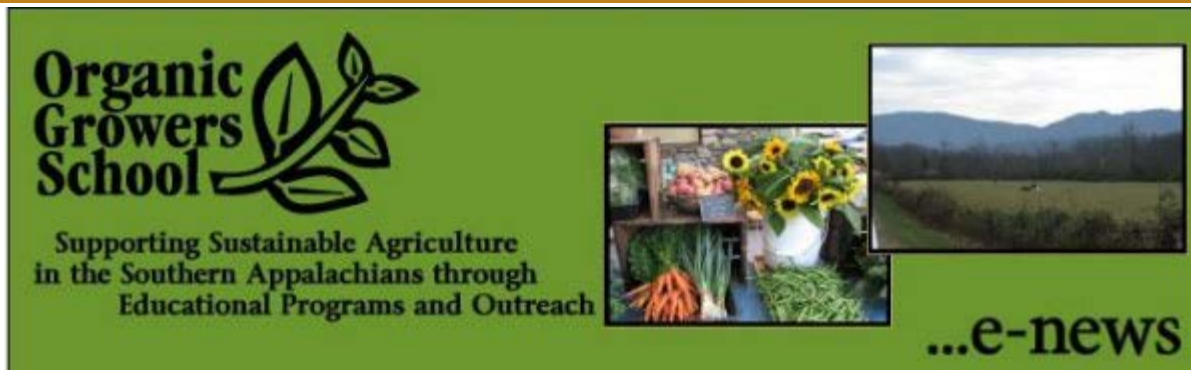


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[Organic Growers School](#)



October 2010 Growers Notebook

News, Tips & Advice on Things Organic

CRAFT: Mountain Harvest Organics



Mountain Harvest Organics is an oasis amidst the rocky mountain terrain of Madison County. On October 16, C.R.A.F.T. members gathered at this remote mountain farm to discuss Greenhouse Management and Season Extension with farm owners

Carl Evans and Julie Mansfield. While the season is coming to a close, Carl, Julie and their interns, Noah and Sobrina, are well prepared for the colder months with their greenhouses full of peppers, eggplants, chard, and tomatoes. Their set-up offered an amazing educational opportunity for some of the young farmers seeking to extend their season through greenhouse management, and provided fodder for an in depth discussion led by the farm owners, who offered information on heating, spacing, irrigation, pest control, construction, materials, and more. "Season extension and greenhouse growing has become a key part of our production system," Carl noted, and benefits include more control over microclimate, increased market

In this issue:

[CRAFT: Mountain Harvest Organics](#)

[Gardener's Corner: Ask Ruth](#)

[What is a Farm Apprentice?](#)

[News Bits](#)

[18th Annual Conference](#)

[Farmer's Corner: Ask Tom](#)

[Advertise!](#)

What is a Farm Apprentice?

Wondering if you have the right set up to host apprentices on your farm? Needing the extra help but not sure if you comply? Relax. No farm is the same, and in turn, no apprenticeship is either. The great news is this: apprenticeships can take on many different forms. Just as a small business owner running a coffee shop or book store sets his or her own rules when it comes to who, what, and when, farmers get to do the same! Through our [online apprentice link service](#), we work with farmers using myriad different models of mentorships, each one designed to fit the unique needs of the farm itself. Keep in mind, though, that farmers hiring workers for pay must do their research regarding state and federal requirements. Just as the government holds the coffee shop owner to rules like workers compensation, tax withholding, and minimum wage, many of these rules apply to farming as well. However there are exceptions. Some farmers can operate under an agricultural exemption, as long as they don't employ workers over a minimum number of hours per fiscal quarter. This winter, the Organic Growers School is working to research farm employment requirements in several southeastern states, in an effort to help you understand how to comply. In the meantime, check out the farmers currently profiled on [NC Apprentice](#)

offerings, and seasonal consistency and diversity. There have been challenges as well. Carl discussed how he and Julie have handled the greenhouse environment's reduced air and light, and persevered through the trial-and-error necessary to discover optimal planting and harvesting schedules, variety selection, and pest control. Carl added that "The fact that our area has a strong local food movement has made it possible to invest in season extension because there is demand for year round production of local produce, and the expectation is that the demand will only increase as more and more people become aware that local options exist."

