Alaskan Peony Represented at World Flora Expo

The World Flora Expo was held in Las Vegas on March 22-24/2017. The Alaska Peony Marketing Group, representing 4 Alaskan Peony farms from the Homer area:

- Scenic Place Peonies
- Joselyn Peonies
- Chilly Root Peony Farm
- Alaska Perfect Peony

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Alaska Peony Growers Association (APGA) is to provide support and assistance to its members in all aspects of growing, processing, transporting and promotion of peony plants and flowers. APGA will advocate for research, reasonable governmental regulation, public and private financial assistance, and technology transfer that supports its members and the commercial peony industry in Alaska. APGA advocates and supports establishment and maintenance of a reputation by its members for the highest quality of our products, reliability in our performance, and integrity in our transactions. APGA will promote peonies grown by its members to the general public and to markets throughout the world, and will publicize and advocate for the Alaska peony industry in general.
APGA State of the Union

APGA is a 501-C-6 non-profit.

To support our members we provide; research, Lobby for favorable government legislation, and we promote Alaska Peonies.

APGA does not do all things for all people. We cannot sell your peonies. But we can prepare you and guide you. Peonies do not sell themselves. I know that it has been mentioned that Alaska Peonies are available when no other Peonies are available. This may be true but during July, August and September, the marketplace demand has always been satisfied by floral varieties that have been traditionally available.

In Commerce Committee meetings, we have provided members with guidance to teach the COMPETITIVE FORCES that shape our actions outside of APGA.

In the Marketplace-
- The threat of new competitors.
- Your lost market share affects prices and costs.
- High cost of supplies.
- Buyers demanding low prices.
- The threat of substitutes. - Roses for instance. -
- Rivalry among numerous peony producers.

APGA provides guidance and education.

We promote our Brand - Alaska Peonies.

We lobby for favorable government legislation.

If members do not have a crystal clear understanding of structure WITHIN the organization, we cannot operate OUTSIDE of the organization.

APGA cannot make profits through regular business transactions. APGA covers expenses through fundraisers, dues and grants. APGA has made advertising space available to vendors. It is of value for vendors to reach our membership. APGA asks value for value in return. membership.

To preserve our non-profit status, self dealing and providing goods and services by an insider is prohibited. Vendors provide goods and services. Transactions take place at the vendors' place of business. That is just good business. It is a simple arrangement but it must be understood by all parties.

- APGA's membership is evolving.
- Single Growers

- C0-0ops
- Packhouses
- Industry suppliers
- Industry buyers

APGA includes all lines of business in our 501-C-6. This requires tiers of membership.

We are constructing a new website to enhance communication. Improved communication within the organization is a priority. Improved communication outside of the organization is a priority.

Regional Representatives are key players. We are working to streamline this communication link.

Membership participation is required to move the organization forward. APGA membership is not a spectator sport. Join a committee. Contact a Board Member with your thoughts and suggestions. Get to know your Regional Representative.

Grant funding will be a 2017 goal. Research and Promotion are in need to address the ever increasing needs of our growers.

Get involved. Contact a Board Member. Join a committee. Keep up to date and monitor APGA's website. We are a diverse group operating in a very large state.

Give it your best effort to grow this organization into a Great Organization!

I have been proud to have served as your President and Board Member.

Richard Repper
Past APGA President
Echo Lake Peonies
1-907-262-5408
www.echolakefarm.com

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The American Grown Flower Movement isn’t a trend. It is a cultural shift in response to universal concerns about jobs, the economy, the environment and a desire to connect with nature and live in the season. Farms, retailers and florists who display the new Certified American Grown logo will
Introducing...

Greetings Fellow Peony Growers,

I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself, and thank the membership for the vote of confidence in electing me to the APGA board of Directors at the conference in Fairbanks.

Although our farm has been in production for seven years, this is the first year that I will be working it more “hands on”, with my wife, Beth. She has been converting me from a fisherman/mariner, to a farmer, all be it with a little bit of kicking and screaming along the way.

I have been crawling up the learning curve, with so many different facets of farming and the industry. With the help of the APGA conference seminars, local mentors and the school of hard knocks, I’m gaining on the battle.

