runs. Needs more work.

The country was still a part of the peasant, so finally he told the owner he'd like to get the tractor running. She said, "Well, I'll give it to you!" So here's the peasant with a 1955 Farmall, which had been used on a strawberry farm in Florida and ended up in Alaska.

You may well ask what this has to do with gardening in Alaska. It is this. In years past, tillage methods had changed little on farms as the switch was made from horsepower to tractor power. It was easy to overdo tillage with tractors. Then people began to realize that the soil would remain in better condition if the amount of tillage was reduced. Soil structure would be better and less erosion from wind and rain would take place. Farmers went to minimum tillage and then to no tillage. They used equipment designed to plant in crop residue, and chemicals when going to no-tillage.

We are all familiar with garden tillers, and indeed they are useful tools. There is a danger in over-using these machines, however, in that they can ruin good soil structure by over-working the soil. This can result in compacted soil which resists water infiltration and aeration. Often more tillage is used to break up compact soil. Another factor is that weed seeds that have lain quiescent deep in the soil will be brought close to the surface where they are able to germinate.

We need to go easy on the amount of tilling we do. In fact, we can go to minimum tillage or no tillage without the use of chemicals and raise really good crops. Indeed a good seed bed is needed for germination and friable soil for transplants. Mulches, fabrics, raised beds, and composts are some ways we can cut down on the amount of soil disturbance and maintain plant requirements. It will pay off in better crops and less expense and labor.

Give it your consideration.

STRAWBERRIES FOR SOUTH–CENTRAL ALASKA

Submitted by Deb Blaylock, Master Gardener

Strawberry types include *June bearers*, ever-bearers and day-neutrals. June-bearers produce only one crop per year, in July/August. In some parts of Alaska, ever-bearers are grown as annuals, fruiting the same year they are planted and plowed under after fruiting. *Day-neutrals* produce a crop almost continuously through the normal growing season.

The fruit of ever-bearers and day-neutrals typically is smaller than that of June-bearers, and total yields often are lower. However, the advantage in growing day-neutrals along with June-bearers is that you can harvest fruit for most of the growing season. Note that day-neutrals are the best choice for fresh fruit throughout the season, as they have a longer fruiting period and better fruit quality. Unfortunately, retail nurseries often lump day-neutrals and ever-bearers together as "ever-bearers."

Successful strawberry growing is greatly influenced by selection of the cultivar most suited for the location. Tolerance of extreme cold temperatures and photoperiod are important characteristics in selecting June-bearers. Cultivars for consideration in South-central Alaska perennial beds include:

•'Pioneer' (earliest fruiting, Alaska variety, low quality fruit, hardy with no mulch, hardy in Interior Alaska)
•'Matared' (early fruiting, Alaska variety, excellent quality fruit, mulch for hardiness)
•'Susitna' (mid-season, Alaska variety, excellent quality, winter hardy if mulched)
•'Skwentna' (mid-season, Alaska variety, distinctive flavor, excellent frozen fruit)
•'Toklat'(mid-season, Alaska variety, hardy in Interior and north, large berry)

Day-neutral strawberry cultivars to consider growing in South-central Alaska include:

•'Tristar' (early fruiting, hardy, disease resistant and adaptable)
•'Tribute' (hardy, disease resistant and adaptable)
•'Fern' and 'Selva' (not hardy but may be adaptable in Southeast as perennials or elsewhere in annual production systems)
Ever-bearer cultivars successfully grow in annual production systems in Fairbanks include 'Quinault.' 'Fort Laramie' (hardy) is worth considering as an ever-bearer or in annual production systems.

Establishing the planting

Soil preparation

Strawberries grow best in well-drained, reasonably fertile soil. A good supply of organic material worked into the soil improves aeration, drainage and water-holding capacity. Apply organic matter the year before planting if possible. If you use fresh or woody organic matter, add ammonium nitrate at 1 pound per 100 square feet to aid in decomposition.

