



June 2009 Growers Notebook: Tips, Advice, and News on Things Organic



Meet CRAFT:
Thatchmore
Farm

Our CRAFT farm tour for May took place at Thatchmore Farm in Leicester, NC. Over 30 farmers and interns came out to the farm to learn about season extension. Tom and his wife Karen have been farming organically since the 80's, and started selling "when Earth Fare, then called 'Dinner for the Earth' had a produce section only half this size," Elmore said as he gestured to his small front porch. Since then, as awareness of organic and local food has risen, Thatchmore farm relies on retail sales for 90+% of its revenue. Tom led the group around the farm, discussing his famous greenhouse tomato operation, hoophouse construction methods and materials, and even a new technique he is borrowing from the Chinese to cut down on propane costs in his greenhouse and reduce his farm's carbon footprint. The technique involves 16 panels he and his workers constructed out of old landscape fabric and insulation, which they pull over the greenhouse in the late



Nationally Known Artist's work featured on True Nature Country Fair Poster!



The poster art selected by the organizers for this year's True Nature Country Fair is nationally recognized multi media artist Norma Bradley's fiber art "Dancing Leaves ." "We knew this piece was a beautiful fit with our mission of working in harmony with the earth," said Program Manager Karen Vizzina. The third annual **True Nature Country Fair**, a celebration of life in connection with the Earth, will be held this year on September 26 and 27, 2009, at a new location, the Big Ivy

Community Center in Barnardsville, North Carolina. True Nature Country Fair is sponsored by the Organic Growers School, www.organicgrowersschool.org.

Norma Bradley's fiber art includes quilt-like elements of the earth, dyed painted and collected cloth. She is the creator of the Earth Quilt Project, and has installed over sixty-five Earth Quilt Gardens through the Southeast in schools, hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Bradley participated in the State Visiting Artist Program in North Carolina, and is a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild and Tri State Sculptors. She is Director of Education for HandMade in America.

"I was thrilled to have my piece chosen for True Nature Country Fair," said Bradley. "There are moments in the day when a falling leaf or the strong upright trees glow with their unique markings, colors and rhythms. It is those moments that enter into

afternoon to trap the day's heat inside for the night. Not only does this keep a more constant temperature inside the house, but also "reduces condensation that forms on the ceiling and then drips down onto the plants, leading to one of the most troublesome diseases on our farm--tomato leaf mold".

Tom also discussed how his small acreage and steep



topography have shaped his operation, and how he and his family have turned the potential challenges of lack of space and bottom land into opportunities and niche markets. After the tour, the group got to pitch in and start building the frame of another small greenhouse. Not a bad way to spend a Saturday, post-Tailgate Market. Thanks to Tom, Karen, and their daughter Liz for welcoming CRAFT onto the farm. Those who don't know Thatchmore farm can find Tom on Wednesday afternoons at the West Asheville Tailgate Market, and on Saturday mornings at the North Asheville Tailgate Market, where he offers produce, hollies, and later in the season, blueberries. To learn more about CRAFT, [click here.](#)

my studio. I work intuitively, like a jazz musician. I improvise, always searching for a sense of movement, harmony and balance."

For more information on True Nature Country Fair, contact Program Manager Karen Vizzina at

earthstarnc@earthlink.net or 828.342.1849.

<http://www.organicgrowersschool.org>



Market Finds for June

"It looks like something off the front of a calculus textbook", said one farmer about the cauliflower variety that we found at tailgate market this past weekend. Romanesco Cauliflower is typically planted in summer, for harvest in the fall, but in the southeast it can be grown for spring, fall, and possibly even midwinter harvests. First documented in Italy in the 16th century, Romanesco is referred to as a type of broccoli in some parts of the world, and as a variety of cabbage in others. The taste is great, no matter what you call it--sweeter than regular cauliflower and nuttier than broccoli. Kids are reported to love it, and it is high in Vitamins A, C, and carotenoids. Like other green cauliflower varieties, it boasts more vitamin C and fiber than the white cauliflower you are used to seeing. On top of all this, it may spur a math lesson over dinner. What could be better?

This Month's Picks

Each month, we hope to feature a seasonal recipe and a website of the month. If you have recipes or websites to submit for inclusion, [contact us.](#)

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Family Farm Tour Still Needs Volunteers!

The Family Farm Tour is coming up soon, and we still need volunteers! Come out to a farm on one day of the tour, and assist that farmer with registration, parking, and other tasks, and then take

the tour on the other day (with a carload of your favorite people) FOR FREE! Contact libby@asapconnections.org for details. Volunteer training required. See you on the farm!