Julie and Carl have been farming for almost ten years on a farm that has been in agriculture for one hundred and fifty years. They began small, working fulltime as computer programmers and the farm was their weekend and vacation getaway. After realizing the farm needed more attentive caretakers to reach its



potential, they left their careers and became full-time farmers. Now, they actively farm on the 130 acres, cultivating vegetables, raising pigs, chickens, horses, and dogs. One of the greatest challenges to Carl and Julie's farm has been the deer population in Madison County. The deer have created such a risk to the success of their crops that they were forced to build a high deer fence that surrounds their entire vegetable field. It has proved successful and has enabled their farm to thrive. Even with the greenhouses, Carl mentioned, they are forced to spray a deer repellent around the edges, so that when they raise the sides for temperature control, the deer won't crawl through the openings and devour their greenhouse crops. The more CRAFT tours we add to our repertoire, the more we see how many different and innovative ways farmers overcome obstacles. Indeed, the extensive

[Link](#), and discover how they are organizing their mentorships. If you are ready to create a profile, it takes only about 10 minutes of your time, and may just pay off for many seasons to come.

If you're a farmer, and you have tips or advice on hosting workers on the farm, don't hesitate to [send us your story](#). We'd love to include farmer profiles in our "What is a Farm Apprentice" guide, to demonstrate the many ways in which farmers can seek help while simultaneously providing training for future growers.

And if training is a passion for you, you might benefit from our [CRAFT program](#), which forms networks among seasoned farmers and aspiring farmers for on-farm group trainings and work exchange.

More info online at organicgrowersschool.org

News Bits

News Bits are reader-submitted news, events, and opinion. Submit your bit to [OGS Reader News](#)

Bamboo Workshops

Haiku Bamboo Nursery & Farm and the Oshima Bamboo School announce their October/November workshop schedules. Classes include *The Physiology of Bamboo*, *Thinning the Bamboo Forest*, *Bamboo Crafts*, and all new *Bamboo Walking Tours*. More info online: oshimabambooschool.com

Community Seed Exchange

[Sow True Seeds](#) announces a Community Seed Exchange program. Volunteer in the Sow True Seed Warehouse helping with inventory, germination, and packing, and for every four hours of work you receive a free packet of seeds. For more information, or to apply, contact Mikey at 828.254.0708

18th Annual Conference



Time to mark your calendars for one of the best events the southeast has to offer.

The 18th Annual Organic Growers School Spring Conference is March 5 & 6, 2011 at the University of North Carolina-Asheville.

deer fence at Mountain Harvest Organics is a feat of craftsmanship, hard work, and determination!

This month's tour brings our CRAFT season to a close. Thank you to everyone who contributed, attended tours, prepared delicious food to share, asked questions that increased the dialogue within our gatherings. Together, we've created a



community and encouraged learning within our region. CRAFT member farmers and interns alike all note this resounding benefit of participating in CRAFT WNC. While farmers spend most of their time working their own land, focusing on their own microclimate, addressing the special needs of their own land, CRAFT farmers are able to realize a social and technical network that furthers their ability to thrive as successful farmers. From the mountain setting of Madison County to the bottomland of Old Fort, each CRAFT member brings to the table different skills, ideas, insights that reflect the individual nature of working a different piece of land. The experience that comes from visiting one another's farms, discussing tools, pest control, irrigation, greenhouse management, value-added goods, and more is invaluable to the local food systems in our community. The opportunity to share ideas and see different ways of farming increases the resilience and sustainability of Western North Carolina's farm networks by empowering farmers and encouraging future growers.

Breaking News: CRAFT is growing! A partnership with the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture and Mountain Bizworks has been funded by the USDA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. OGS has already begun work on an exciting expansion that will allow CRAFT to benefit farmers in Eastern Tennessee, integrate farmer business planning, and allow access to additional farmer-training resources in our region. You can

Movers and shakers in the food world are already busy planning classes, trading ideas, and networking to make your 2011 conference experience great! We plan to release the schedule in late December, and open registration soon after. **For just \$40/day** you can enjoy classes on all aspects of sustainable living, seed and plant exchange, trade show, kids program, silent auction and more. **We've got a few surprises up our sleeves, so stay tuned!**

Educational topics include gardening, farming, soils, livestock, herbs, alternative energy, cooking, landscaping, forestry, food preservation, permaculture, and more. NEW tracks this year include primitive skills, urban farming, poultry, and fruit production!

