



MAT-SU MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER

Nov 2018



President's Patch

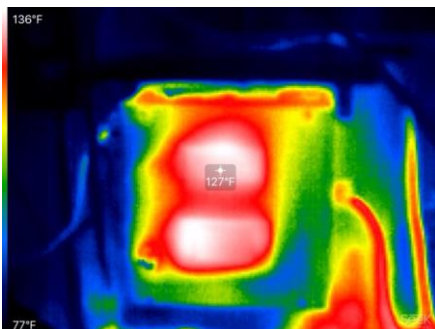
By President Michael Kircher

Okay, why is it warmer in Palmer than in Massillon, Ohio where Phyllis and I are staying? El Niño seems to be having a tempering effect on our weather in Alaska. If the weather forecast is accurate then Palmer will not have a freeze until the end of the month. We still have some carrots in the ground that I will harvest when we get back. I imagine that you folks up on Lazy Mountain and the Butte have had at least a mild frost by now.

I tucked the bees in before we left for the United States; putting two inches of blue foam insulation on three sides and the top and leaving the front uninsulated. The theory is that moisture will condense on the coldest section, the front, and run down the front and out the bottom board instead of falling on the bees. I also installed a three-and-a-half-inch box with a screened bottom into which I put paper litter that looks like cellulose insulation to use as a "dehydrator box". This sets on top over the inner cover and under the outer telescoping cover. We'll see how that works.

In another note, no more lawn mowing, yeah! But it's time to dig out the snow shovels and ice melt and change over the tires. How long is it to Spring?

Here's a thermal image of one of my hives. I'll be taking these periodically during the winter to monitor their progress.



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GENERAL MEETINGS FIRST MONDAY OF THE MONTH

NEXT MEETING

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 5TH AT 7:00 P.M.
LOCATION: MATANUSKA TELEPHONE COMPANY (MTA) BUILDING, MEETING ROOM (IN THE BASEMENT), 480 COMMERCIAL DR., PALMER, AK

DO NOT HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO ATTEND

SPEAKER/TOPIC

ANNUAL MEETING

HOW TO MANAGE A SUCCESSFUL WORM BIN WITHOUT FLIES & STENCH!

PRESENTED BY:

ELLEN VANDEVISSE, GOOD EARTH GARDEN SCHOOL

PEASANT'S PERSPECTIVE: BY CURT MUELLER, MASTER GARDENER

Photos submitted by the author

The peasant is in his fiftieth year in Alaska and has never seen an autumn quite like this. As this is being written we're nearing the end of October and the dahlias are still blooming with no frost damage. This brings up some observations of frost dates and frost prone areas. At the peasant's elevation of about 550 feet we often miss the first hard frost which occurs in river bottom areas sooner. The coldest air sinks to the lower levels on a cold, quiet night and spares areas that are a bit higher in elevation.

In springtime the situation is different. Our elevation warms more slowly. In fact, when wild roses start to bloom in Palmer we can expect to wait a couple of days before they pop out here, and you've probably observed how the green color of vegetation moves slowly up the mountain day by day when trees are leafing. Interesting phenomena indeed.

We gardeners keep trying to grow non-native perennials here, some of which are marginally hardy. Many years, the fall season is of very short duration with quite cold weather happening in late September or early October, with the soil beginning to freeze. Some plants don't begin to harden off until the equinox, so if they're very cold sensitive they may not have enough time to complete the hardening off process. There may be winter dieback, or they may not survive at all. Certainly, the fall of 2018 has been kind to perennials.

The subject of hardiness brings up another factor. A very late start in spring growth can leave a plant in vulnerable straits, especially if the summer is cool with much overcast. Consider the stress on a bare root tree

when it is planted in spring; the soil is cold, and the roots take a long time to redevelop. It's better to plant one that has been container grown, or to put a bare root one into a container for the growing season, then plant it out in the fall or following spring. A good summer growing season is crucial for marginally hardy plants.

Most of you are aware of the idiosyncrasies and variability of our Alaska seasons and know to take steps to mitigate potential problems. How much we can depend on warming trends to help us in our gardening is questionable. The peasant can only say that he remembers some very tough winters. Even a winter with no snow cover and moderately cold weather and wind can be hard on our plants. Mulching certainly helps. We live in a subarctic zone and that won't change for a while. It could be said though, that we are able to grow a greater variety of plant material than 30 or 40 years ago.

Thanks, folks. We will never quit trying!



Forty years ago, this English primrose might have been difficult to find growing in Alaska. Today it thrives and provides beauty and a light fragrance in the peasant's perennial bed.