Before planting, apply 1 pound of 10-20-20 fertilizer (or equivalent) per 100 square feet. If you use manure, decrease the fertilizer rate by one-half.

In soil that drains relatively slowly, you can improve strawberry plant growth by planting on raised beds about 10 to 12 inches high.

Planting

Purchase certified, disease-free plants from a reputable nursery. If you use runners from an old, established patch; they may be diseased. Plant strawberries in early spring as soon as the soil can be worked.

Dig a hole for each plant large enough to place the roots straight downward but somewhat spread. The midpoint of the crown should be level with the soil surface, and the top root should be just below the soil surface (Figure 3). Irrigate the plants as soon as they're planted.

The matted-row and hill systems are the most common training methods for strawberries (Figure 4). The hill system is preferred for ever-bearers and day-neutrals because they don't produce as many runners as do June-bearers. June-bearers usually are grown in a matted row; however, they can be grown in either system.

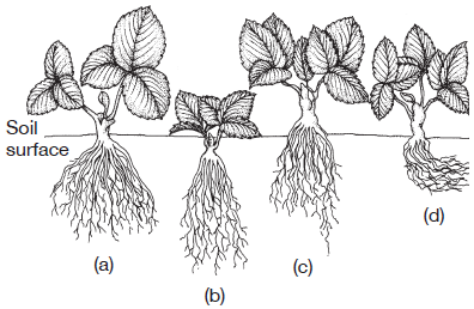

Figure 3.—(a) Proper planting depth for strawberries. (b) The crown is too deep. (c) The crown is too high. (d) The roots are bent and remain near the surface.

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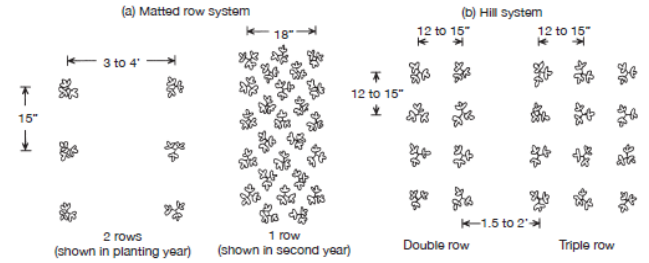

Figure 4.—Proper spacing for strawberry plantings: (a) Matted row system; (b) hill system.

In the matted-row system, set plants 15 inches apart in the row or raised bed, with 3 to 4 feet between rows (Figure 4a). Allow the runners that form from these "mother" plants to take root; they will form a matted row 18 inches wide. Keep the remaining 1½ to 2½ feet between rows clear by sweeping early-forming runners into the row and by cutting off late-forming runners.

The hill system is ideal for cultivars that produce few runners, such as ever-bearers. Set plants 12 to 15 inches apart in double- or triple-wide rows (Figure 4b). Aisles should be 1½ to 2 feet wide. Remove all runners that develop throughout the growing season.

First-season care

For June-bearers, some gardeners remove all flower clusters during the planting year. Young plants may be stressed if allowed to produce fruit the year they are planted. If crown and leaf growth are limited, the following year's yield will be decreased.

For ever-bearers and day-neutrals, remove only the first flush of flowers, allowing flower clusters formed after July 1 to develop fruit. This allows plants to become well established before fruiting.

On a few occasions during the summer, cut off all runners from plants growing in the hill system. In the matted-row system, most of next season's crop will come from the mother plants plus runners that develop and root before September. Ideally, position runner plants as they develop to attain about five runner plants per square foot of matted row. Place a little soil just behind each runner plant to keep it in place. Once this density is achieved, remove all other runners. A simple method is to remove all runners that have not rooted by September 1.

Cultivation and weed control

Weeds compete with shallow-rooted strawberry plants for water and nutrients. Hoe often enough to destroy weeds and keep the soil loose. Use sawdust, bark or clear or photoselective plastic film to suppress weeds, conserve moisture and keep fruit clean. Be aware that some mulches may lead to increased slug populations. Row covers and IRT plastic mulch are useful in warming the soil and air.