If your business wishes to support this one-of-a-kind event, you can download sponsor and exhibitor information [here](#). Join a core of proud folks who already take part in this important regional conference!

To our faithful volunteers: If you're itching to take part in our work exchange program (a 4 hour shift gets you a free day pass!) note that we begin filling this program in January. To get on the list, just send your email address to meredith@organicgrowersschool.org. We'll send out a mass email when we start taking applications.

Join Our Mailing List

Farmer's Corner: Ask Tom



Tom,

I am interested in learning to be an organic farmer. I have had some international, organic farming experience in the past (~5 years ago) and would really like to make this a full time career for myself. Do you know of any programs that are available to receive this type of training? I have contacted Central Carolina Community College. I am hoping that you may have some other suggestions for schools and/or universities that you can share with me... I am looking for more fulfillment by directly shaping the food system and improving the health of those around me. Please let me know if you have any suggestions.

Thank you,

Janice

Dear Janice –

Thanks for your question on organic farmer education. We have many opportunities in WNC and nearby.

My first advice to my workers, most of whom are on an organic farmer career path, is "Don't quit your day job." Particularly as your farm is in the start-up phase, it takes a while to generate enough net income to cover living expenses. Even established family farms usually have some source of off-farm income.

join anytime, but sign up by January 2011 to become a core member of the team of farmers who will shape our program for next year. If you are farming in Eastern Tennessee or far Western North Carolina, please email us today! We are actively seeking to serve you through a CRAFT program in your area, and would love to hear from you.

CRAFT stands for Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training. It is a



coordinated effort to bring established farmers, farm apprentices, and students of agriculture

together for a comprehensive training program in sustainable agriculture. The goal of this program is to give established, successful farmers a stake in the training of our next generation of growers, and to give farm apprentices a rich educational experience that truly encompasses the ins and outs of farm operation. For more information, or to join CRAFT as an intern, friend, or farmer, [visit our website.](#)

Gardener's Corner: Ask Ruth



Dear Ruth,

I want to start composting my kitchen scraps, but I live alone and don't generate that many scraps. Do you have any suggestions?

Sally in Brevard

Dear Sally,

YES! A few years ago I moved to Asheville from Madison County. In Madison County I had plenty of room, and I wasn't

concerned about attracting raccoons and critters to my compost pile ~ plus I had dogs that patrolled the yard. When I moved to town, I was worried that unwanted creatures would show up for meals at my (potential) compost pile. I couldn't bear to throw my kitchen scraps in the trash, so I started a worm bin.

Luckily for me, some of my friends set me up with everything I needed. My friend Stacia provided the worms, and my friends Jeff & Annie gave me a ready-to-go bin. It was super simple, and the worms went to work right away. Just in case you don't know this, vermicompost (worm poop) is called **black gold!**

The first step in planning your educational strategy might be to decide how important credentials are to your training objectives. Your education plan could lead to a certificate on up to a graduate degree in sustainable agriculture. Or it could be more informal relying on conferences, seminars and web resources. It could be very hands-on by working or volunteering on local farms. In my opinion the best option might well be an "all of the above" approach that continues as long as you are a farmer. One of the appeals of organic agriculture to me is the endless opportunity to learn. In the space of an hour you can be called on to be supervisor, marketing expert, entomologist, plumber, and electrician.

Hands-on Opportunities

Most organic farms use farm workers at one time or other. These learning opportunities range from full-time room and board situations with a stipend to occasional or seasonal work to volunteer situations. The OGS CRAFT program (tab off the home page) is a great way to connect with successful farmers and to hear first-hand how they run their operations. OGS also works to match farm workers with farmers in need of help. Many organic farmers read the ASAP list serve where prospective workers often advertise as well as farmers looking for help. www.asapconnections.org/getinvolved.html The same is true of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association but their coverage is more regional (NC and SC). www.carolinafarmstewards.org/ Our farm gets calls and messages from folks going through the ASAP Local Food Guide which is also searchable on line at the site above. Each farm has a short description which might help narrow your search for hands-on learning more quickly.

