



Presentations & Speakers

Keynote Presentation: Understanding Roots- Robert Kourik

Uncover one of the greatest mysteries of the underground—the secret lives of roots.

Robert Kourik received much of his early training in life skills from the School of Hard Knocks. He learned various horticulture-related skills from the inside out by working with clients throughout California and the rest of the country for over 25 years. During that time he took on design projects of all sizes, shapes and textures—water gardens, paths and patios, elegant arbors, habitat gardens, innovative home playgrounds, outdoor barbecue areas, deer-resistant gardens and landscapes and low-profile and attractive deer fences, to name just a few.



In the late 1970s, with only a high school diploma to his credit, he wrote a big fat book which has become a classic in its field and helped to define the genera of gardening now known as edible landscaping. It's precisely because he had no formal college training in horticulture that he was able to envision and interpret this new interdisciplinary and original approach to gardening and landscaping. Although he has focused primarily on organic, natural, sustainable, integrated systems, permaculture and appropriate horticulture methods, as a result of his continual on-the-job training he has become handy at (and sometimes considered an authority on) a host of garden/landscape-related skills. And he is still trying to graduate from the School of Hard Knocks.

Mistress of Ceremonies- Julie Riley



Julie Riley is a horticulture agent with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service. She works with home gardeners, community gardeners and Alaska's commercial horticulture industry. In the last 35 years Ms. Riley has trained over 1,500 Master Gardeners who continue to be her source of inspiration. "How fortunate I feel to work for Cooperative Extension Service, where I've been able to forage friendships with so many talented gardeners and learn something interesting every day. Master Gardeners are an amazing force that reaches into all corners of the community. You provide me with a continual source of inspiration, both in the beauty of your gardens and your selflessness when it comes to sharing your passion with others. I'm honored to have been invited to be Mistress of Ceremonies today."

Julie teaches non-credit classes and gives presentations on a wide variety of topics including vegetables, flowers, herbs, organic gardening and soils. With the help of Master Gardener volunteers, and in partnership with the Alaska Botanical Garden, she has trialed 30 varieties of cilantro, made dormant and late-season plantings of spinach and participated in the Alaska Turnip project growing locally hybridized turnips. Now in Fairbanks, Julie works with Master Gardeners of the Tanana Valley. She writes regular gardening articles for the Fairbanks Daily News Miner and while filming weekly television spots these past two years has nearly worn out her 2008 Master Gardener Conference cap that says 'In the Zone'.

Mayor Ethan Berkowitz

Mayor Ethan Berkowitz has lived in Anchorage since 1990. He and his wife, Dr. Mara Kimmel have two children, Ziva and Noah. Mayor Berkowitz earned an undergraduate degree studying Government and Economics at Harvard University, where he graduated with honors. He received a Master's degree from the Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge University, and a law degree from Hastings College of the Law. After moving to Alaska, he worked as an assistant district attorney before serving for ten years in the Alaska State Legislature, eight as Minority Leader. As a state legislator he supported fiscal responsibility and a more comprehensive and sustainable energy policy. In the private sector, Mayor Berkowitz worked on technology and energy projects, including deployment of fiber optic cables in Alaska and across the Arctic, and a major geothermal project in Northwest Alaska.



The Mayor is an avid gardener and an advocate for local food production. He is interested in making it easier for growers to enter into food production. After receiving input at the 2016 Statewide Master Gardener Conference, Mayor Berkowitz began the Community Compost program.



Morning Presentations

The Secrets Behind Compelling Combinations- Brenda Adams

Combination planting is the art of arranging plants in pairs or groups. The goal is for each plant to compliment another so that the ensemble is more beautiful and impactful than its individual elements. Discover the secrets behind great combinations: why they are important, what makes them work, and how to create your own compelling combinations. You'll learn which plant attributes to feature and how to use repetition and contrast effectively. Then, taking the notion of combination planting to a refreshing new level, Brenda will describe techniques to design upbeat, dazzling, and exciting combinations as well as those with a calm, more subtle, but still very memorable presence.

Brenda Adams is the author of the acclaimed books, *Cool Plants for Cold Climates: A Garden Designer's Perspective*, winner of the Garden Writers' Association 2018 Silver Award, and *There's a Moose in My Garden: Designing Gardens in Alaska and the Far North*. She teaches four different garden design-focused classes at the University of Alaska as well as the landscape design section of the Alaska Master Gardeners' course.



Brenda is the award-winning designer of Gardens By Design. She has created over 240 unique and personalized gardens for both residential and commercial clients in Alaska. She's a long-time master gardener and member of Alaska's Rock Garden Society, the Perennial Plant Association, Garden Writers' Association, Alaska Master Gardeners, and the Alaska Botanical Garden. She was president of the Homer Garden Club (2004-2010) and served on its board for 13 years.

Brenda's designs have received three prestigious awards in the Perennial Plant Association's annual international competition. Her 2012 award was the PPA's highest, the Honor Award. She is a frequent guest on radio offering advice to gardeners who toil in zone 2 through zone 5. A sought after speaker both within and outside Alaska, Brenda has been invited to speak twice at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show.

Fruit for the Urban Garden- Debbie Hinchey

Various types of fruit can be grown in small spaces and double as landscape features. Cultural techniques, including planting, pruning, overwintering, fertilization and water needs will be discussed.



Debbie Hinchey has been involved in the Alaska horticulture industry since 1974. In 1985 she received an Interdisciplinary Master of Science Degree in Horticulture, started her horticulture business, and helped found the Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association. Debbie is on the Board of Directors of eight gardening organizations and is a well known local speaker on many horticultural topics.

