

Sep 18 2009

3rd Annual True Nature Country Fair is Next Weekend!

2009 Fair Artwork

True Nature Country Fair is in its third and biggest year. A kick-up-your heels, affordable celebration of life in connection with the earth, the Fair will be held September 26 and 27 at the Big Ivy Community Center in Barnardsville, NC. On hand will be farmers, homebuilders, craftspeople, restaurateurs, and lovers of the earth for a weekend of live music, trade demonstrations, organic and local food, sustainable products and a huge array of resources. Gates open at 10:00 AM and close at 6:00 PM both days, with daily admission \$5 for adults and \$3 for kids. While kids enjoy earth, arts and crafts projects in the children's tent – among them folk songs, cob building, nature walks and pottery – parents can choose from over sixty-seven learning tracks that turn True Nature Country Fair into a mini-

university on sustainability for \$5 a class. Sample subjects are biodynamic farming, tribal ceremony, biofuels, heirloom plants, perennial food plants, primitive fish hooks, organic farming, dowsing basics, the home cow, orcharding, spinning with a drop spindle, urban farming, shiitake and oyster harvesting and herbal first aid.

Forty vendors, including Greenlife, Appalachian Seeds Farm & Nursery and Blue Daisy Cafe and Bountiful Cities Project, will be on hand to feed and provide fair goers with tools and tips for the sustainable trade. Demonstrations include, but are not limited to, affordable greenhouse construction, spinning wool roving into yarn, and a hands-on dance party with earthen bench construction. A fiddle contest and contra dancing will be emceed by Joe Hallock and the Back Creek Boys'. Juan Holladay will also be on hand with solo guitar and tenor vocals, harmonizing with Wildflowers.

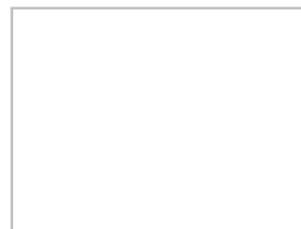
Topping off this year's Fair will be a field-to-table dinner at 6:00 PM Saturday when Fair gates close, \$30 for adults and \$10 for children. Dinner reservations recommended. For dinner menu, reservations, more information about the Fair, or directions, visit our website www.organicgrowersschool.org.

Meet CRAFT: Mountain Harvest Organics

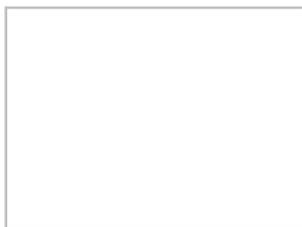
In early August, the CRAFT-WNC group met at Mountain Harvest Organics, a mixed vegetable farm nestled in the beautiful Spring Creek Township of Madison County. Owners/Operators Carl Evans and Julie Mansfield gave us the lowdown on their transition from software developers to full-time organic farmers. Mixing a kind of down-to-earth farmer's wisdom with a little bit of humor, Carl and Julie explained their farming operation, with a focus on irrigation, harvest, and post harvest handling. In many ways, MHO was the perfect farm for a focus on irrigation, as Carl and Julie use

a mix of both drip irrigation and overhead sprinklers. Their greenhouse is outfitted with automatic misters, “Just one less thing I have to worry about-watering the greenhouse-makes it worth it to me,” Carl said. The pair has had experience with nearly every sprinkler head, drip tape, and pipe on the market, and has used a combination of recycled and new materials to create a unique system that works for their farm.

On harvest and post harvest, Carl introduced the group to a harvest schedule system that he and Julie have developed using Excel. “Julie and I are system developers, that’s what we did for a living before we farmed” Carl added, “So we use several systems we’ve developed to make sure our farm runs as efficiently as it can, and our interns know what is expected on a given day.” Based on the number of CSA shares, and upcoming markets, workers at MHO know how many bunches of beets or heads of lettuce to pull from the fields. “Then we bring everything back to the barn, where we grade, pack,

