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Supporting Sustainable Agriculture  
in the Southern Appalachians through  
Educational Programs and Outreach



...e-news

## June 2011 Growers Notebook News, Tips, and Advice on Things Organic

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### True Nature Country Fair

true nature  
country fair

Celebrating our heritage • Cultivating our future

Organic Growers School



October 8,  
2011  
at  
Highland Lake  
Flat Rock, NC

Planning for this year's event is in full swing! Will you be joining us as a teacher, demonstrator, vendor, or volunteer? Are you coming to learn from this year's amazing line up of presenters? Maybe you enjoy old time music or want to settle down at the end of the day with a warm bowl of stew, served up in a locally made bowl. Whatever your passions, you can teach it, learn it and enjoy it at this year's fair.

Participants will choose from hundreds of offerings in themed topic areas, including Gardening, Farming, Permaculture, Health and Healing, Livestock, Primitive Skills, Green Building, Renewable Energy, Folks Arts, Low Impact Forestry, Food Preservation, Medicinal Herbs, Music, Native American Culture, Cooking, and more. Learning opportunities are experiential, and offerings take the form of live demos and/or hands on workshops (materials fees may apply) such as making kombucha, sheep dog demonstrations, storytelling, hayrides, blacksmithing demos, "100 things to do with apples", spinning yarn, learn to clog, and many, many more!

Additional fun and learning for the whole family include special events held during the course of the day.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual old time music contest is an organized event for both junior musicians under 18, and senior musicians (18 and older). Categories include solo banjo, solo fiddle, and old time band. There are prizes at every level, and the winner will give a concert after the judging.

"One Bowl", a local foods dinner, is a signature event at the Fair that occurs on Saturday evening, after the Fair gates close. Participants enjoy delicious, seasonal food that has been grown on the fairgrounds and/or sourced from local farms and purveyors. The main course is served in locally crafted pottery bowls, which participants may take home with them after the dinner.

The cost for the all-day event is \$10 per person. Check out the details on-line and download teaching and vendor applications. [www.organicgrowersschool.org](http://www.organicgrowersschool.org) Contact the Program Manager, Karen Vizzina, with your questions or ideas: 828.342.1849 or [earthstarnc@earthlink.net](mailto:earthstarnc@earthlink.net)

### WNC Farmers to be Subject of Film



Purple States LLC, an independent film production company, and the Organic Growers School, are working with several local farms as the focus for a new film project. The Farmers Film, as it's called, is different from other documentaries because these farmers will be trained to film themselves and tell their own stories.

Cinnamon and John Kennedy are the producers of the documentary, and in the past have produced video for The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, The Gates Foundation and the United Nations Millennium Campaign. The Organic Growers School hopes the series will focus more attention toward supporting the small independent farms of Western North Carolina.

"This is the perfect place to film the story of the small farm," John Kennedy says. "Historically, small farms were common in the mountains. Now, you have the end of tobacco farms, you have residential developments, you have negative economic pressures, all of which make it very difficult for the small farmer. If you run a small farm today, it is because you are very passionate about the farm."

Meredith McKissick, Director of the Organic Growers School, and also a small farmer commented on the project. "I would like to return to a focus on community," she said. "There was a time when you trusted your doctor because he was a member of your community. And you could trust the food you were eating because it was made by the farmers in your community."

The Kennedys and McKissick will focus on four area farmers, train them to use handheld HD cameras, and then direct them as they film this harvest season. Purple States LLC will edit the material into a series of short videos as well as a longer documentary. With the national platforms they have worked with, the Kennedys are confident that they will be able to find a major platform to broadcast the project.

The Kennedys have already filmed a three-minute reel for the project, following McKissick and two other Western North Carolina farms. The focus of the video series is on how small farms survive in a global economy. In the trailer, these farmers talk about their passion and their struggles. For example, Jennifer Perkins of Looking Glass Creamery relates the story of when Williams Sonoma called to offer to sell their cheese to a national audience. Perkins also speaks about the time when they needed a new \$10,000 boiler and had to shut down their business for a month in June.

“The idea of local foods is at a cusp moment,” Kennedy says. “A decade ago people started talking about the benefits and improved taste of organic food. Today, organic is common in every supermarket. People are choosing food without chemicals, because it is healthier, because it tastes better. Now people are looking at local food - how to get more food grown and raised in the surrounding area onto their plate. It’s fresher, it’s safer, and it helps support the local economy. If people demand more local food, restaurants and supermarkets will all find a way to stock local produce.”