Fertilizing

If plant growth is weak and leaves are light green in color, add additional nitrogen fertilizer 6 weeks after planting. Broadcast ammonium nitrate at a rate of ½ pound per 100 square feet of row. Make a similar application in mid-summer if the plants lack vigor.

Broadcast the fertilizer when foliage is dry. Avoid placing fertilizer directly on crowns because they can be burned. If necessary, remove fertilizer from leaves and crowns with a brush or sprinkler irrigation.

Watering

Strawberries are shallow rooted. To obtain maximum growth and yield, never let them be stressed by lack of water. Keep new strawberry plants well irrigated throughout their first season.

Article adapted from UAF-CES HGA-00339, Sustainable Gardening: The Alaska Master Gardener Manual, author/sponsor: Heidi Radar. For more information refer to UAF-CES HGA-00235, Growing Ever-bearing Strawberries as Annuals in Alaska, A Technique for High Yields

USDA Hardiness Zones Explained

Hardiness zones are based on the average annual extreme minimum temperature during a 30-year period in the past, not the lowest temperature that has ever occurred in the past or might occur in the future. Gardeners should keep that in mind when selecting plants, especially if they choose to "push" their hardiness zone by growing plants not rated for their zone. In addition, although this edition of the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map (PHZM) is drawn in the most detailed scale to date, there might still be microclimates that are too small to show up on the map.

Microclimates, which are fine-scale climate variations, can be small heat islands—such as those caused by blacktop and concrete—or cool spots caused by small hills and valleys. Individual gardens also may have very localized microclimates. Your entire yard could be somewhat warmer or cooler than the surrounding area because it is sheltered or exposed. You also could have pockets within your garden that are warmer or cooler than the general zone for your area or for the rest of your yard, such as a sheltered area in front of a south-facing wall or a low spot where cold air pools first. No hardiness zone map can take the place of the detailed knowledge that gardeners pick up about their own gardens through hands-on experience.

Many species of plants gradually acquire cold hardiness in the fall when they experience shorter days and cooler temperatures.

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MatSu Master Gardener Meeting 2/3/2014

Called to order by Rhonda Bowman, President at 7:05pm
Officers present: Rhonda Bowman, President-Curt Mueller, Vice President-Marg Mueller, Member at Large, Jan Bass, Secretary; and 19 regular members and officers present.
Minutes read by Jan Bass, accepted by membership.
Treasurer's report was not given as treasure was not present.
Old Business:
Currently 22 paid club members.
New Business:
Eva Brown reported on the new -. Com- website and presented some of the potential costs attached. She discussed the one year contract option and the five year contract option for this new .com website. A motion was offered by Sue Wallin, 2nd by Wayne Bowman to accept the one year contract. The motion was approved by membership.
Proposed - A change to scholarships increasing individual scholarships to $500.00 from $250.0 was discussed-tabled at this time.
Proposed - A grant to "Natural Connections" of approximately $500.00 benefiting the agriculture program at Palmer High School. This proposal was tabled until more details regarding the programs needs were explored.
Proposed - City of Palmer 'Adopt a Garden' program. A community garden - the first one in the city of Palmer. The members discussed this proposal and sounded supportive. The discussion was tabled until more details become available.
Mentor program was floated to the membership discussed for linking new MG graduates to senior members. No action was taken.
Question and Answers-none
Adjournment was called at 7:35, 2nd by Anita K.
A lively and entertaining program by Sue and Paul Wallin on Worm Ranching. Paul and Sue built a worm box and at the end of the program held a drawing for one very lucky member.