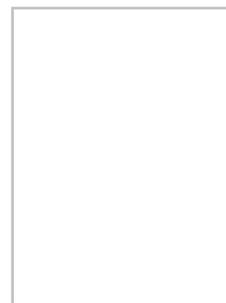


and store it.” MHO’s post harvest set up consists of an old bathtub for a washing station, a washing machine set on its spin cycle to dry greens, an ice machine, and two farm-built coolers with temperatures regulated by the revolutionary CoolBot. Of all the post harvest equipment, Carl and Julie seemed to treasure their ice machine the most, attributing it with the freshness of their broccoli and cilantro. “It’s a valuable thing to have, especially when you consider that broccoli that has been iced since

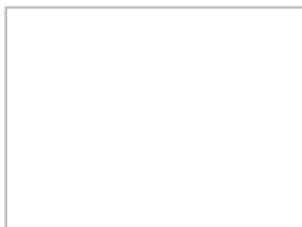


harvest for two and a half days is as fresh as broccoli that sat at 68 degrees for four hours.” These and other bits of technical wisdom are what make CRAFT so valuable. A new farmer not only learns from his mistakes, but also receives the benefit of other farmers’ experience, knowledge, and intuition.

To top it off, the CRAFT tradition of a social gathering after the tour gets richer every month. At MHO, Carl and Julie stoked their brick oven for homemade pizza, with member farmers and participating interns contributing toppings and refreshments. The food table, complete with flower arrangements, was so welcoming, and Julie rounded up a bunch of plastic chairs. Everyone sat in a circle and shared stories about funny tourists on the farm, pulling city-folk’s cars out of the mud, and quirky intern memories. As we tackled the winding road out of Spring Creek well after dark, I remember thinking that CRAFT is feeling less like my job and more like family. Thanks to Carl and Julie for a great learning experience, and an escape from our own rainy farms for a bit.



Visit their website at www.mountainharvestorganic.com, or catch them at the North Asheville Tailgate Market on Saturday mornings at UNCA , and the Historic Haywood Market in front of theHart Theatre in Waynesville on Wednesdays.



For more information about CRAFT-WNC, visit www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/1874

CRAFT logo



Farmers Corner: Ask Tom

Last month, Tom answered a question on fall sowing schedules, and this month we are offering an elaboration on this topic to include more detail, plus

Tom Elmore

season extension resources. Happy winter growing.

Q – What is the best way to schedule late fall and winter production?

A – The best way to schedule your late fall and winter plantings is to look back over ten years of your farm records and adjust your plantings from last year. Since everyone's farm location, aspect (facing north, south, etc.) and elevation are different, your records are the best and over several years a pattern will appear. For years we stopped sowing head lettuce at the end of August. Some years that produced harvestable heads in November but in other years the freeze thaw cycle turned the heads to mush before they reached harvestable size. We backed up to August 15 for the last sowing and rarely lost that last crop to cold damage. Lately we have been growing salad mix which can be sown a little later.

Given your question, you are just beginning to developing your own farm-specific fall hardiness records. Here are some resources to help with your early attempts at Winter harvests.

I am a big fan of the Johnny's Selected Seeds catalog (as well as their seeds). They use a snowflake icon to indicate the varieties that do well in cold weather. While they are in Albion, Maine – much further north – they are also closer to the coast than we are so their varieties and snowflakes seem to work out fairly well for the Southern Appalachians.

Another variable is the amount of protection that you intended to provide. Eliot Coleman's new book The Winter Harvest Handbook (<http://www.growingformarket.com/store/products/19>) discusses fall and winter scheduling at great length. He stages crops by the level of protection:

- Outside (unprotected)
- Quickbeds – hoops and spunbond row cover
- Cold house – high tunnel with row cover inside
- Cool house – high tunnel with row cover and supplemental heat to keep the inside above freezing.

He provides detailed variety suggestions and scheduling examples. He is in Maine too so keep that in mind as you read – much shorter winter days than WNC but his hardiness zone is similar to our situation.

I would add one more category to his list

- Cool house with outside insulation.

We are experimenting with a way to protect our heated greenhouse from cold spells with a movable insulation blanket. Here is a photo (right) from a recent CRAFT visit to our farm in Leicester.

