

^{24th Annual}
**SPRING
CONFERENCE** 
Practical. Affordable. Accessible.

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:

Organic Growers School Hosts the 24th Annual Spring Conference in March

The 24th Annual Spring Conference—for farmers, gardeners, homesteaders, and sustainability seekers—is hosted by Organic Growers School (OGS), a local non-profit organization, and will take place Saturday and Sunday, March 11 & 12, 2017, at the University of North Carolina in Asheville.

The Spring Conference offers practical, region-specific workshops on farming, gardening, permaculture, urban growing, and rural living and includes a trade show, seed exchange, silent auction, and children's program. Three on-farm, pre-conference workshops are also available at an additional cost. There are more than 70 90-minute classes per day in 16 themed tracks: Community Food; Cooking; Earth Skills; Farmers: Beginning; Farmers: Intermediate to Advanced; Gardening; Herbs; Livestock; Mushrooms; Permaculture; Pollinators; Poultry; Soils; Sustainable Forestry; Sustainable Living; And More!

This one-of-a-kind event brings people of all walks of life together for a weekend of learning, inspiration, and networking and features a host of local and regional experts. The mission of the Spring Conference is to provide down-to-earth advice on growing and sustainable living, while remaining affordable and accessible. The OGS Spring Conference is the largest locally run sustainability conference in the Southeast.

The cost for the weekend is \$99 before January 31st and \$129 after. For Saturday only, the cost is \$59 before January 31st, and \$74 after. And the cost for Sunday is \$49 before January 31st, and \$64 after. Prices for the pre-conference workshops are:

- Treating the Farm as an Ecosystem with Gabe Brown—\$65 with weekend registration and \$80 without.
- Chickens & You: From Egg to Table with Pat Foreman—\$65 with weekend registration and \$80 without.
- Beginning Forest Farming: Cultivating Crops Under the Canopy—\$65 with weekend registration and \$80 without.

Special guest speakers for the 2017 Spring Conference:

Gabe Brown, of Brown's Ranch, is regenerating landscapes for a sustainable future. A conventional farmer in the '90s, Gabe is now a cover-cropping and soil-building pioneer who speaks all over the world about the advantages of soil health. A North Dakota farmer with over 5,000 acres in production, Gabe teaches techniques that, when applied in concert, can achieve similar success anywhere. Field trials, scientific data, personal examples, and two decades of experience back up his productivity gains. Brown's Ranch has eliminated the use of all synthetic fertilizers, fungicides, and pesticides. They use minimal herbicide—and are striving to eliminate it—and they do not use GMOs or glyphosate. Their resulting increase in production, profit, and quality of life is the very definition of sustainability.

Matthew Raiford is the executive chef and owner of The Farmer and The Larder which was featured in January 2016's *Garden & Gun* as one of the South's most exciting new restaurants. A classically trained French chef, Matthew served as program coordinator and associate professor of Culinary Arts at the College of Coastal Georgia. He has a Bachelor's of Professional Studies in Culinary Arts from The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY, and a certificate in Ecological Horticulture from UC Santa Cruz and The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems. Raiford is also the farmer at Gilliard Farms in Brunswick, GA where he is the sixth generation to farm land that has been in his family since 1874.

Althea Raiford is a farmer, electrician, teacher, and US military veteran. She caught the bug to farm on her Nana's homestead in southern Georgia while gathering eggs, harvesting pears, picking pecans and greens and cotton, and hearing stories of how her family became part of the backbone of their community. In addition to life lessons learned, she draws continuous inspiration from the hard work and relentless spirit of those that came before her. Her passion to reclaim Gilliard Farms comes from her love and appreciation of her family's legacy and future.

Pat Foreman is a poultry pioneer, local foods and sustainability fanatic, organic farmer, author, pharmacist, international consultant, and instructor extraordinaire. She is the founder of The Gossamer Foundation, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to global sustainability and local foods, and the developer and lead instructor of the Chickens and You Training Series which awards the Master Backyard Chicken Keeper Certification. She is the author of *City Chicks*, co-author of *Chicken Tractor*, *Day Range Poultry*, *Backyard Market Gardening*, and *A Tiny Home to Call Your Own*. Pat has kept poultry for about 25 years with experience ranging from a community farm to a commercial operation with free range, organic layers, broilers, and turkeys. Pat has been featured on NPR & BBC.