THE REAL DIRT ON SOIL: PART VI – FINAL THOUGHTS

BY JOE MOORE, MASTER GARDENER CANDIDATE



Credit: USDA-NRCS

This concludes the *Cliff Note's* version of soil science for general gardening and agriculture. Successful gardening requires managing or 'working' the soil to sustain a fertile soil. Knowing both the properties of your soil and the crops you want to grow will help you develop good management techniques to sustain and enhance production. Learn as much as you can about your soil by using the ***Soil Survey of the Matanuska and Susitna Valley Area, Alaska*** (<https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>) or contacting the USDA-NRCS. Do initial soil tests and periodic retesting to understand your soil's nutrient status and what amendments are needed and in what quantity. UAF Cooperative Extension Service provides numerous information resources to assist your gardening and crop production.

Below are some tips based on my knowledge of Alaska soils and personal gardening experience. They are only my opinions; get more information wherever you can. Every garden is an ongoing experiment and most gardeners will share what they are learning.

What is the best garden location?

In Alaska, we need all the solar radiation possible, so a site with good exposure to the southeast, south, or southwest is best. Nearly

level ground is usually preferred. A convex or hilly site will drain well and warm more rapidly in the spring but become droughty during dry periods. A concave or depressional site will be cooler, collect runoff, and may occasionally become too wet. When homes are built, soil material excavated for the foundation is spread adjacent to the home to achieve a proper grade level. This results in subsoil now overlying the most fertile soil layers. Locate the garden away from the house where the soil has not been disturbed and mixed.

Should I use the existing ground soil or purchase soil?

It all depends on your existing soil type, the plants you want to grow, and what alternative sources you have for soil. The silty soils of the Matanuska Valley, especially those that overlie glacial outwash, are some of the best agricultural soils in Alaska. Almost all organic matter and nutrients, however, are contained near the soil surface. If clearing native ground, retain as much of the near surface layers as possible.

If your in-ground soil is mostly sand and/or gravel, or densely compacted, you should consider purchasing soil. When purchasing, evaluate the soil texture and organic matter content (darker is better) before buying. Even soil sold as 'valley silt' has been excavated somewhere and is dominantly subsoil material; you will need to add organic material. Some vendors will manufacture soil by mixing together organic matter (usually peat), sand, and silts. If you are growing crops that require a specific soil texture, you may be able to purchase a manufactured soil custom-mixed for your need.

What is the best way to improve my soil?

Organic matter, organic matter, and more organic matter!!! Organic matter will increase the cation exchange capacity or the ability to hold nutrients.

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Organic matter will increase the available water-holding capacity of the soil. Organic matter will improve the soil structure as it helps lower the soil bulk density and develop loose granular or subangular blocky structure; facilitating root penetration and water movement. Organic matter will improve nutrient content over the long term as it slowly releases nutrients to the soil. Remember that composted materials are preferred. Green or raw organic matter will work, however, existing nitrogen in the soil will be temporarily depleted as microbes use it to decompose the new organic material.

I am fortunate to have deep silty soil for my in-ground garden. Over many years, I have continually added organic matter in the form of compost, tilled-in cover crops, and dried grass clippings. I now have a fertile, dark, loose soil with a pH of 6.8 that I no longer amend with manufactured fertilizers. Recently, I filled some large elevated beds with good soil taken from a portion of my in-ground garden. I then backfilled the excavated area in my in-ground garden with silty subsoil a neighbor had excavated from a building project. As a simple experiment, while planting the in-ground garden, I planted seeds and starts in both the well-managed soil area and the new backfilled area. The difference in growth form, plant vitality, and yield was overwhelming between the two areas. I firmly believe adding organic matter is your most important soil improvement tool.

To till or not to till

There are diverse opinions regarding tillage and no-till farming has become the norm in the lower 48. Research in Alaska has not clearly supported no-till methods in a cold climate. Tillage does disrupt existing soil structure, disturb mycorrhiza networks, and bring weed seed to the surface. My experience, on a silty soil, is that tilling considerably helps to increase the near surface soil temperature and dry the soil in the spring; enabling me to plant sooner. I've tried tilling and no-till and have now settled on lightly rototilling my garden once each spring.

