CRAFT TOUR: Bluebird Farm & Diversified Small-Scale Livestock

Bluebird Farm welcomed us back again this year for our June CRAFT farm tour. This time the tour topic focused on "Diversified Small-Scale Livestock." We are grateful to Marie Williamson and William Lyons for opening up their farm and home to us and for their good-natured flexibility when the rain really started coming down. The determination of our CRAFT members to go on with the tour despite the stormy weather is a true testament to how tough farmers can be!

After graduating from Warren Wilson College and testing their farming stamina in Colorado, William and Marie came back to NC to start Bluebird Farm on Marie’s family’s land outside of Morganton. The farm is split between 12 acres of family land and 15 acres of leased land from a long time family friend. The extra leased land has allowed them to experiment with their growing methods by integrating their animal and vegetable productions.

Currently they market at three farmers markets, three restaurants, and a 40 member CSA by raising sheep, pigs, layers, meat chickens, vegetables, and now a few beef cattle. William and Marie are a perfect example of diversified small scale farming using each enterprise in a way that complements and supports another.
**Farmer's Corner**

**Ask Tom**

Dear Tom -

This may be a silly question - but, if you use plastic mulch, don't you run the risk of solarizing the soil? I understand that solarizing the soil can kill diseases - but it also kills off "the good stuff".

Thanks

Paula

Paula -

Clear plastic is needed to solarize soil and most growers use opaque plastic for that reason. Clear plastic may also threaten your crop with high temperatures and it allows weeds to grow underneath in some cases. My comments in earlier columns assumed agricultural plastic mulch – normally white or black, although more exotic colors and various degrees of reflectivity are available.

While I have never used solarization intentionally for soil treatment, I see it as a tool that may be useful in particular situations. I use solar energy and plastic sheets to dry firewood for home and greenhouse heating. I unintentionally singed grass on several occasions when moving greenhouse plastic from one structure to another and this was with just a few minutes exposure. Finally, I once managed to fuse a roll of plastic into a single melted hunk – an expensive mistake but that experience shows how high temperatures can get inside several layers of clear plastic. I have heard reports of seed flats melting inside greenhouses with vents and fans turned off.

Read more at Our Blog

**Farmers: Got a question for Tom? Email it to us at**

enews@organicgrowersschool.org

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**Gardener's Corner**

**Ask Ruth**

Dear Ruth,

This is the second year my fruit trees (plum, peach,) have produced bumper crops of fruit and shed every piece of it on the ground. By July there is not one piece of fruit on the tree. Can you help me figure out what is happening? Last year the apple tree produced no fruit.

Cheryl J

Dear Cheryl,

Yours is not an unusual problem. As far as last year's apples, most fruit growers in WNC had a bad fruit year because of late frosts. Last year even blueberry production was

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**Organic Living Corner**

**Ask Meredith**

Dear Meredith,

I saw your recent recipe for Safer Soap as an alternative to pesticides in the most recent issue of Appalachian Voice. I've heard about using concentrated garlic sprays to control mosquitoes as well. Will Safer Soap work for this purpose?

Thanks so much,

Amy Clark

Hi Amy,

The battle on mosquitoes has taken a serious turn this year! I think this has something to do with the incessant rain from April to July, maybe? We're super glad you're looking for some natural deterrents. While Safer brand soap is a great deterrent for many pest insects, it's not known as an effective deterrent for mosquitoes.
compromised because of frost, and usually blueberries will pull through even when other fruits don’t. Fruit growers in WNC often hold their breath all spring in fear of an ill-placed frost.

Spring weather in 2013 was very cool but many fruits escaped frost damage and it promises to be a good fruit year...sort of (the substantial rainfall in 2013 presents another set of problems like disease issues). Let’s go over a few reasons for fruit drop so you can determine how to proceed...

The garlic oil-soap spray recipe we included for Voices should work for mosquitoes. The best application would be a concentrated spray around your home, lawn, and garden. The recipe is included again with this article. If garlic sprays aren’t appealing to you, you can try soap sprays with essential oils that are known to deter mosquitoes, such as lavender, citronella, and geranium. The effectiveness of these oils seems to vary, and you may need to experiment with quantities until you get it right. For a quick first round, try a spray with equal parts water and Castile soap, and add a tablespoon of mineral oil and your chosen essential oil per gallon of mix.

Gardeners: Got a question for Ruth? Email it to us at enews@organicgrowersschool.org

Organic Thinkers: Got a question for Meredith? Email it to us at enews@organicgrowersschool.org

Western Piedmont Community College’s Sustainable Agriculture Program is excited to offer a 16-week course in Fall Organic Crop Production. Students will learn fall and winter organic production techniques for...
vegetables, small grains and culinary and medicinal herbs. Topics will include variety selection, production methods, pest management, post harvest handling and organic certification information. Seating is limited, so please register early. To register online: http://www.wpcc.edu/continuing_ed.php?cat=382 If you have questions about the class, please contact Meagen Roberts at mroberts@wpcc.edu

Course Information:
$150
August 17- December 7 Saturdays from 10:00 am- 2:00pm
WPCC Sustainable Ag farm in Morganton

The Sustainable Poultry Network and Western Piedmont Community College Sustainable Agriculture are excited to offer a 16-week course on Sustainable Poultry Production. This course will cover everything you need to know to raise your own poultry flock, from the egg to the table. Topics will include an overview of the poultry industry, the rich history of standard bred poultry, how to properly identify poultry, how to incubate, brood and grow your own flock as well as develop marketing strategies for networking and business development. Click here for registration.

Course Information:
$125
August 21-December 16
Wednesdays, from 9:00am - 12:00pm

Blue Ridge Community College has expanded their horticulture program to include biological pest management, organic production, small fruits, and specialty crops. They are looking for adjunct professors in those areas. Check out available opportunities here under the “Adjunct Faculty” tab.

Got Organic News to Share?
Email a brief description to jenn@organicgrowersschool.org

Questions? Thoughts? Comments?
Let Us Know How We're Doing!
We want to hear from you!
Email them to us at jenn@organicgrowersschool.org