Another great resource on season extension is Steve Moore who works at the NCSU Center for Environmental Farming Systems down east. I first heard about Steve in an article entitled "The Gandhi of Greenhouses" from Rodale (<http://newfarm.rodaleinstitute.org/features/0404/moore/greenhouse.shtml>). Steve developed his systems in central Pennsylvania so his experience there is very relevant to our climate, although CEFS is in a warmer coastal plain situation. For some crops he likes used greenhouse plastic as the inside cover instead of row cover. In WNC I might try both. His presentation at

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/PDFs/High%20Tunnels/High%20tunnel%20production%202009.pdf> gives his winter sowing schedule in Pennsylvania.

Other resources are Walking to Spring by the Wiedigers in Kentucky (<http://www.aunaturefarm.com/bookorderform.html>). Their climate is probably similar to ours as well.

A last suggestion is the True Nature Country Fair put on by the Organic Growers School September 26-27 in Barnardsville this year. (<http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/15150> It has 87 classes and other events including three that deal with season extension. Hope to see you there!

-- Tom

Commercial Growers: Got a question for Tom? Email it to the organicgrowersschool: (ogs.readernews@gmail.com)

Gardener's Corner: Ask Ruth

Ruth Gonzalez

Dear Ruth,

I am thinking about planting some fruit in my yard. How much room do I need? Is now a good time? What kind of place does fruit like to be planted?

Sarah
Asheville, NC

Dear Sarah,

Fruit is a great addition to any yard! It is a thrill to walk outside your door and bite into something wonderful. Kids love it. Grownups love it. Even some pets love it.

Before I answer your question though, I want to encourage everyone to check out the enticing list of classes at the True Nature Country Fair this year. It's on September 26 & 27, Saturday & Sunday, in Barnardsville, NC – *just 20 miles north of downtown Asheville* from the experts...and three of the classes are about fruit & edible landscaping!

So Sarah...now *is* a good time to plant most fruits. *You can actually plant containerized fruits any time of year as long as the ground is not frozen.* One advantage of planting now is that the fruit will be making roots all winter long, and thus will have a head start come springtime.

Most fruits require full sun (a minimum of 6 hours for good production), drainage, good root drainage, yearly pruning, and good sanitary practices for disease prevention. Ideally, fruit trees should be planted on a north or northeast-facing slope. In these locations, they will warm up slower in springtime, bloom later, and therefore be less susceptible to frost damage. Frost collects at the bottom of slopes, and above hedges or fences, so plant your trees midway down the hill to avoid frost pockets.

berries

Since most fruit requires **good root drainage** to prosper, dig your planting hole 2-3 times wider

than the plant's container. Plant it *even with or slightly above* the soil line in the pot (or the soil line on the bare root plant) - *no deeper*. Amend your backfill with a soil conditioner like Nature's Helper to about 50%. Amending with compost can be beneficial and add great microbial activity, but the compost must be very well finished. Compost that is still "hot" can burn newly forming roots. Be very cautious using compost when planting blueberries, as their roots are especially sensitive. Worm castings should be safe to add to your planting hole. Roots need to have an affinity for their surrounding soil, so always mix in *at least* 50% native soil with your planting hole amendments.

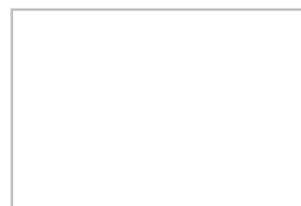


Some of our **favorite teachers** at the Organic Growers School (see upcoming classes below) recommend adding a few handfuls of kelp meal and rock phosphate (and sometimes Azomite) to the soil backfill when planting. Phosphate is a root fertilizer, so mix it in close to the roots, as it is very slow-moving. Kelp (a potassium source) and Azomite provide wonderful micro-nutrients - I like to call them "magic dust".

For the whole **first year**, **water** your plant deeply – *to the bottom of the roots* – once or twice weekly. Use your common sense and your God – given moisture meter (your finger) to determine proper watering. Neither bone-dry nor swampy is good.

After leaf-fall in autumn, rake up and remove leaves and diseased or dead wood. These will carry over diseases. Broadleaf weeds also harbor insects and disease, so keep orchard areas as clean as possible. This advice could prove more challenging for urban plantings, which are often incorporated right into your home landscaping. On that note, fruit adds a very attractive element to any yard. Most fruit has showy flowers in spring, fruit in summer or fall, and some have pretty fall color (leaves) too. When considering your choices, remember there are many small fruits you can squeeze in to small spaces or plant on a trellis. Dwarf fruit trees grow to only 8-10 feet tall, and semi-dwarf fruits get 12-15 feet tall. Most blueberries get 4-6 feet tall. Other fruits to consider: raspberry, blackberry, tayberry, kiwi, elderberry, grapes, persimmons, paw-paw, serviceberry and more obscure fruits like medlar, Cornus mas, etc.