How much to water

Surprisingly, we live in a fairly dry environment for agriculture. The Palmer area averages about 15 inches of total precipitation (including snowmelt) per year. Precipitation increases westward toward Wasilla and reaches an average of 28 inches per year at Talkeetna. Our limited precipitation is not distributed evenly through the year and often is not available when we need it. During break-up, most of the snowmelt runs off the still frozen soil. May and June are usually dry months with minimal precipitation. Only in late-July and on into the fall and winter do we get most of our precipitation. Many of our summer rainfalls only produce a few tenths of an inch of water and barely wet the soil surface. We need to provide adequate moisture throughout the rooting zone, but often under- or over-water our in-ground gardens. You can determine when to water by observing your plants or using an inexpensive hand-held moisture probe. Many plants can appear wilted in the mid-day sun so make your observations in the morning or evening. Our silty soils have a relatively large available water capacity; however, they have a slow infiltration rate so that water applied too rapidly will pond and/or runoff. Silty soils can be watered less frequently but a long, slow application rate works best. Sandier soils have a lower available water capacity; however, their infiltration rate is much higher. They need to be irrigated more frequently and the application rate can be faster. Adding organic matter will increase the water holding capacity; mulching any bare ground will help retain soil moisture; but compaction from walking or machinery will decrease the infiltration rate leading to ponding and runoff. There are detailed charts and guides available for determining proper irrigation rates; however, for the home gardener, closely observing your plants and soil works well. UAF Cooperative Extension Service has good information regarding irrigation at <http://cespubs.uaf.edu>.

That's enough soil information. It's fall and time to reflect on what did and didn't work this year, and to plan for next year.

Minutes of Master Gardener Meeting, Oct 1, 2018

Submitted by Secretary Dorte Mobley

Thank you cards from Kathy Liska from the fair were passed around. We donated money for prizes for some of the classes; Veg Head, Artistic design and trees and shrubs.

President, Michael Kircher, opened the meeting at 7:03.

The treasurer's report was given by Michael since Cathy wasn't there. We have \$12,602 available.

Minutes were in newsletter. Kristina moved we accept them as written. Motion was seconded and passed.

Kristina sent a card to Becky at the fair to let her know how much we appreciate all her beautiful flowers and designs

Elections are coming up. Michael is stepping down, Cathy and Dorte will stay on. Greg Kalal volunteered to run for vice president. We have 62 members and it is someone else's turn to step up. Michael and Curt will be a nominating committee and call people. Kristina will be the speaker coordinator.

Marge will take charge of the Christmas party. There was interest in having it at the Turkey Red banquet room again this year.

Guest, Christopher Narvaez, talked about how important it is to start indoor farming and not be as dependent on fruit and vegetables being brought up here from the lower 48.

Dues are due - there is a form on the web site to download, fill out and submit with the dues. Deadline for getting in the membership directory is January 15, 2019.

Deb B. will investigate what divisions or classes at the State Fair still can be

sponsored and talk with Michelle and Kathy - maybe new and unusual plants?

Michael asked if there was any interest in getting t-shirts or hats made. Nobody seemed interested.

Curt has been printing and mailing the newsletter to 4 people in the club who don't have computers. He has spent his own money for stamps, envelopes etc. Dorte made a motion that Marge and he keep track of their expenses and get reimbursed. Motion was seconded and passed.

Anchorage Master Gardeners are hosting the State Master Gardener Conference next year at the Cuddy Center on April 6, 2019.

Deb and Ken represented the MMGA at a meeting at the botanical garden with several other garden clubs to talk about what the different clubs do. Eagle River has done a lot of reclaiming old and overgrown garden beds in their area. Valley Garden club in connection with the City of Wasilla have reclaimed a garden bed by the Blue Star Memorial (Corner of Lucille St and Nelson). It will be planted with red, white and blue flowers.

We had several members talk about successes and failures in the gardens with some questions added in:

Dorte brought a dahlia that had grown from only a piece of stem with an eye on it. It had several tubers and was about 1 ft tall. Might have gotten bigger if it had gotten a bigger pot.

Kristina talked about her dahlia that she had had in her sun room. To be prepared for winter, she decided to cut back the plant and put it in the garage. Well, instead of going to sleep, the plant started growing again. It was suggested that she let it sit outside to cool down and go to sleep.

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Christine asked if she could divide a fuchsia plant now. She was told it was not possible, to cut it back, let it stay outside to freeze the leaves off, put it in a frost-free area over winter with very minimal watering and start it under lights in January to make cuttings to share.

Michael told us that he had won a new State Fair record for tallest asparagus plant - 7' 5 1/2". He had been out in the garden looking around for something to enter and had decided to give it a try. Tying the plant with Velcro to a long stick, it barely fit in their vehicle.

Deb C was wondering if we had any suggestions on how to grow daffodils. Hers always die. It was suggested that she planted them too deep. Kristina has one area where they are totally happy and multiply and other areas where they die, giving them about the same growing conditions. She suggested to grow *Scilla siberica* instead. The little blue flowers are very hardy and self-seed.