One thing I wanted to share with all of you is that by subscribing to e-mail list servers from some of our trade publications; Floral Daily, Flowers and Cents, and Perishable News we can learn much about the floral industry as a whole.

Being the “new kid on the block”, I look forward to meeting with my fellow growers in this emerging agricultural industry.

Thank you so much to the APGA members that have reached out recently to the BOD (ed. Board of Directors) with their concerns and feedback. As communications is a key component in any organization, I would like to invite APGA members to contact either myself, their regional rep, or any other board member with any of your concerns or suggestions on how we can better serve our growing membership. To stay informed on the latest BOD meetings, sign in to membership area on the APGA website. Click on minutes and agenda and select the latest approved minutes for your reading pleasure. Remember that as members, all teleconferenced board meetings are open to you. Contact our Administrator, Gary Wells, if you would like to listen in.

Wishing you a bountiful harvest of premium Peony buds.
Kurt Weichhand
CFO (Chief Flower Officer)
Scenic Place Peonies, APGA Secretary

Interior Alaska Peony Growers Report

By: Marjorie Illingworth

The snow is finally melting – slowly – and we look forward to preparing for planting in late May. From then on, it will be a race to keep up and prepare for a late June /early July harvest.

Several things have happened since the January APGA Conference. Arctic Alaska Peonies Cooperative offered a New Growers School and an Advanced Growers Symposium in March and Pack House Certification in early May. Polar Peonies and Arctic Alaska Peonies Cooperative have been preparing their producers to grow and harvest the great peonies that the Interior is famous for.

The Interior will again host a Peony Farm Tour July 21st and 22nd. The tour will visit several farms, participate in the Georgeson Gardens’ Wine Tasting, and have featured speakers at each farm and close with a farm picnic.

A tour bus will comfortably transport to each of the farms. Anyone interested in attending should email marji@arcticalaskapeonies.com for an application. Spots on the bus will be limited.
FAIRBANKS — On the stage of the Alaska Peony Growers Association’s winter conference, University of Alaska Professor Mingchu Zhang was awarded the organization’s Growers Cup Award, a big silver trophy recognizing his research supporting the peony industry.

Zhang is a researcher who specializes in soil and plant nutrition, and has dedicated his life to understanding and teaching the science behind growing plants.

It’s a passion that started early for Zhang, who grew up in Wuhan, China, under the communist rule of Chairman Mao Zedong.

“I actually grew up in the city, nothing to do with agriculture. No clue about seeds or soil or growing crops,” he said. “I finished high school and I was sent to the countryside — they were sending young, educated people to the countryside to farm — and during that time, I developed a passion about agriculture.”

He said working in the fields was hard, eye-opening work.

“I felt that the farmers at that time in China were poor, but worked hard,” he said. “I said, these people do need help. When I had the chance to go to college I went to college for agriculture. ... My family thought it was a foolish decision. Nobody in my family is in agriculture except for me.”

Zhang first attended university in Alberta, Canada, then moved to Fairbanks in 2003, where he settled in and raised a family. Now 60, he spent much of his time focusing on the now multimillion-dollar peony industry in Alaska, working to understand what makes peonies grow best.

He’s often shared that knowledge directly with growers across Alaska, working to translate lab results to common language. He said along with making growing things easier, he has a passion for teaching.

“My philosophy is the nation is great because of its people and the way you make people great is to educate them,” he said. “That’s why I have a passion for educating.”

He said his long-term dream is to develop a grain crop that’s perfectly suited to Alaska’s climate and shorter growing season. He’s currently working with breeders on that project, and said ideally it could help shore up Alaska’s food security.

“Life is short, things can change, but if you have something benefit the whole people, that’s what I want to do,” he said. “With crops and plants, if people benefit from that and they are happy, then I’m happy.”

Contact staff writer Matt Buxton at 907-459-7544. Follow him on Twitter: @FDNMpolitics.
Seeking 2018 Winter Conference Volunteers

Gary Lincoln, 2018 Winter Conference Chair, is asking for volunteers from APGA’s membership to serve on the Conference Planning Committee and during the conference.

The Conference will be held in Anchorage at the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel from January 25th to 28th.