Other quick fruit notes: Blueberries require acid soil. Get a **free soil test** from Cooperative Extension to see if you need to acidify your soil, adding sulfur if you do. Figs and other questionably hardy fruit are probably best planted in spring, so that they have well-established root systems by wintertime. Mulch figs with a 5-6" layer of pine straw over winter to protect their shallow roots. Mulch should never touch the actual trunks of your trees or shrubs, since that could cause root-rot and provides damaging critter habitat.



Favorite and unusual fruits are available locally from area garden centers, tailgate markets, and micro-nurseries.

Upcoming Classes on Fruit:

- Sept. 26 at 4:30 p.m. - **Perennial Plant Foods** with Chuck Marsh at True Nature Country Fair, \$5 per person
- Sept. 27 at 2:30 p.m. – **Great Edible Landscaping** with Chuck Marsh at True Nature

Country Fair, \$5. per person

- Sept. 27 at 4:30 p.m. - **Orcharding- Fruit Cocktail with a Twist** Bill Whipple, True Nature Country Fair, \$5. per person
- October 10 at 10 a.m. – **Home Orchards** with Andrew Goodheart Browns Creek Nursery, free of charge

Gardeners: Got a question for Ruth? Email it to the Organic Growers School
(ogs.readernews@gmail.com)

News Bits (submitted by readers for readers)

Last month, we published a reader-submitted caution about pasteurized raw almonds. Another reader submitted this response:

It was the Almond Board of California who approached the USDA and requested that pasteurization of almonds be made mandatory. The almond board felt this was necessary to protect their industry after a few food borne illness outbreaks. The industry, i.e., the vast majority of almond farmers in California, asked for this. The USDA responded. (not that I agree with it, just that's how it transpired).

The concern should be that big commodity groups can push for laws that affect the entire nation, or a state. This could happen with anything you produce. (the Florida Tomato Growers have state laws that prohibit farmers from selling tomatoes that meet state-mandated grades. Ugly Tomatoes were not allowed to sell their heirloom tomatoes outside of the state until they took it to court: <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/Story?id=352424&page=1>).

Also, as an aside, the Cornucopia Institute explains that you can still buy truly raw almonds direct from the farmer at their farm or at a farmers' market. I haven't taken the time to read the whole law in the Federal Register to see if that is actually true, but my point is that this was a farmer driven requirement.

Here is documentation:

The California Almond Board is the one who pushed for this new ruling:

http://www.almondboard.com/FoodProfessionals/Documents/Pasteurization_Sheet%205.22.09.pdf

This Month's Picks

Stuffed Apple Crisps

Well, it's September, and apples are about to hit the markets. Nothing says fall like a warm, sweet apple dessert on an autumn evening. Enjoy!

6 apples

1 C. rolled oats

1/2 C raisins or currants

1 C finely chopped walnuts

1/2 C. light brown sugar

6 T. butter, melted

1 T. ground cinnamon

1/4 t. ground nutmeg

pinch of clove

pinch of salt

1 t. lemon zest

whole cream

Preheat oven to 325. Cut off the top of each apple (about 1/4 inch) and set the tops aside. Using a spoon, core the apples, removing a bit of the flesh to create 1/2 in. thick shell around the perimeter. Discard cores. Arrange apples in a baking pan, cored sides up. Combine all remaining ingredients except the cream in a medium bowl, stirring well. Fill each apple with the mixture and top with a reserved top. Bake until soft, about 45 min to 1 hr. Serve hot out of the oven in a bowl and drizzle with whole cream.

- from *Southern Farmers Market Cookbook* by Herrick

Organic Growers School • 926 Welch Road • Franklin • NC • 28734

[Subscribe](#) | [Unsubscribe](#) | [Preferences](#) | [Send to a Friend](#) | [Report Spam](#)

powered by:  & 