Curt brought in Polar Baby tomatoes for us to taste. They were very good and sweet. He is very impressed with the determinate plants that grow outside in a pot. They are something to try next year! He starts his seeds in March or April. Michael likes Koralik and Kristina suggested Red Pear.

Deb B brought in a personal size spaghetti squash called Angel Hair (Johnny's seeds). It has a very good flavor; cut in half, scoop out seeds and bake with some butter, salt, and pepper; plus, it stores well. She won a grand champion for a collection of 5 different varieties of garlic, that were absolutely stunning.

Members use pelleted seeds for planting carrots instead of thinning them. Seed tapes is another way to do it. Put little daps of "corn starch or flour mud (Elmer's glue can also be used)" on strips of toilet

paper with the right spacing and put a seed on it. Seed tapes can also be bought.

Dorte showed her Lee Valley Gardening Journal that has room for drawings, inventories (tools, perennials, trees bushes and more) and a calendar to write information in for 10 years.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:20.

REPORT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The nominating committee has selected the following people as nominees for president of the Mat-Su Master Gardeners Association:

- Ginger Sweeney
- Kristina Tornqvist
- Deb Blaylock
- Hazel Koppenberg
- Ken Blaylock

Further nominations may be made at our November meeting.

Voting will be by ballot at our November meeting.

Committee Chairman, Curt Mueller



Sustainable Agriculture Conference & Workshops

November 4-8, Anchorage

**BP Energy Center: 1014 Energy Court and
SpringHill Suites Anchorage University Lake Hotel:
4050 University Lake Drive**

Farming Alaska from Peak to Coast

Pre-Conference Workshop

Sunday, Nov. 4 • Produce Safety Training Workshop hosted in cooperation with the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Farming Alaska from Peak to Coast

Monday, Nov. 5 • Statewide Updates and Technical Sessions
Tuesday-Wednesday, Nov. 6 -7 • Special Topics and Technical Sessions
Topics covered during the conference range from climate updates and seaweed farming to livestock production and growing rhodiola.

Post-Conference Workshop

Thursday, Nov. 8 • Ag in the Classroom Workshop

For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/AKsareconf>



877-520-5211 • www.uaf.edu/ces



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Fees and Registration

Registration Link

<http://bit.ly/AKAGConference14>

Early-bird Registration Fees

all three days of the conference \$125
one day \$50

The last day for early-bird registration is Oct. 28.

Conference fees can be refunded in full through Oct. 28.

Beginning on Monday, Oct. 29, the registration fee will increase

by \$25 per person.

Garden Links

Alaska Botanical Garden

<http://www.alaskabg.org/>

Alaska Center for Conservation Science

<http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu/botany/>

Arbor Day Foundation

www.arborday.org

Alaska Division of Agriculture

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/>

Alaska Farm to School

<https://www.farmentoschoolalaska.org/>

Alaska Garden Clubs

<http://www.alaskagardenclubs.org>

Alaska Grown Source Book (online)

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/sourcebook/sourcebookindex2016.html>

Alaska Master Gardeners Association, Anchorage

<http://alaskamastergardeners.org/>

Alaska Master Gardener Blog

<https://alaskamastergardener.community.uaf.edu/>

Alaska Native Plant Society

<http://www.aknps.org/>

Alaska Orchid Society

<http://www.akorchid.org/>

Alaska Peony Growers Association

<http://alaskapeonies.org>

Alaska Peony Society

<https://alaskapeonysociety.wixsite.com/alaskapeonysociety>

Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

<http://www.apfga.org/>

Alaska Plant Materials Center

<http://plants.alaska.gov/>

Alaska Rhodiola **New**

<https://www.akroseroot.com/>

Alaska Rock Garden Society

<http://www.akrockgardensociety.org/>

Good Earth Garden School

<http://ellenvandevisse.com/>

Grow Palmer

<http://growpalmer.org/>

Integrated Pest Management Program

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ipm/>

Junior Master Gardeners

<http://www.jmgkids.us/>

Landscape Plants for Alaska

www.alaskaplants.org

Mat-Su Borough Rain Garden Program

<http://www.matsugov.us/environment/raingardens>

Mat-Su Master Gardener Website

www.matsumastergardeners.com

Master Gardener Research Link

<http://search.extension.org>

Master Gardeners of the Tanana Valley

<https://fairbanksmastergardeners.wordpress.com/>

Palmer Soil & Water Conservation

<http://palmersoilandwater.org/>

South-Central Alaska Beekeepers Assoc.