Morning Presentations

Just Say Grow: Raised Bed Gardening in South Central Alaska- Deb Blaylock

What are the basics for raised bed vegetable gardening? Why use raised beds? Learn about some simple methods of bed design and construction, bed location and orientation, what materials to fill the bed with, what to grow in raised beds , and tips and techniques.

Deb Blaylock is a former Farrar, Iowa “classic farm girl” and has gardened in Alaska for over twenty years. She specializes in growing garlic and other alliums with many blue ribbons for her garlic at the Alaska State Fair. Since moving to Palmer in 2002, she started with 5 raised beds and currently has over 20 raised beds of various sizes, shapes and materials. She completed the Alaska Master Gardener training in 2004 through the Palmer Cooperative Extension Service and Advanced Master Gardener training through the Anchorage CES under Julie Riley. Deb is the current president of the Mat-Su Master Gardener Association as well as the editor of its monthly newsletter. She also moderates many Facebook gardening groups and pages in her free time. Her small business, Dodo’s Garden, specializes in growing flower and vegetable starts.



Small Spaces, Big Gardens- Using the Design Process to get the Most from Your Outdoor Spaces- Elise Huggins

Begin with how to understand your site through an exploration of constraints and opportunities including climate (and climate change), slope, views, neighbors, regulations and other natural and human elements and how they could affect the design. Learn how design elements such as color, texture and form are creative tools. Explore solutions and discuss challenges with a focus on the urban gardener. View examples and details of patio gardens and traditionally sized yards, getting tips and ideas that can be applied to your outdoor spaces.



M. Elise Huggins began the practice of landscape architecture in 1979 soon after obtaining her degree in Landscape Architecture. Elise is still practicing the art of gardening with the hope someday of becoming a real gardener. In the meantime, Elise shares her design expertise and offers creative solutions to garden and landscape projects of all sizes and shapes. Elise started the award winning landscape architectural firm Earthscape in 1989 and remains the principal in charge.

Afternoon Presentations

Small Plants for Small Spaces: Alpines & Hypertufa- Jaime Rodriguez

Do you live in an apartment with only a balcony? Or a rental unit with very limited gardening opportunity? Do not despair. There are plants and containers that can satisfy any level of gardening. Jaime Rodriguez of The Alpine Garden Nursery will explore small plants, and some creative ways to grow them.

Jaime Rodriguez is an amateur botanist, plant collector, and owner of The Alpine Garden Nursery in Palmer, Alaska. The nursery has been in operation since 1998, and is open by appointment May through September. He worked as the head gardener for The Mat-Su Agriculture Showcase Garden at the Palmer Visitors Center from 1998 through 2003, and returned to the garden as Assistant Gardener from 2014-2017. He was the superintendent of the cut flower exhibit at the Alaska State Fair from 1999 through 2007, where he continues as a volunteer, mostly working with the rest of the Cook Inlet Bonsai Society at the Bonsai Display during the Fair. His work with the Alaska Rock Garden Society is most noted for the seed collecting expedition to China in September and October of 2000, and the chapter he wrote on Rock Gardening in Alaska for the book "Rock Garden Construction" produced by the North American Rock Garden Society published by Timber Press in 2003. Jaime has a B.A. in Theatre from the University of Alaska, Anchorage. He graduated Magna Cum Laude with leadership honors and is a member of the academic fraternity Phi Kappa Phi. He is 12 credits short of a second B.A. in Cultural Anthropology.



Vegetable Container Gardening- Julie Riley

Want to grow vegetables but don't have the space for a garden? Learn how to grow vegetables in containers, what vegetables grow the best, how to prepare the soil, and how to get the most out of growing vegetables in containers.



Julie Riley- see page one for Julie Riley's biography.



Afternoon Presentations

Pests in the Garden: Friend or Foe?- Janice Chumley

Every season brings new and often exciting 'finds' in our gardens. We view insects we have not encountered before, plant diseases we are not familiar with, slugs that seem to appear from nowhere, and sometimes just mysterious problems with our garden plants. Conventional methods of pest control are becoming green to include non-toxic and organic control methods. In this presentation we will cover common pests, resources for identification of things new to us, and using IPM (Integrated Pest Management) to take the least toxic approach to evicting the visitors to our gardens if they are unwelcome.

Janice Chumley has been a Master Gardener since 1998 and worked as an IPM tech for the Cooperative Extension Service on the Kenai Peninsula for the past 20 years. Recently retired from CES, she plans to continue working with local agriculture on the Kenai Peninsula and continue to enjoy her own garden in the future.



Fast Composting- Steve Brown

Are you really composting or do you just maintain a refuse pile? Traditional compost piles can take years to break down. This presentation will show you how to go from raw material to finished compost in just 3 months. Participants will learn about the ideal carbon/nitrogen ratio, oxygen and water management, online compost calculators, composter design and how to test your finished compost.



Steve Brown is the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service District Ag/Hort Agent for the Mat-Su Valley and Copper River region. His subject matter specialties are agricultural engineering and high latitude agriculture. In his spare time he is an avid marathon runner and mountaineer.

Closing Session

The Good, the Bad, the Unbelievable- Robert Kourik

Old-fashioned fighting swords cut in both directions. The irony is you didn't know when the other side was coming. All gardening techniques and assumptions have a double edge. One we expect and the other side comes as a surprise.