The Conference Planning Committee needs volunteers to work on

- conference planning
- conference agenda
- speaker and volunteer recruitment
- airport shuttle service to and from the hotel
- silent auction donations solicitation
- setup,
- oversee the ongoing silent auction process during the conference
- conference registration
- donations solicitation for goodie bags and items for the bags
- conference website maintenance
- serve on the conference committee

To volunteer or for more information on volunteering, please by February 17th contact Gary Lincoln at conference@alaskapeonies.org or Gary Wells at admin@alaskapeonies.org.

2017 Winter Conference Photos

Some photos of the Winter conference
A little more than four years ago I heard about peony farming. I read, researched, attended farm tours, joined APGA, emailed and called people in my area to learn more. Although the folks that invited me to their farm were very willing to share, I felt like I was a hindrance to their work because I would ask so many questions they couldn’t even work! It felt like a scratch on the surface of something that had so much potential.

So I am here to offer what I wish I had found, a mentorship or internship. My farm is in Willow, we have 4,700 roots in the ground ranging from 3 years old to one year old. We are not a strictly organic farm, but do combined methods. We have a unique irrigation method and do quite a bit on our two-wheeled tractor and various attachments we have bought, modified or built. We have experimented with a few methods of weed control and spring drainage problems. We are converting a trailer into a chiller this year and will be harvesting with a neighboring farm for the first time this year. We are not experts, but we do learn a lot by reading, experimenting and really, REALLY looking at the plants everyday.

I am not offering payment or any other compensation. I do not have overnight accommodations, though friends and family often pitch tents. Our way of doing things may not be the right way for you to run a farm. But the opportunity to see how hard it is to install irrigation, squish buds to get familiar with harvest stages, see plant disease or fungus and learn how to control it, identify bugs in the field and really spend time learning first hand about the plants is the opportunity that I wished I had, so I’m offering it to someone willing to show up and learn. Although I’d like a commitment on a regular basis, I understand you are busy and have to set your own schedule. Your time commitment is not employment or work that I am depending on to get through the season, but if you miss the chance to see how we install irrigation because you take a week off, there is no going back, irrigation is done and I am moving on to the next task so your learning opportunity is diminished. There is a new task weekly between general maintenance, fertilizing, taking off side buds etc. And once we pass these tasks, you’ll have to wait until next year to see it again. I am not expecting this “intern” to do any amount of work for me, but I am expecting a serious, dedicated learner who shows up, asks questions and is able to put in the time to warrant my dedication to this “intern”. In return I am willing to answer any questions to the best of my ability, provide hands on learning in all aspects of the farm and share with you anything I can about the way we grow peonies.

I will not be able to host everyone, but if I can share with one or two people this season, it would be wonderful. If you can be serious, committed, willing to learn and able to show up on a regular basis, then we should have a chat. You can email me at marthalojewski@gmail.com or call at 907-306-8137.

Happy Farming Everyone!
Soil is by far the most important resource to growing any healthy, vibrant plant. Even for those that grow plants hydroponically, the same basic soil science principles must be applied for plants to thrive.

In short, soil is the derivative of processes that mix the rock constituents with the organic matter constituents (anything that was once “alive”) in any given plot of land on Earth. This means that soil itself can vary widely in its makeup, most times even on the same acre of land. But most importantly to growers, how the mixing of these materials takes place impacts the soils’ ability to grow any particular plant.

The main rock constituents of soil are classified as sand, silt or clay particles. Sand particles are larger than silt particles, which are larger in succession than clay particles. The percentages of the three tell a grower how their soils will “drain” (hold water versus air). Sandy soils drain the fastest and subsequently hold the most air as well. Silt and clay follow in that order, with clay soils holding water best and draining least (think clay pottery that does not leak). The more clay and silt you have in your soils, the more water they will hold and the less air.

Soil science tells us that this increase in water and lack of air also encourages the formation of acidic soils.

Without delving into too much detail, it should be understood by Alaskan peony growers that most Alaskan soils spent thousands upon thousands of years being plowed back-and-forth by unimaginably heavy glaciers. Through these actions and the prevalence of forest growth following glacial retreats long ago, a vast majority of Alaska’s land is home to either silty or acidic soils. It is also common to have both at the same time.