<http://www.sababeekeepers.com/>

Southeast Alaska Master Gardeners Association

<http://seak-mastergardeners.org/index.html>

Sustainable Agriculture – UAF

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ah/sare/>

UAF Cooperative Extension Service, Palmer

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/districts/matsu/>

UAF Cooperative Extension Service Publications

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs/catalog/>

UAF CES Citizen Pest Monitoring Portal

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ipm/cmp/>

UAF Georgeson Botanical Garden

<http://www.georgesonbotanicalgarden.org/>

UAF Herbarium **New**

<http://www.uaf.edu/museum/collections/herb/>

UAF School of Natural Resources & Extension

<http://www.uaf.edu/snre/>

University of Saskatchewan Fruit Program

www.fruit.usask.ca

USDA/NRCS Plant Data Base

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/>



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- Submit an article to the newsletter
- Volunteer to chair or help a committee
- Grant/scholarship coordinator
- Volunteer to serve as president

Its time to renew your membership for 2019. The deadline to renew and be listed in the 2019 Membership Directory, is January 15, 2019. You have two options for renewal, print a hard copy form and mail it in or bring it to a meeting - or you can renew online at: <https://www.matsumastergardeners.com/online-membership-application.html>



MAT-SU MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION
 PO BOX 598, PALMER, AK 99645
 Website: www.matsumastergardeners.com
 Email: www.matsumastergardeners@gmail.com

2019 MAT-SU MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL FORM

Membership is \$10 for an annual individual membership or \$12 for an annual family membership. **Family memberships are for family members who reside in the same household.** Memberships are for the calendar year – January through December. Please add matsumastergardeners@gmail.com to your email address book so that club correspondence is not blocked.

Mat- Su Master Gardeners Membership Application:

Please PRINT CLEARLY and complete all address fields to ensure that our database is current and accurate. Please indicate if this a

New Annual Individual \$10 membership OR a new Annual Family \$12 membership

or if you are **renewing** an individual \$10 membership OR a Family \$12 membership

Name (s): _____

Mailing Street Address/PO Box: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Preferred Phone Numbers: Home: _____ Cell: _____

E-mail: _____

Gardening areas of interest: ___ annuals ___ perennials ___ trees & shrubs ___ vegetables
 ___ fruit ___ landscaping/garden design ___ other (please specify) _____

Gardening information you would like to see in the newsletter or presented at a meeting:

Do you consent to having photos of you participating in Association activities posted on the website? Please initial: Yes _____ or No _____

Do you consent to have your phone number and e-mail published in the Annual Yearbook? Please initial: Yes _____ or No _____

The newsletter is published monthly and is available to download and print on the association's website: www.matsumastergardeners.com.

Return your payment and the completed application/renewal to:

Mat-Su Master Gardeners
 c/o Membership Coordinator
 PO Box 598,
 Palmer, AK 99645

Visit our website for monthly meeting information

Lenita Deda, Membership Coordinator~ 745-3413

CLUB CONTACT INFO

President:	Michael Kircher	745-1459
Vice President	Curt Mueller	745-6144
Secretary:	Dorte Mobley	232-5422
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 at her email: kdblalock@ak.net

Website: www.matsumastergardeners.com/

Email: matsumastergardeners@gmail.com

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2018

Nov 4, Daylight Saving Time ends - Fall Back!

Nov 5, Palmer, MMGA Meeting, Worm Bin, Ellen VandeVisse, Good Earth Garden School,
<http://ellenvandevisse.com/>

Nov 5 - 7, Anchorage, Alaska Sustainable Agriculture Conference

Dec 3, Palmer, MMG Mtg, Christmas Party -
Note time: 6:00 pm with dinner at 6:30 pm

JANUARY 2019 AND BEYOND

Jan 7, Palmer, MMGA Meeting

Feb 4, Palmer, MMGA Meeting

Mar 4, Palmer, MMGA Meeting

Apr 1, Palmer, MMGA Meeting

Apr 6, Anchorage, State Master Gardener Conference

May 6, Palmer, MMGA Meeting

Jun 1, Palmer, Annual Plant Sale

Jun 3, Palmer, Palmer Library Planting

Club Membership

The membership year runs from January to December each year. Annual individual memberships are \$10 and family memberships are \$12. Family memberships are only for family members living in the same household. The deadline to join is January 15, 2019 to be listed in the annual membership directory

Join or renew online

Thank you

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. 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 publisher 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.

Deadline for submission of articles and info: 20th day of each month -- Thank you--



November 2018



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Facebook

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

**MAT-SU MASTER GARDENERS
ASSOCIATION
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