Respectfully submitted by Jan Bass

High Tunnel and Season Extension Grower Training: Mat-Su & Anchorage

Discover how to overcome Alaska's cold climate challenges by extending the spring and fall growing season. This special course focuses on successful growing vegetables, flowers, and herbs in greenhouses, hoop houses/high tunnels, cold frames, low tunnels, and other innovations. Season-extending enclosures invite higher risk of disease and pests. Come learn about managing these, plus advantageous crop selection, soil nutrients, and irrigation systems. Glean in-depth information about efficient production growing methods (organic & inorganic), as well as marketing strategies if you plan to sell what you grow. Save yourself years of costly mistakes. Snap up this rare blast of knowledge offered by Dr. Jeff Smeenk and Ellen Vande Visse.

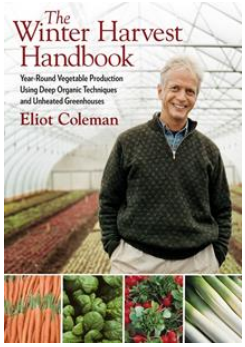
Note--you'll need Internet access at home for email and to download the many resources.

Mat-Su:
Three Wednesdays:
March 26, April 2, and 9.
3pm - 7 pm

Anchorage:
Three Tuesdays:
March 25, April 1, 8
3pm - 7 pm
$65 includes lab fees

To register, please go to the website -- www.goodearthgardenschool.com

We recommend you buy this text for the course



The Winter Harvest Handbook, by Eliot Coleman

UPCOMING GOOD EARTH GARDEN SCHOOL CLASSES

Class	Location	Date & Time	Tuition
Worms & Vermi-Composting #2 *Disappear your garbage, create fertilizer, & prevent flies*	**Anchorage Anchorage Wildflower Club Central Lutheran Church 15th & Cordova St**	**Thursday, March 13 10am**	**Free, Public welcome**
Worms & Vermi-Composting #3 *Disappear your garbage, create fertilizer, & prevent flies.*	**Anchorage** Directions on website	**Tuesday March 18 7pm - 8:30pm**	**$23**
Composting—Perfect Your Pile! Ellen's workshop at the ***Alaska Botanical Garden Spring Conference*** Keynote Speaker: Roger Doiron, Kitchen Gardeners International	**Anchorage Hilton Anchorage Hotel**	**Keynote on Friday, March 14 6:30-8:30pm** **Workshops on Saturday March 15 9:30am-5:30pm**	**Register at** www.alaskabg.org
Organic Gardening ***The Comprehensive Growers Course*** MSC course # Agri 138 *-This is a 6-part class-*	**Mat-Su Valley Mat-Su College** Room: JKB 123	**Total of 5 Friday Evenings 6pm-8:30pm March 21, 28, & April 4, 11, 18; Plus Field trip on Monday April 21**	**1 credit = $154** *or Senior Citizen Tuition Waiver* Register by calling 745-9746 (Phoning is way easier than on-line)
How To Grow Delicious Organic Veggies *Secrets to Nutrient-Dense Vegetable Production*	**Anchorage Alaska Mill & Feed**	**Saturday March 29 10am repeated at 1pm**	**Free** But you **must** sign up by calling **276 6016**
Gardening Outside the Box #1 *Partner with the Joyful Devas & Nature Spirits*	**Palmer Artemisia Acres** Directions on website	**Friday March 7 7-9 pm**	**$35**

To Register: Go to www.goodearthgardenschool.com under "GEGS classes"
Questions? Email information@goodearthgardenschool.com

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This hardiness is normally lost gradually in late winter as temperatures warm and days become longer.

A bout of extremely cold weather early in the fall may injure plants even though the temperatures may not reach the average lowest temperature for your zone. Similarly, exceptionally warm weather in midwinter followed by a sharp change to seasonably cold weather may cause injury to plants as well. Such factors are not taken into account in the USDA PHZM.