Conferences and Workshops

Fall and winter is conference season and dozens of opportunities exist. Starting with the Organic Growers School go to our site at www.organicgrowersschool.org. The Spring School in March and Fall Fair are some of the best and most affordable educational events anywhere. The CFSA Sustainable Ag Conference is coming up in a few weeks. The winter vegetable conference is in Asheville as well as the southeastern apple school. The NC Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Association meets late this month in Raleigh. Most county Extension Agents have a newsletter in their specialty area (e.g. vegetables, livestock, nursery) with upcoming events. For organic, one of the best is from a regional specialist, Jeanine Davis, at www.NCorganic.org. If you are interested in a particular commodity, most crops have an association that puts on some sort of winter meeting. For example the American Holly Society meets in Oak Ridge, Tennessee next month.

Colleges and Universities

Warren Wilson College is well known for its sustainable agriculture program, with livestock and garden concentrations. Three land grant universities surround the southern Appalachians, all with organic or sustainable offerings – NCSU, Clemson, and University of Tennessee. Appalachian State in Boone also has sustainable agriculture degrees. These schools may be a long commute but some have done it. Most offer on-line classes as well as classroom experiences. All four offer degrees from bachelors through doctorates. North Carolina has a great system of community colleges. Blue Ridge, AB Tech, Haywood and Mayland all have ag-related programs but one of the most comprehensive is at Western Piedmont Community College in Morganton <http://www.wpcc.edu/uploads/file/pdfs/catalog/2009/susagr.pdf>.

Community colleges are also good with specialty topics that farmers need like welding or small engine repair.



Worm castings are hopping with wonderful microbial activity. Even if you have a big compost pile, you might want to consider a little vermicomposting on the side. Something special happens in the worm's gut that produces amazing compost.

What you need:

- A Bin ~ with 1/2" airholes drilled in the bottom
- Bedding ~ shredded paper, dead leaves, shredded corrugated cardboard
- Moisture ~ but not too much
- Garden Soil ~ 2 handfuls will introduce some grit and microbes to the system
- Redworms (*Eisenia fetida*)
- Kitchen Scraps, or other nitrogen source
- Blocks or boards ~ elevates the bin to achieve airflow underneath

According to Mary Appelhof, author of *Worms Eat My Garbage*, your bin should be shallow, rather than deep. Worms tend to feed on the surface. If the matter is too deep, conditions can go anaerobic and the whole process slows way down ~ plus it gets stinky. The worms and microorganisms need oxygen to prosper, and good conditions in your bin will result in a faster turn-around time for compost production.



You can make your bin from exterior-grade plywood (NOT pressure-treated), or you can buy a plastic tub and drill holes in it, or you can purchase something online. Alternatively, you can utilize plastic "chest-of-drawers" (found in box stores) by drilling holes in the bottom

of each drawer ~ worms will move up through the drawers toward the fresh material as each drawer of material is composted.

Getting Started: Once you have all your materials together, you need to thoroughly moisten the bedding. The bedding should be damp ~ but not wet ~ and only a few drops of water should be released when you squeeze it. I soaked shredded paper in a bucket of water and then squeezed out the excess water. I fluffed up the moist bedding and spread it out in my bin. Then I added a couple of handfuls of soil, and scrunched it around. Next, I added the worms as evenly as possible. After the worms disappeared into the bedding, I spread my kitchen scraps on top and mixed it into the bedding. Then I closed the top, since (1) worms like darkness, (2) the lid helps maintain moist conditions, and (3) the lid discourages intruders.

Redworms prefer warmish temperatures between 55 to 70 degrees; so most people keep them inside. Basements make great spots for worm bins, though under the kitchen counter is workable too. I have been keeping my worms outside for the last few years. Last winter they were fine until the beginning of March, but that last bit of cold weather finished them off. I looked in my bin and everything seemed strangely quiet. I dug around in the bin and couldn't find a single worm. Yipes! *If your worms are outside* James Magee, of Blue Ridge Redworms, suggests that you use plastic garbage bags full of leaves as insulation around, and on top

Web Resources

Web and distance learning resources are nearly endless. Below are a few links to get you started. The OGS "links we like" is listed first. The last one is a new entry by Marc Williams who often teaches with OGS. His site is an on-line based distance learning resource.

