

Palmer Lake Historical Society, March 19

History of fox farming recounted

By Marlene Brown

The Palmer Lake Historical Society (PLHS) held its membership meeting on March 19 at the Palmer Lake Town Hall. The PLHS promotes, preserves, and protects the history of the Palmer Divide area. PLHS is also responsible for maintaining the Lucretia Vaile museum, downstairs in the Palmer Lake Library. It houses many photos, articles, and artifacts of Palmer Lake, Monument, Black Forest, and the surrounding area.

The presentation for the night was by Julie Haverluk of Silver Fox Farms of El Paso County. Fox farming was a booming business in the 1920s and '30s. She said there were over 75 fox farms in the area of Douglas County and El Paso County in 1932. It was predicted to be one of the greatest industries in the state.

Haverluk said that in the 1920s, the fashion was to wear a fox fur. There was a big market

and everyone wanted one. The first fox farm in El Paso County was started in 1921 in Fountain. Northern El Paso County was perfect for raising foxes, a cool, dry climate with tall shade trees and good rail transportation. They would bring feed and supplies in and export the pelts to eastern and foreign markets.

The Black Forest Fur Farm was started in the 1930s on 1,240 acres, Haverluk said. The farm had over 900 pens. In 1949, the Black Forest Fur Farm was sold to the Black Forest Baptist Assembly, which ran summer camps there for many years. In 1986, 390 acres were sold to El Paso County, which was named Fox Run Regional Park and was opened to the public in 1987.

By 1945, the bottom fell out of the fox industry. With WWII, a 20% excise tax, and fashion evolving, people were not buying luxury items as they had just a decade before.

By then, my grandparents, Bill and Esther Brown, had just begun to build their fox farm on the old Jackson Place (W.S. Jackson of Colorado Springs). They were able to pay off their ranch in one year and buy my grandmother a Cadillac. It was a very lucrative business while it lasted.

PLHS meetings are usually held on the third Thursday of the month, 7-8:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:30 p.m.) at the Palmer Lake Town Hall, 28 Valley Crescent St. They are free and open to the public. For full descriptions, dates, and times for future programs and information on memberships or donating to the PLHS, visit their newly updated website: palmerdividehistory.org.

Marlene Brown can be reached at marlenebrown@ocn.me.

The Nature of Our Community

Mountain pine beetles

By Dr. Judith von Ahlefeldt, Landscape Ecologist

In Colorado, the conifer hosts for mountain pine beetles (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) are ponderosa pines and lodgepole pines (mountains). Ponderosa pines are dominant conifers of lower timberline forests bordering the Great Plains, and extend east from the mountains, mostly on private lands.

Extra warm, mostly dry conditions and mild, short winters have supported major population increases in all bark beetles, especially mountain pine beetles, everywhere in Colorado. Other bark beetles that kill other species of conifers (spruce, Douglas fir, pinon pine) have all increased dramatically in the past two years statewide.

On Dec. 16, 2025, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis announced the formation of a special Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force and appointed its members in late February. The Task Force has three co-chairs: Dan Gibbs executive director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR); Matt McCombs, director of the Colorado State Forest Service, state forester; and Mike Morgan, director of the State Division of Fire Prevention and Control.

Mountain pine beetles are native insects, and usually have low (endemic) populations of a few infested trees in several to many square miles. Periodic epidemic population increases happen (of record, a few times a century per large areas).

Epidemics (may shift locations and last a decade or more) mostly last until there are no more suitable host trees, or populations are killed by extreme winter cold events. A week of extreme Polar Vortex 1981-82 stopped the 1977-82 epidemic in El Paso County.

On the first day of spring, 2026, there are still endemic (light) occurrences of mountain pine beetle-infested trees in western El Paso County and on the Palmer Divide west of State Highway 83 (per the 2024 Forest Health Report).

Prompt removal of ponderosas infested last season (summer, fall of 2025) is critical to prevent a likely exponential increase as the 2022 to 2024 ongoing epidemic-level outbreak of mountain pine beetle in the fire perimeter areas of Black Forest continues. These epidemic areas are still mostly in locally light burn areas of southeast and southcentral Black Forest – but spreading.

Green ponderosa pines should be inspected now for still-pliable pitch tubes higher than 2-3 feet on tree trunks. Take bark samples with an ax to check for blue stain wood on the trunk. Successfully infested trees are faded but may wilt and fade soon in hot, dry weather. Mountain pine beetles prefer larger trees (14-inch diameter and larger but can infest smaller ones 8-13 inch diameter).

If the still-green ponderosa has pitch tubes AND blue stain in the trunk wood, it should be removed from the treed area before June to mitigate beetle populations.

Only the trunks need to be removed from the site for beetle infestation. Slash can be disposed of separately. Cut trees from close to the base to a 6-inch top stem diameter. Search 'mountain pine beetle'.

Wood can be buried under 8 or more inches of soil, taken to Rocky Top Resources or to the Slash-Mulch site in Black Forest for 8-inch or smaller diameter logs cut into 6-foot or shorter lengths. It is too late in the season for plastic solar treatment, mastication, or pesticide application.

The Black Forest Slash/Mulch site opens May 2. See bflash.org for details. There is a \$10 per load dump fee. Rocky Top Resources' main wood recycling facility is located on East Las Vegas Street in Colorado Springs. For private landowners, the weekday dump fee is \$25 per load, and on Saturday, private landowners are charged \$10 per load. There is no diameter or length limit on logs. Landowners must unload all sizes and types of loads at Rocky Top, so infested trunks may need to be cut to short lengths.