All PHZMs are just guides. They are based on the average lowest temperatures, not the lowest ever. Growing plants at the extreme of the coldest zone where they are adapted means that they could experience a year with a rare, extreme cold snap that lasts just a day or two, and plants that have thrived happily for several years could be lost. Gardeners need to keep that in mind and understand that past weather records cannot be a guarantee for future variation in weather.

Other Factors

Many other environmental factors, in addition to hardiness zones, contribute to the success or failure of plants. Wind, soil type, soil moisture, humidity, pollution, snow, and winter sunshine can greatly affect the survival of plants. The way plants are placed in the landscape, how they are planted, and their size and health might also influence their survival.

Light: To thrive, plants need to be planted where they will receive the proper amount of light. For example, plants that require partial shade that are at the limits of hardiness in your area might be injured by too much sun during the winter because it might cause rapid changes in the plant's temperature.

Soil moisture: Plants have different requirements for soil moisture, and this might vary seasonally. Plants that might otherwise be hardy in your zone might be injured if soil moisture is too low in late autumn and they enter dormancy while suffering moisture stress.

Temperature: Plants grow best within a range of optimum temperatures, both cold and hot. That range may be wide for some varieties and species but narrow for others.

Duration of exposure to cold: Many plants that can survive a short period of exposure to cold may not tolerate longer periods of cold weather.

Humidity: High relative humidity limits cold damage by reducing moisture loss from leaves, branches, and buds. Cold injury can be more severe if the humidity is low, especially for evergreens.

This was just a brief explanation of how the USDA planting zones affect gardens and plants. Want to find your particular location's hardiness zone? Just enter a Zip Code into the query box and the website will determine the approximate plant hardiness zone. For even more information, go to the Interactive Map tab and zoom into a particular location on the map. Maps are available for download under the Map and Download tap. Explore the site and enjoy!

(adapted from the US Department of Agriculture Website: http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/ , 20 Feb 2014)

Garden Links

Alaska Botanical Garden
http://www.alaskabg.org/

Alaska Community Agriculture
http://www.alaskacommunityag.org/

Arbor Day Foundation
www.arborday.org

Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearinghouse (AKEPIC)
http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu/botany/akepic/

Alaska Garden Clubs
http://www.alaskagardenclubs.org

Alaska Grown Source Book (online) **New**
http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/sourcebook/index.htm

Alaska Master Gardeners Association, Anchorage Chapter
http://alaskamastergardeners.org/

Alaska Master Gardener Blog
http://alaskamastergardener.blogspot.com/

Alaska Native Plant Society
http://www.aknps.org/

Alaska Peony Growers Association
http://alaskapeonies.org

Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Assoc..
http://www.apfga.org/

Alaska Plant Materials Center
http://plants.alaska.gov/

Alaska Rock Garden Society *UPDATED*
http://www.akrockgardensociety.org/

Cooperative Extension Service, Palmer
http://www.uaf.edu/ces/districts/matsu/

Eat Local Alaska
http://akfood.weebly.com/index.html

Integrated Pest Management Program
http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ipm/

Junior Master Gardeners
http://www.jmgkids.us/

Landscape Plants for Alaska
www.alaskaplants.org

Local Alaskan Plants Clearinghouse
http://www.localplants.org/Home

Mat-Su Borough Rain Garden Cost Share Program
http://www.matsugov.us/planning/environmental-division/rain-gardens

Mat-Su Master Gardener Website
http://www.matsumastergardeners.com/

Master Gardener Research Link
http://search.extension.org

Master Gardeners of the Tanana Valley
http://interiormastergardeners.org/

Palmer Soil & Water Conservation
http://palmersoilandwater.org/

South-Central Alaska Beekeepers Assoc.
http://www.sababeekeepers.com/

Southeast Alaska Master Gardeners
http://www.seakmg.org/

UAF Cooperative Extension Service Publications
http://www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs/catalog/

UAF Georgeson Botanical Garden
http://www.georgesonbg.org/

UAF CES Citizen Pest Monitoring Portal
http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ipm/cmp/

University of Saskatchewan Fruit Program
www.fruit.usask.ca

USDA/NRCS Plant Data Base
http://plants.usda.gov/java/

Wasilla Soil & Water Conservation
http://www.wasillaswcd.org/

Announcements

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Know of an upcoming event or organization which needs our help? Let a board member know!