Forest Farming Experts:

- Jeanine M. Davis, PhD, Horticulture Professor at NC State University since 1988 and author. NCHerb.org.
- Jim Hamilton, PhD, the County Extension Director for the [Watauga County Cooperative Extension](#).
- Jeannie Dunn, owner of [Red Moon Herbs](#).
- Jennifer Flynn, C.O.O of Accelerating Appalachia and Brand Manager for the North Carolina Natural Products Association's [Blue Ridge Naturally](#) program.
- Jennifer Gerrity, the Executive Director of Operations of Mountain Rose Herbs in Eugene, OR.
- Margaret Bloomquist, Research Assistant with Alternative Crops and Organics Program of NC State.

Weekend classes include Spring & Summer Hoophouses, Creative Farmland Access, Creating Monarch Habitats, Permaculture, 5 Keys to Building Healthy Soils, Sustainable Seafood, Fire Building, Strategies for Pastured Livestock, Knots, Ropes & Strings, Powerhouse Breakfasts, What's That Mushroom?, Dairy Goats, Rainwater Harvesting, and many more. The pre-conference workshops, a full weekend schedule, and class descriptions can be seen online at organicgrowersschool.org. Additional long-standing traditions at the OGS Spring Conference weekend include the following:

- Forest Floor Wilderness Program has teamed up with OGS to run this year's Annual Children's Program. Forest Floor staff will mentor children through stories, games, and earth skills. On the agenda is a nature museum, outdoor safety and awareness, bird language, plant identification, tracking skills, and ancient crafts. This program will coincide with the adult class schedule and will serve two age groups: 5–7 & 8–12. Registration is \$40 per day, per child, and the program is limited to 40 children per day.
- The Trade Show will showcase a wide array of exhibitors and products: local farms, gardening suppliers, and cottage industries that specialize in organic products, books and resources for organic growers and permaculture practitioners, and several non-profit organizations with information on related topics. (A full list of exhibitors is on the OGS website and is updated regularly.)
- The Seed and Plant Exchange booth is open throughout the weekend and offers the opportunity to preserve genetic diversity and protect regionally adapted varieties. Attendees may bring excess seeds and small plants to share, barter, or trade. Seed saving supplies and recommended readings will be provided.

Three full-day, on-farm pre-conference workshops are offered on Friday, March 10 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at various locations around WNC. They are as follows:

Treating the Farm as an Ecosystem with Special Guest, Gabe Brown takes place at Living Web Farms in Mills River, NC. Workshop description: Soil, water, and sunlight. It is from these resources that all life develops. It is also from these resources that farmers make their living. To

ensure both our current success and the sustainability of future generations, we must regenerate our landscapes. Learn how Brown's Ranch, located near Bismarck, ND, uses cover crops, zero-till, crop and livestock diversity, pasture recovery, and high-density grazing as key tools for increasing yield, profit, and efficiency. Their ever evolving strategies have significantly improved the mineral and water cycles, allowed for nine or more months of grazing, and increased the topsoil and, consequently, the health of the entire farm.

Chickens & You: From Egg to Table with Special Guest, Pat Foreman takes place at Franny's Farm in Leicester, NC. Workshop description: There is a back-to-the-land movement and it's happening in backyards and on small parcels across the world. Raising chickens is fun, empowering, and assures that your food is grown with clean soils, heritage breeds, and proper, high-quality food inputs. Some people are finding they can't eat commercial poultry because of food allergies and sensitivities to the grain that the birds eat. With pastured production methods and heritage birds, you can raise birds that you couldn't otherwise source or afford. Learn everything you need to know from egg to table for a small-scale backyard chicken operation, including how to minimize work, maximize production, and have fun doing it. Keep you and your family in good health—occupy your backyard with chickens!

Beginning Forest Farming: Cultivating Crops Under the Canopy with team of experts takes place at Mountain Horticultural Crops Research & Extension Center in Mills River, NC. Workshop description: Most farms and homesteads in Western NC and the Southern Appalachians contain forested land. Forest farming is a practice of cultivating medicinal, edible, decorative, and handicraft crops under a forest canopy—a unique habitat for producing non-timber forest products. The Appalachian region contains native habitat for more than 15 forest farmable plants. Due to an ever-growing market (one billion dollars annually in the US and rising), forest-based production can contribute to the financial success of regional farmers.

