

# News from the Ridge

July 27, 2004

## Buckwheat - An O'Tay Cover Crop

- By Andrew Pressman

One of the most important tasks of any farmer is building and maintaining soil fertility. By not using any synthetic chemicals, Mountain View Farm is faced with challenges in finding a good natural source of soil fertility. In searching for local, sustainable and economical soil nutrients, we focus on organic matter. Nutrient rich organic matter feeds soil organisms and builds soil structure. As we are taking out our summer crops and beginning to plant fall crops, it has become evident that using cover crops is an ecological and sustainable way to build and manage soil fertility right in the field.

Cover Crops are usually grasses or legumes that are planted during the fallow season to cover the soil. Cover crops are used to enhance soil organic matter, stimulate soil biological activity and diversity of soil biota, trap nutrients in the soil left over from previous crops, reduce soil erosion, inhibit weed development and provide alternate hosts for beneficial enemies of crop pests. In addition, the legume cover increase soil fertility by fixing nitrogen. Cover crops can also be used as living mulch when they are retained on the soil surface or as a green manure by being tilled into the soil.

Buckwheat is an annual, warm weather cover crop that is making its appearance known at Mountain View Farm. *Fagopyrum esculentum*, the botanical name for buckwheat, is one of the best hot weather cover crops because of its ability to produce organic matter and smother summer weeds quickly. Although buckwheat does not fix nitrogen, it accumulates insoluble phosphorus and, when turned under, releases it to the soil in plant-available form. Rich in calcium and magnesium, buckwheat is also a lime substitute for acidic soils as it raises the pH. When planted early, it is an excellent trap crop for pests while also attracting beneficial insects.

The use of buckwheat as a cover crop at Mountain View Farm exemplifies what can be done to manage soil fertility biologically, naturally, and with minimum outside inputs. The Lil' Rascals love buckwheat and so do we!



*The answer my friend is buckwheat blowing in the wind.*

## Field Report

- By Christine Qualls

## Taste the Love Apple

Did you know that tomatoes were once called "love apples"? They were considered aphrodisiacs in the 1800s. Perhaps this story illustrates the modern day power of the love apple for some.

I am at our Thursday Frederick farmers market where I see an older couple and a single woman admiring our tomatoes. Clearly, the older woman is hesitating over the price of our tomatoes (\$2 per pound), and the single woman says to her, "If you make your husband a BLT with these tomatoes he'll do anything you want." The older woman asks, "You mean he'll mow my lawn?" The single woman replies, "No, I mean he'll do *anything* you want!" The older woman turns to me and says, "I'll take two."

Never underestimate the power of a good, homegrown tomato. There is a song that has the great line, "There are only two things in life money can't buy – true love and homegrown tomatoes". Well, maybe when our homegrown tomatoes are for sale, the true love isn't so far behind.

We have been having a great tomato harvest this year. This size harvest is more typical of August than July. It is so easy to store any extra tomatoes for use in the winter. You can freeze whole peeled tomatoes in freezer bags. (You peel a tomato by briefly dipping it in boiling water.) They will be great for sauce, stews and soups. You can also freeze any extra sauce you make. My friend, Tom, pours the cooked sauce into bread pans. When the sauce is frozen, he stores it in freezer bags. He says this method of making tomato sauce bricks saves room in the freezer. I dehydrated a bucket of cherry tomatoes in my oven. I put whole sungolds onto a roasting rack and turned the oven on 200. Eight hours later I had a ton of dried tomatoes. They would have dried much faster if they had been blanched, peeled and cut in half first. So, you don't have to be an expert canner to put up some of this summer's harvest for the winter. Let me know if you want to can a large quantity of tomatoes at once. I will make certain that they are here for you.

## Blue Ridge Hosts Volunteer Vacation

- By Dusty Vaughn

This past week we enjoyed the presence of seven volunteers from the American Hiking Society. Their week here was part of the Volunteer Vacations program, which sends volunteers throughout the country to work on trails for various organizations. The Volunteer Vacations program offers a chance for hikers to give something back to the trails they love to hike while learning new skills, meeting people with similar interests, and gaining unforgettable memories. This year the program offered 100 locations in 27 states for volunteers to work. This was our first time to ever host a Volunteer Vacation. We learned a great deal about hosting such an event, and look forward to our next group of vacationers in September.

The crew members arrived on Sunday night from as far away as Florida and camped out all week in our group campground. Stephanie Hills came with her son, while Carol Eury and Bob Dahlstadt each brought a grandson they were looking to spend more time with. Their impact on our trails is very noticeable and will remain here a long time. We completed all the projects that we had planned much faster than expected. Below is a list of the projects completed by the Volunteer Vacation trail crew:

- Redesigned Wood Thrush Trail, cleared it, and opened it up for hiking.
- Moved logs for seats around the campfires in the group and backcountry campgrounds from the wood piles left over from the last logging.
- Planted 10 more trees in our forest succession project.
- Built and placed 4 scarecrows in the garden.
- Built stiles for a meadow trail to keep it open for hikers for when the pasture fence is completed.
- Cleaned garlic and picked tomatoes.
- Placed gravel on muddy sections of Arnold Trail.
- Built barricades to close off discontinued trails.

Projects that we plan on completing in the next several weeks include:

- Update and create trail signs as needed.
- Build a new kiosk for the Equestrian Parking Lot.
- Accurately measure our trails and post the distances on the kiosk.
- Create a trail register for visitors to sign so that we can monitor the number of visitors we have on the trails.
- Publish a checklist of birds that can be found at the Blue Ridge Center so birders can keep track of which birds they have seen and also to help us find new species that have not been reported.
- Prevent trail erosion by systematically placing waterbars and culverts where needed.

We thank everyone who has ever volunteered to help at the Blue Ridge Center. Without the help of volunteers, the center would not be what it is today, and without the help of future volunteers, the center will never be able to reach its fullest potential. I encourage everyone to come out and hike our trails, and if you have the opportunity, to come out and help us keep the trails open and healthy for future hikers.



*volunteers try out the new campfire benches*

### Recipe for the Week

#### Holy Cow! Hot Sauce

If you want to make this recipe in this quantity, let me know and I will get you the right amount of everything. Otherwise, you can halve the ingredients and serve fresh.

- 4 qts tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- 1 c chopped sweet peppers
- 1 c chopped onions or leeks
- 1/2 c chopped jalapenos
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 6 oz tomato paste
- 1/3 c wine vinegar
- 1/3 c sugar
- 1/4 tsp. Ground cumin
- 1/4 tsp. Dried oregano
- 1/8 c lime juice

1. Place all ingredients in large pan over medium heat; bring to boil, stirring. Reduce heat, simmer 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

2. Have hot, clean jars and lids ready for canning. Fill jars, cap and process 15 minutes in boiling bath to seal. If you prefer, serve fresh.

Protect hands and face from peppers' burning juices.

### Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship & Mountain View Farm

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### Fundraising Update

- By Christine Qualls

Andy Pressman is very close to reaching the minimum goal of \$2,000 required to participate in the Breast Cancer 3-Day Walk. A few more donations and he will be on his way. Donate online at <http://www.the3day.org>, please sign in to support the participant Andrew Pressman. Thank you for supporting Andy and the Blue Ridge Center team in this noble fundraising effort.