

News from the Ridge

June 29, 2004

Field Report

- by Christine Qualls

This has been a very productive week on the farm. We planted the first round of summer squash, zucchini, and cucumbers. We planted three different types of zucchinis, two types of summer squash, and two types of cucumbers – including last-year's very popular lemon cucumbers.

By the time you read this, the Three Sisters Garden—a traditional Native American garden that incorporates corns, beans, and squash—will also be planted and mulched. Andy and I got a good start on the garden earlier in the week, raking out and planting 5 or 6 mounds a day, but then the reinforcement troops swooped in to help us finish up. We have two volunteers, Andrea and Rory, helping us out for a few days. They came down from the cool northeast to our balmy south and went right to work on the Three Sisters. Good work guys! And thanks, Glenn, for pitching in, too!

I am very happy to have tomatoes so early in the season! It is a good sign that our soil improvement plan is moving in the right direction, and that our deer fence is working. Last year, we had dismal harvests of tomatoes due to our soil, deer munching on the plants and rainy weather. This year, the tomato patch received large amounts of compost and lime. The plants have beautiful fruit sets – a sign that more good harvests are to come.

The small beets, though, indicate that we still have a ways to go before we have truly healthy soil. The beets by now should be full size, but they are still filling out. This is a definite indicator that our soil needs more compost and increased fertility in years to come. We are making progress in revitalizing the soil after years of commercial agriculture depleted its natural fertility.

We have made significant improvements this year (thanks to the Northland College students for applying so much compost this spring), but we know this is just a beginning. I find this to be a very exciting challenge, and it shapes both my farm plan and my day-to-day activities.



"Apprentices, Volunteers and Interns - oh my!"

(Left to Right) Andy, Rory, Andrea and Glenn making mounds in the Three Sisters Garden.

Recipe for the week

BASIL-GARLIC BUTTER

Use on garlic bread, croutons, steamed veggies or on pasta.

- ◆ 1/4 pound butter softened
- ◆ 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil
- ◆ 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh oregano
- ◆ 1/2 teaspoon finely chopped fresh thyme
- ◆ 1 large garlic clove, minced or pressed

Allow the butter to soften. Cream in remaining ingredients. Let sit for an hour or so before using to allow flavor to infuse into butter.

"Pamahsawuh"

— the created world and everything in it

- by Timothy Parsons

adapted from "The First People" by Keith Egloff

Change is one of the few real constants in our natural environment. Sometimes before 12,000 B.C., Asians stood at the brink of a New World that was pristine and uninhabited by humans. They crossed the largest frontier ever traveled.

Before the Pyramids were built in Egypt, before Greece flourished under its Golden Age, before the Great Wall of China was laid, these people journeyed to the outermost reaches of the territory before them. From the Bering Strait, through Canada, and across the Great Plains, they arrived in Virginia long before there was even a Chesapeake Bay. Here, they adapted over many generations to changing environments, responding to their world and finding that it, in turn, responded to them.

The Native Americans of millennia ago faced many of the same challenges that we face today at the Blue Ridge Center, and that our predecessors on the land have been facing for three centuries. That is our role between earth and sky? What strategies can we use that will sustain us and our earth? Today, we use natural farming techniques and natural approaches to conservation and stewardship at the

- continued on page 2

Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship: Nature, Farming, History, and Beer

- by Andrew Pressman

No, beer is not part of our mission. However, each component of the mission (nature, history and farming) does involve beer in some way and, therefore, each of us here at the Ridge looks forward to the end of the day when we can sit back and enjoy a nice, homegrown, homebrew. As an avid home-brewer and farmer, I'm always searching for ways to incorporate plants with fermentation. Although this may sound a bit strange to any of you cheap beer drinkers, ancient beers brewed 10,000 and 30,000 years ago were quite different from what we know as beer today. These tasty beverages were sacred beers and contained plants for use as medicine, as psychotropics, as teachers, and as companions on life's path. According to author and herbalist, Stephen Harrod Buhner, in his book titled, Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers, "Beer is an inescapable part of our exploration of what it means to be human."