<http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/content/1518>

<http://attra.ncat.org/education.html>

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/edtr/EDTR2009.shtml>

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/index.html>

www.botanyeveryday.com

To Summarize

Not many organic farmers have a traditional agricultural education – a masters in agronomy for example – but I envy those that do. If you have the time and financial resources I recommend that approach. Those that do are usually great farmers.

If you don't have time for a four year degree, consider at least some community college classes.

Farming is a second career for me so most of my agricultural education was self-directed. Not growing up on a farm, I found internships critical to my farm education. Carefully targeted workshops and conferences since then allow me to tailor my continuing education to my specific needs based on my farm enterprises and personal interests.

I hope to see you at the OGS Spring School in a few short months.

Thanks for your inquiry.

-- Tom

Commercial Growers: Got a Question for Tom?

Send to: enews@organicgrowersschool.org



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For OGS sponsorship, [email Jane](mailto:jane@organicgrowersschool.org).

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

of, your bin.

Harvesting your Black Gold: You need to harvest on a regular basis. The finished compost can begin to get heavy and make it hard for the worms to move around in the box. (1) You can push the "finished" compost to one side and add fresh scraps and bedding to the other side. Wait a few days to allow the worms to migrate to the new side, and harvest your compost. (2) You can dump the contents out and sort through it, separating the worms and fresh matter from the compost. (3) The simplest ~ Just dump most of it out on your garden. Return about a third of it to the bin, add fresh bedding, and you're done.

Utilizing the primo compost: Because worm compost is extra wonderful, I usually reserve it for adding to planting holes or to a seed trench. The microbial activity in worm castings will inoculate your soil with beneficial microorganisms, and get your plants off to a great start. Sometimes I use another soil amendment as an extender for spreading a light dusting of worm



castings throughout the garden. Scratch worm castings into the soil around existing plantings, or incorporate them into the backfill of new plantings. Vermicompost will not burn plants and can even be used to boost houseplants.

Considerations: Avoid onions, garlic, and citrus; worms don't like them. James says melons and bread provide a "moist oasis" that worms love. Coffee grounds are one of their favorites. I avoid adding cooked foods and meats to my worm bin. You can use them, but they may stink and attract the attention of critters. Worms don't have teeth. Some people grind their kitchen waste up in a blender to make it easier for the worms to get to work. I usually crush my eggshells. Definitely don't give worms any toxic or indigestible material (metals, plastic, chemicals, vegetation with herbicides or pesticides).

Some sources for purchasing redworms:

Blue Ridge Redworms, 828-299-9258 828-299-9258, by appointment only

Buy worms by the pound

Mary Appelhof's (author of Worms Eat My Garbage) site: *buy worms, bins, books, etc.*

<http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/vermicomposting.html>

Other sources to check out:

Worms Eat My Garbage, by Mary Appelhof (Great book full of info!)

Mary Appelhof's WormEzine (free newsletter):

<http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/wormezine.html>

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences ~ Kids Pages

<http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/worms.htm>

HowToCompost.org on worms:

http://www.howtocompost.org/info/info_wormfaq.asp

To purchase bagged worm castings locally:

Fifth Season, Asheville, NC

<http://www.fifthseasongardening.com>, 828.253.4112

Mountain Harvest, Fairview, NC

600 Charlotte Highway, 828.298.9000

New Age Garden Center, Swannanoa, NC
www.newagegardens.com, 828.299.9989

Reems Creek Nursery, Weaverville, NC
www.reemscreek.com, 828.645.3937

I love my worm bin, Sally, and I hope you'll give it a try!

All my best,
Ruth

Gardeners: Got a question for Ruth?

Send to: enews@organicgrowersschool.org

Ruth Gonzalez is a former market farmer, avid gardener, local food advocate, and founder of the Tailgate Market Fan Club where she blogs at <http://tailgatemarketfanclub.wordpress.com>. In her job at Reems Creek Nursery, Ruth offers advice on all sorts of gardening questions, and benefits daily from the wisdom of local gardeners.
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