Dr. Judith von Ahlefeldt can be contacted at judithvonahlefeldt@ocn.me.

High Altitude Nature and Gardens

Attracting hummingbirds the safe and beautiful way

By Janet Sellers

The safest way to attract hummingbirds and other birds to your garden is to offer fresh water and blooming flowers. It is a beautiful way to attract hummingbirds for the season. Hummingbirds remember their reliable food and water sources and come back year after year. They follow the flower buffets, so gardening plans should include ongoing flowering or sequential flowering. A true copper penny (pre-1982) in the bird bath or waterer keeps out algae.

Perennials just need to get started, and then you'll have blooms year after year and hummingbirds. To attract hummingbirds in Colorado, plant nectar-rich, tubular flowers like penstemon, Agastache (sunset hyssop), bee balm (Monarda), and cardinal flower. Key Colorado native plants include scarlet gilia, Rocky Mountain bee plant, and golden currant, which thrive in local conditions. For best results, choose plants that bloom at different times.

Pest-free and powerfully attractive

Flowers in hanging pots offer the birds—and

us—a safe place to enjoy each other. Often, hummingbirds will nest in a hanging pot, too. Native plants that hummingbirds already love will attract them easily, as well as eliminating the problems with bears, squirrels, and wasps. No more trotting out at night to remove the feeders or the feeders going sour and endangering the birds.

Vertical gardens can hang anywhere, including fences, posts, and trees. They're commercially available, but we can also make them with things around the house in a variety of ways. Filling garden soil into feed or seed bags and other strong food-grade bags can be upcycled as vertical planters. Turned inside out, the advertising doesn't show while we wait for the plants to grow, and they can be painted for fun, too. Burlap is also a natural choice, but it dries out faster and may only be good for one season. Ensure the burlap and any materials used are clean and food-safe if you are growing edible plants or growing plants to be hummingbird-safe.

Gardeners fill the bags with the soil, make slits around the bag, add their plants or seeds, and hang the bags by the handles or tether them. It

works like a strawberry pot, only bigger. For growing food, it is safest to rely on food-safe materials, proper soil, consistent watering, and safe amendments. Tomatoes and other climbing plants work well this way because they'll just grow hanging downward instead of up a trellis. Some gardeners maintain that good quality soil, watering, and proper drainage are best, but some use hydrogels, and most add watering drain holes.

Absorbent material at the bottom (hydrogels or gel beads) can help avoid drying out. Quality potting mix is the ideal, though, so use a mix that includes vermiculite, peat moss, or coconut coir to hold moisture. A good mulch is a friend even with pots. Apply a layer of organic mulch (like straw or bark) on top of the soil to reduce evaporation.

Janet Sellers is an avid "lazy gardening" enthusiast, letting Mother Nature lead for gardening wisdom in our Tri-Lakes high desert ecosystem. Share your garden tips and stories:

JanetSellers@ocn.me.

Art Matters

The architecture of awe: why art holds nature's secret language

By Janet L. Sellers

Engineering a forest bath

Last month, we explored how the Nobel physicist Richard Feynman found a profound second language in art. He saw no conflict between the equations of the universe and the beauty of a flower. This month, I want to take that a step further: What if art isn't just a "pretty" addition to our lives, but a biological necessity?

Living here in the ponderosa forests of Tri-Lakes, many of us practice what the Japanese call Shinrin-yoku, or "forest bathing." It isn't a hike or a workout; it's a sensory soak. It's the act of simply being—letting the scent of pine resin, the rhythm of the tides, or the vastness of a sunny sky "wash" over us. Our landscape provides more than just a view; it offers a complex biological rhythm.

When we experience these natural fractals, our brains do something remarkable: They "down-regulate." Our cortisol drops, our heart

rates steady, and a sense of restorative awe takes over. Our bodies recognize the organic world—whether it's the depths of an ocean or the reach of a meadow—as a home.

In my recent research and MFA work, I've been asking a vital question: How do we bring that restorative bath to someone who can't leave their bed? I have developed indoor murals for this purpose; in some, the trees arch branches and leaves overhead onto the ceiling for the bedridden to see, creating a protective canopy.

I call this the "architecture of awe." The goal is to move beyond decorative pictures and create "trace memories" of nature, especially for clinical spaces. This research is informed by my time in Japan studying the concept of Ma—the silent, resonant space between objects that allows the viewer to breathe. In my studio, I've been experimenting with ways to archive those feelings of "being there" onto a canvas.

Instead of traditional brushes, I often use organic tools—like ponderosa pine branches—to apply pigment. By using the tools of the land and the pull of gravity, the resulting art holds the "velocity" of the outdoors. It creates a layered history on the canvas—a palimpsest—that our brains recognize instantly as an authentic natural rhythm.

I have designed these works for walls, and some are modular "2-3-2" triptychs. Designed for flexible installation, these 4-foot-high pieces follow a modular 2-3-2 configuration. The work consists of two 2-foot-wide panels and one 3-foot-wide panel. While each functions as an individual work, they can be combined into a seamless 7-foot-wide panorama of forest, sea, or sky. This flexibility allows the healing power of nature to adapt to any clinical footprint, extending its restorative reach directly onto a sterile wall.

Why does this matter? Because when a patient or client encounters these natural rhythms,