I always encourage growers to have at least a basic understanding of what pH is and what it means in regards to soils just because it impacts everything in the soil, from what microorganisms reside there to what nutrients are made available to plants. Consensus research tells us that most varieties of peonies are at their very best in well-drained, neutral to slightly-acidic soils pH of 6-7).

So, if after proper soil testing, the Alaskan peony grower finds that this is not indeed the nature of their soil, necessary amending before planting may be required. Before planting is the most ideal time to make amendments in regards to giving the plant the very best start from the beginning.

However, it is quite possible to amend soils after planting so do not be alarmed if this is what is required. Increasing the drainage of overly-silty or clay soils will go a long way towards helping your soil in a variety of ways. It will help to raise the pH of your soils if you find this is required. Remember that this is due to the fact that too much water encourages a lowering of the pH. Better drainage will also encourage more healthy, oxygen-loving microorganisms to populate your soils. These are the “good guys” that help to fight off the pests and diseases that tend to thrive in overly wet conditions. Finally, the addition of more air spaces in soils allows the peony roots an easier time growing and absorbing their nutrients. Just think that it is a whole lot easier for anything to move through air than it is to move through rock!

Josh Gefen, Agricultural Ecologist
Kashwitna Peonies Farm
As July 29th, 2017 approaches I find myself making lists upon list of “things to plant”, “things to find out”, “things to confirm”, “things to delegate”, “things to fix”... the lists never seem to end. It can be very exhausting to put on a Field to Vase Dinner tour, but ohh so fun and rewarding!

Being a founding member of the Certified American Grown (CAG) movement we were super honored to be asked to hold the first Dinner in our beautiful state. Folks have asked me if their farms can be future host. Absolutely!! All CAG members can be considered. Go to http://www.americangrownflowers.orgfieldtovase/scroll to the bottom and click on Farm Application.

What should you expect as a host? Long hours, endless time on the computer coordinating with folks that have a 4 hour time difference. Trying to explain that Alaska is not a dinner tour but a destination and things need careful and long-term preplanning. The logistics of securing tents, tables, chairs, dinnerware and such can be pretty daunting in a small town. Procuring 800 stems of peonies from your farm for the takeaway bouquets and then another 1000 stems to the designer for the dinner install. Did I mention that you “get” to make the 150 takeaway bouquets?

What can you expect to get as a host? Many new acquaintances in high places in our industry, fantastic exposure to growers, buyers and designers. A show of pride in your farm and the Certified American Grown program. Kurt’s favorite thing...lots of yard improvements... well its not really his favorite thing. It’s mine. He keeps reminding me that we are a farm and not a garden!

Alaska peony farmers are great supporter of the CAG movement, shown by the large numbers of member in our “little agricultural” state compared to the big guys like California.

We welcome you to join us for this exciting event as well as take advantage of the world renown designer that will be making our peonies the center of attraction.

Author of “Flowers for the Table” and the upcoming book “The Flower Workshop,” Ariella Chezar is the designer for our adventurous dinner at Scenic Place Peonies in Homer, Alaska, on Saturday, July 29. Both florist and farmer, Ariella specializes in weddings and events using flowers from her farm, onneveld Farm, located in upstate New York. She is heading west for this special F2V dinner where she will showcase the striking Alaskan peony in her floral designs. Ariella will teach a day-and-a-half long workshop on Friday, July 28 and pre-dinner on July 29 that promises to fulfill a floral Alaskan adventure of a lifetime.”

If any of you have questions or want more details about being a Field to Vase host, please feel free to contact me. It really is an incredible opportunity to highlight your farm and beautiful product!
Scenic Place Peonies 907-299-0301 beth@scenicplacepeonies.com

By: Beth Van Sandt
A Message from the Editor

A big thank you to everyone who contributed to this newsletter!

This newsletter is created based on the contributions of APGA members and is a valuable resource to all—no matter at what stage you are in your endeavors.

All contributions are welcome for future editions. If you have an idea for an article, but don’t have the time to put it down on paper—get in touch, I can help.

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