Whether found wild or cultivated, the 900-acres of the Blue Ridge Center are filled with an abundance of ingredients available for brewing beer. These include plants, trees, and even honey from our beehives. Various plants at Mountain View Farm are in bloom and available to harvest for home brewing. Please contact us if you are interested in learning how to brew or if you would like to try something new, something healthy, and something frothy. In addition, Buhner's book contains numerous ingredients for herbal beers along with delightful folktales on the intersection between herbal medicine and fermentation. Below is one of my favorite ingredients for an herbal beer from Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers.

YARROW BEER (*Achillea millefolium*)

Yarrow, one of the most widely used herbs in the world, is highly aromatic and contains substances known to be antiseptic, antimicrobial, antibacterial, and anti-inflammatory. Yarrow beers are not overwhelming in taste and yarrow adds a nice bitter flavor to ales.



Ingredients for 5 gallons brew

- 5 pounds malted barley
- 3 ounces recently dried yarrow (plants and flowers) or 6 ounces fresh flowering tops
- 6 gallons water
- yeast

Mash malt with water at 150 degrees F for 90 minutes. Boil remaining water and sparge mash. Boil all with 1 1/2 ounces dried yarrow or ounces dried yarrow or 3 ounces fresh plant. Let cool to 70 degrees F, place in fermenter. Put remaining 1 1/2 ounces of dried yarrow (or 3 ounces fresh) in muslin bag and hang in fermenter; add yeast. Allow fermenting until complete. Prime bottles, fill and cap. Ready to drink in two weeks.

Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship & Mountain View Farm

www.blueridgecenter.org • info@blueridgecenter.org

(540) 668-7640 (tel) • (540) 668-7649 (fax)

11661 Harpers Ferry Road, Purcellville, VA 20132-1944

To contact our staff:

Farming: Christine Qualls, cqualls@brces.org

Nature: Fiona Harrison, fharrison@brces.org

History: Timothy Parsons, tparsons@brces.org

The Dusty Trail Report

- by Dusty Vaughan

If I have not gotten a chance to personally meet you yet, let me introduce myself. My name is Dusty Vaughn and I am the Recreation Ecologist intern for the summer at the center. My home is Nashville, Tennessee and I attend Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas where I am studying Biology. I have always enjoyed being out in nature and learning about its many processes and inhabitants.

My goals for the summer are:

1. Keep the trails clear, easy to follow, in good condition, and make sure that they are not damaging the surrounding habitats.
2. Complete a habitat analysis so that we can know the diversity of habitats on the land so that we can use this information for future planning and monitoring.

A lot of changes have been made to our trails recently. The bridge over Piney Run on the Old Bridge Trail washed out during BioBlitz. We finally found it two weeks later about two hundred yards downstream and mostly intact. We are working on designing a new stream crossing. We have also redesigned the routes of the Little Turtle Trail and the Derry Loop. The Little Turtle Trail now connects to the Farmstead Loop at the southern end of Piney Run Spur. This new location is a better spot for building a bridge over the stream. The Derry Loop was redesigned because of a new fence that is being built along the edge of the forest for livestock. We plan on building stiles over the fence so that our visitors can still enjoy hiking across the meadow where several birds and butterflies can be found in the shadow of the Blue Ridge. To make the trails easier to follow, we have also put up several new signposts and made our existing ones easier to follow. We hope to have a new map made with all of these changes on it available as soon as possible. I have closed off the Wood Thrush Trail because of fallen trees and very large muddy sections until we are given the chance to repair the trail.

I encourage everyone to hike our trails every chance you get. I believe that the best way to experience nature is taking a stroll through the woods.

"Pamahsawuh", continued from page 1

Ridge to serve as an example—to show that natural, environmentally responsible approaches to health and the environment can improve our quality of life.

The first Americans lived with nature and adapted their lifestyles to their surrounding and the seasons. We know that they dealt with years of drought, glacial advances and retreats; the birth of a vast bay, rivers, and forests; the death of huge herd animals such as the mastodons and mammoths. They learned to use plants for many things in everyday life, and hunted animals for tools, food, shelter, and clothing.

Although we can hardly suggest that the people of today return to these lifeways, it is certainly possible to live in harmony with our surrounding environment, and to use it for our benefit as well as to the benefit of our surroundings. We can learn from our ancestors and predecessors, and incorporate certain aspects of their lives and beliefs into our modern life—for our sake, and for the sake of the world around us.