The Organic Grower’s School and Cinnamon and John Kennedy are holding events from 5-7pm on June 30th in Asheville at the Highland Brewery and at Black Mountain Ale House between 6-8 pm on July 7th. Both events will be used as an outreach an awareness of local food, organic food, and the choices made by all of us about what we eat. The trailer for the series will be aired, and the event will be used as a fundraiser to buy the cameras, microphones, stands, and to launch the filming.

“The most rewarding part of my job is meeting with my customers,” McKissick says. “We’re such a small farm that we do everything in the food chain. We go from seed to plate. I like to meet the people we are helping to feed.”

Please help contribute to this important project! Attend the first event this Thursday, June 30th at Highland Brewery (details below under "News Bits"), [or contribute online](#). Funds are being raised to purchase filming equipment for the farmers. For more information about the video project, and to see the trailer, visit the website [www.farmersfilm.com](http://www.farmersfilm.com).

### Gardener's Corner: Ask Ruth

Dear Ruth,

The leaves on my squash have whitish spots and are starting to look a little shriveled. They were looking great, and now all of the sudden they look bad. It is on the stems too, and it seems to be spreading. What is this and what can I do?



Tyler  
West Asheville

Dear Tyler,

That is a fungus called **powdery mildew**. There are lots of strains of powdery mildew, but the symptoms basically look the same. The leaves get white or greyish spots that look "powdery", and sometimes the leaves begin to look distorted. Eventually, the mildew will cover most of the leaf, it can spread to the stem and buds, and finally take over the whole plant. If it gets bad enough, it can actually impair photosynthesis.

First, check the **air circulation** in your garden area. Are your garden plants far enough apart to allow for air-flow through the garden? Can you increase air-flow around the plants by staking or trellising them? Can you thin within the plant to encourage air-flow without compromising your harvest? If weeds have grown up in surrounding areas or the grass is high, consider weed-eating/mowing. Are the plants in **full sun**? (Shade contributes to powdery mildew.) Remove diseased leaves from the plant and burn them or put them in your garbage. You don't want the spores to winter over on your property or in your compost pile.

As always, **a healthy plant is less susceptible** to disease and insects than a stressed plant. Make sure that your plants are receiving the nutrients and the water that they need on a regular basis. Many veggies are prone to powdery mildew, especially those in the cucurbit family ~ including summer and winter squash. Here is a **list** of some of them: artichoke, beans, beets, carrot, cucumber, eggplant, lettuce, melons, parsnips, peas, peppers, pumpkins, radicchio, radishes, squash, tomatillo, tomatoes, and turnips. Bee balm, grapes, and hops are susceptible to powdery mildew, and so are many familiar ornamentals like columbine, dogwoods, lilacs, phlox, and roses. As mentioned earlier, there are many different strains of powdery mildew and each strain is plant specific ~ the powdery mildew on your lilac will not spread to your squash plants. Seek out powdery mildew-resistant cultivars, and plant in full sun to help prevent this disease.

Powdery mildew comes on quickly if **conditions** are right ~ that's when the humidity is high and temperatures are between 68 and 80 degrees. The fungus stops spreading when temperatures hit 100 degrees. It spreads more quickly in dry, but humid weather than when it is rainy. Tender, succulent growth is very attractive to powdery mildew, so avoid applying nitrogen fertilizer while trying to combat powdery mildew.

There are a number of **fungicides** you can use to stop the spread of powdery mildew. Here are a few: Actinovate, Bicarbonate concoctions, Copper, Neem Oil, Safer Soap Fungicide (contains Sulfur), Serenade, and Sulfur (do not apply sulfur within two weeks of an oil spray). Spray the plant thoroughly on all sides of the leaves, the stems, and the buds to the point of dripping. For most products, spray every 7 days when combatting a disease and every two weeks when preventing a disease ~ BUT read and follow all directions and safety precautions on the labeling of the specific product you will be using. Sprayers with wands are especially helpful when trying to coat all sides of the leaves and for reaching the undersides of leaves. *Spray early in the morning or late in the day* to avoid sunscald (if using Neem Oil, spray late in the day and avoid the flowers since Neem is toxic to bees). When you spray late in the day, the plant has all night to soak in the fungicide before the sun hits it the next morning. Well-made compost tea should work too, especially when sprayed early as a prevention.

There are different bicarbonate mixtures utilized to stop powdery mildew. Milstop®, Armicarb 100®, and Kaligreen® are commercially produced potassium bicarbonate-based products. More discussion of bicarbonates can be found at: <https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/bakingsoda.html>. Baking Soda (sodium bicarbonate) is used in the following recipe.

Here is a spray you can **make at home** with ingredients you probably have on hand. Safety hint: If you do not have baking soda on hand, you should buy some immediately and store it near your stove for emergency use in case of a grease/oil fire when you are frying those squash blossoms.