As the largest grassroots conference of its kind in the region, the Spring Conference has allowed Organic Growers School to reinforce WNC's role as a regional leader in sustainable food and farming. Attendees come from 18 states and Canada and have described the event as a ritualistic kick-start to the growing season. The value placed on local wisdom and mountain-specific growing information—as well as accessible, practical, and hands-on education—makes the event a regional and much-loved tradition in the WNC mountains.

This event has grown exponentially, from a small gathering of 100 growing enthusiasts in 1993 to a regionally recognized conference drawing over 2,000 attendees, exhibitors and speakers. "The OGS Spring Conference is a gathering place, a source of inspiration, and a reminder of the richness of our community. The number one thing people come away with is an immersion in the human web, much like the soil web, of like-minded folks. To be connected, even for a weekend, as allies for land stewardship, sustainable food systems, and local farming goes a long way to creating an infusion of delight and momentum," says Lee Warren, Executive Director of OGS.

The 150+ class schedule that makes up the Spring Conference program is created by track leaders, volunteers who are experts in their respective fields, and community leaders. Track leaders for the 24th Annual Spring Conference include Chris Smith of Sow True Seeds; Bre O'Connor of the Asheville Mushroom Club; Mark Dempsey of CFSA, Meredith Leigh and Richard Freudenberger of Living Web Farms; Nicole DeCogliano of OGS; Elizabeth Ayers of NC Cooperative Extension; Shane Maxson, Pearson King, and Dylan Ryals Hamilton from the Permaculture community; Amah Mitchell, herbalist; Shawn Swartz, Forester at Warren Wilson College; Anne Knoflicek, Local Chef; Kelly Gaskill of NC State; Franny Tacy, Local Farmer; and Phyllis Stile and Nancy Adamson of the Bee City and Pollinator Activist communities. "Our focus on local education and community-based leadership makes this conference a real grassroots event," says Rodney Bowling, the Conference Director. "And if we want change in our food systems, creating education for the people by the people is what will create this change."

An additional day of programming is being offered in 2017, with two co-sponsored events planned for Thursday, March 9, 2017. The National Young Farmers Coalition is hosting a workshop titled "Accessing Land to Farm: Strategies & Partners to Help You Succeed," from 10am-4pm and a networking and mixer event from 4-6pm at the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy Incubator Farm, 180 Mag Sluder Rd, Alexander, NC 28701. This free, full-day training is designed to provide beginning farmers with an overview of the partners, resources, and strategies involved in finding secure access to farmland. For registration, visit www.youngfarmers.org/landaccess. Additionally, in partnership with Living Web Farms, a lecture entitled, "Nutrient-Dense Foods" with Dan Kittredge will happen, also on Thursday, March 9th, from 5-7pm, upstairs at the French Broad Food Coop, 90 Biltmore Ave, Asheville, NC 28801. Learn about 'Quality Food,' how to get it, and why it is important, with Dan Kittredge of the Bionutrient Food Association. No Registration required.

The major sponsors of the 24th Annual Spring Conference are Carolina Farm Credit, French Broad Food Co-op, Mountain Rose Herbs, Living Web Farms, Earth Tools, Biltmore, Red Moon Herbs, Fedco Seeds, Central Carolina Community College, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Wild Abundance Firefly Gathering, Sow True Seeds, Edible Asheville, WNC Woman, Laurel of Asheville, Hendersonville Community Coop, IWANNA, Mountain Xpress, Mother Earth News Fair, Reems Creek Nursery, Thyme in the Garden, Sheville, Home Garden & Green Living Show, and Lenoir-Rhyne University.

The Spring Conference is organized annually by the Organic Growers School, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a mission to inspire, educate, and support people to farm, garden, and live organically. Organic Growers School is the premier provider of practical organic education in the Southern Appalachians. OGS envisions a mutually supportive network of prosperous farmers, productive gardeners, and informed consumers engaged in creating healthy communities.

OGS is proud to offer over 150 opportunities for individuals to attend the conference by means of a work-exchange program. Persons interested in applying for work exchange/volunteer status

should visit the OGS website and fill out an application. Shifts are filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Interested participants may register online at www.organicgrowersschool.org or request a mailed registration form from Rod Bowling at rod@organicgrowersschool.org or (828) 680.0661. Registration forms are also available at area retail stores and Cooperative Extension offices.

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