**Farmer's Corner:
Ask Tom**

Dear Tom,

Help! Flea Beetles are eating my precious lettuces!

-Barbara (NC)

Barbara -

The key to flea beetles is to outgrow them. I've never seen them on lettuce but they love cole crops and eggplant. The plants are usually most at risk



Strawberry...Soup!

Summer Strawberry Soup (first course, or last)

2 cups strawberries, quartered (reserve a few for garnish)

8 oz. strawberry yogurt

1/2 c white wine, chilled

1/4 t finely grated orange zest

1/4 t finely grated lemon or lime zest

Sugar to taste, optional

About 1 T finely shredded mint leaves

Place the quartered strawberries and yogurt in a blender or food processor and puree. Add the wine and blend until smooth. Add zests. Taste for sweetness and add sugar if desired. Refrigerate at least 3 hours, or overnight. Garnish with reserved strawberries and fresh mint.

Website of the month: Growing Small Farms

You may know about Debbie Roos' Growing Small Farms website, but for those of you who don't, it is a great resource. Debbie got such rave reviews after her workshops on insect pest management at our annual Spring Conference, so we decided to give her a shoutout in this month's e-news. From buy local guides, web resources for growers, workshops and news, to great pictures (Debbie is also a photographer), the Growing Small Farms site is a must on anyone's list of bookmarks. Check it out at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/index.html>

Important: Listening Session for farmers about National Animal Identification System (NAIS)

Below is a copy of a letter from the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's Executive Director, Roland McReynolds. The letter was sent via the CFSA listserv in the past week, but in case some of our readers are not subscribers, we wanted to pass Roland's notice along. If you are not familiar with NAIS, check out the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance (see link below) for more information. Thanks to Patryk Battle for his help on this front, as well.

when they are young.

One strategy would be to plant bok choy and then spray the beetles with Pyganic when they move to the trap crop. Another would be to dunk the crop in Surround before you plant it. Surround is a clay material that confuses the sensors in their feet. That might help them get past the young sensitive stage.

With all the rain this spring, my lettuce is growing slowly so you might try a side dressing of compost or fertilizer to help your plants outgrow the little hoppers.

Good luck.

--- Tom

Commercial Farmers, got a question for Tom? [Email it to the Organic Growers School.](#)



**Gardener's Corner:
Ask Ruth**

Dear Ruth,

What is the difference between different kinds of lime available for garden application? I have some instructions that say "Do not use slaked lime", but I don't know what that means. I asked the local garden center, and they told me their lime was dolomitic. What is that? Is dolomitic lime also slaked?

The USDA has announced that it will be holding a listening session on the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) in Raleigh, NC on June 25, from 9am to 4pm.

This is part of a series of meetings on NAIS, and it is critical for proponents of small farms, diversified agriculture and heritage breed preservation to attend and voice your opinion on this industrial ag initiative to trace every animal on every farm and homestead in the country. Learn more about NAIS opposition at <http://farmandranchfreedom.org/content/articles-and-newsletters>.

Registration is required to attend the June 25 meeting.

To register, you can:

- 1) Pre-register online: Send an email to NAISSessions@aphis.usda.gov In the subject line of the e-mail, indicate your name (or organization name) and the location of the meeting you plan to attend. If you wish to present public comments, please include your name (or organization name) and address in the body of the message.
- 2) Pre-register by Phone: call 301-734-0799
- 3) Register the day of the meeting: From 8 am - 9am on the day of the meeting

The public can submit written comments at the meeting, as well as make oral statements. The Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance has sample comments you can use for ideas, as well as alternatives for meeting the purported goals of NAIS, the protection of livestock from pandemic disease.

The afternoon part of the meeting will be "facilitated sessions," where the attendees will be divided into groups to develop solutions.

Please help!

-Anna, (Asheville, NC)

Dear Anna,

I'll do my best to keep it simple, and I invite soil scientists in the neighborhood to send us additional comments on this important topic.

There are two basic types of lime available, Calcium Carbonate, called calcitic limestone (CaCO_3) and Calcium Magnesium Carbonate, called dolomitic limestone [$\text{CaMg}(\text{CO}_3)_2$]. If calcium carbonate is heated, the carbon dioxide portion escapes and the result is called burnt-lime or quick-lime (CaO). If the burnt-lime is combined with water, hydrated-lime [$\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$] or slaked-lime is produced.