#### **Recipe for Homemade Powdery Mildew Spray:**

*With ingredients most of us have in our kitchens.*

1 heaping Tablespoon of Baking Soda (Sodium Bicarbonate)

1 Tablespoon of Horticultural Oil (like All Seasons Oil) or Vegetable Oil

½ Teaspoon of Insecticidal Soap or liquid soap (use plain liquid soap and not detergent; some recipes called for 1 T.)

1 Gallon Water

*Mix ingredients well and keep well mixed when spraying.*

Planting your squash early and having succession plantings can go a long way to assuring a decent harvest. On her farm, Meredith Mckissick plants early, and utilizes floating row cover. Many commercial growers plant in succession using row covers at planting, and only plan on having each succession of plants in the ground for 6 weeks before the next succession is ready to go ~ ensuring a steady harvest despite the presence of mildew.

Tyler, I hope you enjoy lots of squash this summer. Squash Casserole sounds delicious right now!

Best wishes,  
Ruth

Gardeners: Got a question for Ruth? Email it to us  
[enews@organicgrowersschool.org](mailto: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.*

*Ask Ruth © 2011 Ruth Gonzalez & Organic Growers School*

## Meet CRAFT: Thatchmore Farm

by Andrea Van Gunst

Summer is in full swing and so is our CRAFT season. This weekend's tour at Thatchmore Farm was the biggest yet, and while the weather was not totally cooperative, we had a great tour and learned a lot.



Farm co-owner and operator Tom Elmore spent a bit of time explaining the unique characteristics of his farm. **Thatchmore Farm is land limited with very little flat land so Tom planned his farm with the idea of what can go on slopes: orchards, shitake mushroom logs, etc.** He also uses soil blocks for his plant starts – something that is common in European farming but much less common here. Thatchmore Farm is also a tractor-free farm (due to the small amount of flat land) and Tom instead uses a BCS tiller and, increasingly, a no-till

approach. He also intensively plants into landscape fabric for a cleaner crop and less weeding time.

**The main focus of the tour was on reducing energy consumption on small farms** and Tom had a lot of good ideas for present solutions as well as future solutions to energy needs. We learned that one way to frame thinking on energy output and input is to draw an imaginary line around one's farm and to then think of how much energy enters and leaves the farm and how much energy is generated on the farm.

Some basic ways that energy is lost on a farm residence are through inefficient appliances, leaky seals and ducts and poor insulation resulting in increased heating and cooling demands. In addition to the farmhouse, the operating farm typically uses a lot of energy. Gasoline (mainly for farm implements and transportation of produce) probably accounts for of the largest category

of energy use on an organic farm. As well, poorly insulated greenhouses and produce coolers often take a lot of energy to operate.



Tom noted **methods for turning these energy losses into gains**. He stressed energy conservation in the home: sealing all leaks and ducts, insulating well, buying modern appliances, adding south facing windows, installing a domestic solar hot water system (this pays itself off in a few years with a great tax credit) and installing a photovoltaic system (has a long payback period but grants and credits can help to offset this delay in return).

In addition, he gave some great ideas for how to cut down on energy demands for the operating farm. Thatchmore Farm has adapted a greenhouse insulation system from the Chinese: instead of rice mats and adobe wall structures to trap and keep heat in a greenhouse, Tom uses a series of quilts on pulleys. At night when the temperature dips, the quilts are pulled up on all sides of the greenhouse. Other ideas for heating the greenhouse included a wood furnace system or wood boiler. Tom also proposed increased no-till production as a way to increase fuel efficiency. **Tom's "wild ideas" for the first post-petroleum farmers in the audience**



**included a tractor that runs on wood chips and a produce cooler/ice house combination.**

**included a tractor that runs on wood chips and a produce cooler/ice house combination.**

We ended our tour with another delicious potluck with amazing food and lively conversations about what the future holds for farmers who are just starting to farm in the era of peak oil. Thanks again to all who came out and participated...it was yet another great tour!