2014 MATSU HOME SHOW BOOTH

It's that time again for the spring 2014 Mat-Su Home Show, April 4th - 6th. I would love to have some volunteers to work the booth with me. I know springtime is when folks start thinking gardening and home remodeling so anyone with information on those subjects would be greatly appreciated. Each time I work one of these home shows, I'm reminded by people how wonderful the Cooperative Extension is and how helpful we are to the community. Carmen Kloepfer. To volunteer, contact Carmen at 907-474-5854 or email: cckloepfer@alaska.edu .

Club Membership

The membership year runs from January to December each year. Annual individual memberships are $10 and family memberships are $12.

Membership forms are available to download and/or print on the club's website.

thank you

CLUB CONTACT INFO

President:	**Rhonda Bowman**	**746-2948**
Co-VP	**Curt Mueller**	**745-6144**
Co-VP	**Hally Truelove**	**376-0909**
Secretary:	**Jan Bass**	**373-6208**
Treasurer:	**Cathy Crew**	**632-4401**
Member at Large:	**Marge Mueller**	**745-6144**

If you have gardening news, photos or information you'd like to share in the newsletter, please contact: Deb Blaylock @Email: djblaylock@alaska.edu

Website: www.matsumastergardeners.com/
Email: matsumastergardeners@gmail.com

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2014

MARCH

Mar 3, Palmer, MMG Mtg, Fertilizers/Soil Amendments
Mar 11-13, Fairbanks, Sustainable Agriculture Conference
Mar 14-15, Anchorage, 2014 Alaska Botanical Garden Spring Conference

APRIL AND BEYOND

Apr 7, Palmer, MMG Mtg, Growing Berries
Apr 19, Anchorage, Sears Mall Spring Garden Show
May – Aug, Palmer, Friday Flings
May 5, Palmer, MMG Mtg, Propagating Blueberries
May 31, Palmer, Annual Plant Sale
Jun 2, Palmer, MMG Mtg, Library Planter
Jun 6-9, Palmer, Colony Days
Jun 19, Anchorage (ABG), Midsummer Gala in the Garden
Jun 28-29, Anchorage (ABG), Boreal Garden and Art Festival
July 7, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD
Aug 4, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD
Aug 21 – Sep 1, Palmer, Alaska State Fair
Sep 8, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD
Oct 6, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD
Nov 3, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD
Dec 1, Palmer, MMG Mtg, TBD
Dec 12-14, Palmer, Colony Christmas
Dec 13, Palmer, Colony Christmas Parade

How and what to Submit for the Monthly Newsletter

Your submissions are greatly appreciated and make our newsletter what it is – so don't be shy about submitting items for publication. However, there are a few rules which we all must pay attention to:

Articles, stories, poetry, upcoming events, and pictures (garden-related) are gladly accepted for inclusion in the newsletter. Please submit pictures in JPEG format and other items in Word format with no special formatting other than paragraphs. If you don't have computer access, please submit your article or item neatly and clearly written so the newsletter editor can easily read it. When submitting pictures, please provide a brief caption or explanation as to who or what is in the picture. I do not have a scanner to copy pictures so I cannot accept hard copies.

If you are not the author or photographer, please ensure you have permission of the author or photographer to use their material in the newsletter. The newsletter editor is not responsible for obtaining this for you.

Please do not provide magazine articles or pictures from the internet unless they are public domain items. ~~ **Thank you**~~

March 2014

Website: www.matsumastergardeners.com/
Email: matsumastergardeners@gmail.com

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MAT-SU MASTER GARDENER'S CLUB
PO BOX 585
PALMER, AK 99645