Limestone alters the pH of the soil and provides nutrients to plant life. Ground limestone, either calcitic or dolomitic, is the most used, most abundant, and generally least expensive form of lime. Certified Organic growers are not allowed by the USDA Organic Rules to use either burnt-lime or hydrated-lime. In your backyard garden, it's up to you. I figure most of the organic rules are based on reasonable environmental arguments. It is possible that burnt-lime can kill some of the beneficial microbial activity in your soil, and it can also burn plant roots during unfavorable conditions. Hydrated-lime is liable to leach beyond the reach of plant roots becoming unusable to the plant. If you do use either burnt or hydrated

Be prepared to politely disagree with the facilitator. If they claim that a "consensus" has been reached with an answer that you don't agree with, say so!

You can also submit comments online at:
<http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocketDetail&d=APHIS-2009-0027>

Helpful tips for using the government comments site: Click on the yellow balloon under the "add comments" column. Fill out the required sections, and type in your comments. If you have long comments, it works best to type them up in a document, and then copy & paste them into the comment box. Then click "next step." You should get a confirmation number at the end of the process. If you don't, double check that you've filled in all the required fields and clicked all the "next step" buttons.

*Or mail to:
ATTN NAIS
Surveillance and Identification Programs
National Center for Animal Health Programs, VS,
APHIS,
4700 River Road Unit 200
Riverdale, MD 20737*

At similar sessions in other states so far, the response has been overwhelmingly against NAIS. Let's keep this grassroots momentum going when the USDA comes to Raleigh with a big turnout. Certainly our region's industrial animal producers such as the NC Pork Producers Council will be there to speak in favor of NAIS, and it will be vital for small farms to be there in force to balance the influence of big ag.

lime, extra protection for your skin and eyes is required. Maybe that's why your instructions stated, "Do not use slaked lime."

Why is lime so important?

Primarily, lime sweetens the soil by raising the pH and adjusting the acidity of the soil. Lime can facilitate better nutrient uptake and it's probably the most economical way to provide additions of calcium or magnesium. It's a fact that proper pH is extremely important to optimal plant health and maximum yield in your garden. Lime can also benefit the structure of both clay and sandy soils. Lime should be evenly distributed over the garden and well incorporated into the soil, as it doesn't move around much,

Most vegetables prefer a pH range of 6.0 to 6.5, but this varies by region, and by crop. Beans and peas like more lime than other veggies. Potatoes don't really like lime, and a number of plants prefer acid soil, such as blueberries, hollies, and rhododendrons. Getting a soil test is essential to ensure that your application rate is correct, and not overly sweet. Like Goldilocks... you want it just right.

Guess what? North Carolina is one of the only states that still offers FREE soil testing. Go to your local Cooperative Extension office where they will provide you with a box and instructions. After gathering your soil for testing, put your sample boxes in another box and ship it to Raleigh (you do

Contact the Organic Growers School

If you have ideas, questions, or comments about this newsletter, please feel free to [email us](#). If you would like to unsubscribe, you'll notice a link at the bottom of your screen that says "unsubscribe". This way you can just take yourself off, without emailing us about it.

Thanks for reading!

have to pay the postage). Turn-around times are longer in spring than other seasons, so try to think ahead. Right now their website says it takes 5-7 days for the results to be posted, which seems optimistic for this time of year. Your soil test will tell you exactly how much lime to add, if any. Fall is a great time to get your soil tested, and a great time to apply lime to the soil since lime is somewhat slow-acting. If you don't have a soil test to go by, and the soil has not been limed in the last 3-4 years, it would probably be safe to apply 50 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. of garden. Timing recommendations vary from liming a year ahead, to 4-6 months, to 2-3 months, and to applying just prior to spring planting. The general consensus seems to be to apply lime at least a few months ahead of planting so it has enough time to effectively alter the pH. The finer the particle size of the limestone powder, the faster acting the lime will be.

In general the soils in Western North Carolina are naturally high in magnesium, so in most cases dolomitic limestone would *not* be the preferred lime for this area. Many area farmers actually use a high-calcium lime that acts to balance the calcium/magnesium ratio in the soil and results in better nutrient uptake. Gypsum can be used when you want to add calcium without changing the pH. Elemental sulfur is used to acidify the soil when you have an acid-loving plant. Bagged lime is available at local garden

centers.

Ok, Anna, I hope you are ready to forge ahead with your project!

Best wishes,
Ruth

Web Resources for further reading:

www.soil.ncsu.edu/publications

<http://hgic.clemson.edu>

Gardeners, got a question for Ruth?

[Email it to the Organic Growers School.](#)

A Note about Ruth and Tom's advice: Ruth and Tom are both successful growers in the Western North Carolina area and their advice is based on their reading or personal experience. The Organic Growers School does not guarantee results for any grower who wishes to try the tricks in this column, nor do we claim that the advice given is based on research or statistically significant data.

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