CRAFT stands for Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training. The program seeks to train future farmers using the experience and wisdom of experienced farmers in our region. Membership is rolling, so join today! [More information available online.](#)

Organic Growers School  
**CRAFT**



**Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training**

## News Bits

News Bits are reader-submitted news, events, and opinion. [Submit your bit to enews@organicgrowersschool.org](mailto:enews@organicgrowersschool.org)

### **The Farmers Film**

Purple States LLC along with Organic Growers School, and with support from Slow Food Asheville and Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, will be filming the story of four small independent Western North Carolina Farms this harvest season. Purple States LLC, who has worked with New York Times, The Gates Foundation, and the United Nation Millennium Campaign, will manage and support these farmers as they show their own successes and struggles. Purple States will then edit and distribute the videos through a major news platform. An event will be held at Highland Brewing Company in Asheville on June 30th, 5-7pm, to galvanize support of local food and raise funds for the film series. Expect music, cloggers, silent auction, and a local food truck. Come and watch the trailer. Meet the farmers. Please come and bring a friend. For more information visit [www.farmersfilm.com](http://www.farmersfilm.com)

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### **Workshop on Organic Certification for Farmers and Food Processors**

6/30/11 6pm-8pm. Offered by Blue Ridge Food Ventures. [Information and registration online.](#)

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### **Local Tailgate Market Seeks Volunteers**

Want to help support local food producers? Do you have two hours on Saturday mornings?

The North Asheville Tailgate Market is seeking volunteers for the remainder of the 2011 season. NATM is the area's oldest producers-only market, offering 100% local food and craft items for over thirty years. Each Saturday morning, NATM connects hundreds of customers with more than forty local vendors at our location on the beautiful UNCA campus.

Volunteers are needed from 9 to 11 every Saturday morning. Duties will include directing vehicle traffic to overflow parking during periods of peak volume, keeping the handicap parking area accessible to patrons who need it, creating a welcoming environment for market visitors, and assisting with special events, such as our monthly gift basket drawings.

Volunteers should be 16 years old or older (16-18 with parent present), with the ability to be on their feet outdoors in summer weather conditions. You will be interacting directly with customers, so a ready smile and good verbal communication skills are a must. We welcome those who can volunteer for one market or for multiple dates. Volunteers are invited to come early or stay late to shop and meet our vendors.

Interested volunteers should contact Jessie Shires by email at [NATMvolunteer@gmail.com](mailto:NATMvolunteer@gmail.com) or call [505-417-3290](tel:505-417-3290). For more information about the market, visit NATM's website, [www.northashevilletailgatemarket.org](http://www.northashevilletailgatemarket.org).

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## Farmer's Corner: Ask Tom



Dear Tom –

How do you still have tomatoes in the fall? My plants went down with late blight.

-- Frustrated

Frustrated –

For years the only reliable organic solution to late blight (*Phytophthora infestans*) was spraying copper and growing in a greenhouse or coldframe. The tomato breeding program at the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center (MHCREC) in Mills River offers new hope for outside organic tomato production – late blight resistance in tomatoes.

Refer to the link below for more on this disease.

Copper fungicides have very effectively prevented late blight for us in the past. Both copper sulfate (the fungicide, not the herbicide) and copper hydroxide work well and some of these materials are listed by the Organic Materials Review Institute. ([www.omri.org](http://www.omri.org)) The problem with copper is that washes off in the rain.

While I am not a plant pathologist I have been told that copper works by dissolving in the free water on the leaf of a tomato plant, such as after dew forms in the evening. Our misty mornings extend this wetted period allowing fungal organisms to get a good start without copper on the leaf but the copper in the solution kills the emerging fungi. When the dew dries in late morning the copper is deposited back on the leaf. Copper is a protectant so it must be on the leaf when late blight spores arrive. Rainfall washes the dissolved copper off the leaf surface and removes it as a protectant.

In contrast to early blight which is soil borne, late blight is air borne and can travel hundreds of miles on the wind. The cool mornings of early fall are prime late blight season and a week of rain (like last week) will often bring it on.

This year's Johnny's Selected Seeds catalog offers two varieties that contain late blight resistance – Mountain Magic from MHCREC's breeding program and Defiant introduced by Johnny's with an acknowledgement of NCSU cooperation. We are trying both of these varieties this year to see how they do outside. We are also trying several experimental lines from NCSU. These new lines have both early blight and late blight resistance as well as flavor genes from heirloom plants. Many of you know Dr. Randy Gardner who recently retired. Dr. Dilip Panthee is carrying on his work.

I hasten to add that this breeding program is done the "old fashion way" of crossing two tomatoes with favorable characteristics and observing the offspring. This approach is in contrast to genetic engineering which is not allowed in organic production.

We have high hopes for these new varieties opening up organic production of field tomatoes in WNC. Most tomato fans know that WNC farmers grow the best tomatoes. Now we may also be able to grow a reliable organic crop outside the greenhouse.

-- Tom

*For more information on identifying Late Blight :*

[http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/plantpath/extension/fact\\_sheets/Tomato - Field Staked - Late Blight.htm](http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/plantpath/extension/fact_sheets/Tomato - Field Staked - Late Blight.htm)

**Commercial Farmers: Got a question for Tom? [Email it to us!](#)**

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