



## May 2010 Growers Notebook News, Tips, and Advice on Things Organic

### MEET CRAFT: Green Toe Ground Farm



Saturday, May 15, CRAFT members headed up the mountain roads to visit Nicole DelCogliano and Gaelen Corozine at Green Toe Ground Farm. We had a wonderful turnout, despite the threatening thunderstorms, with about forty farmers and apprentices enjoying an interesting and relaxing afternoon tucked into the fields along the South Toe River. The focus of this month's tour was biodynamics and composting. CRAFT members

learned about the process of preparing compost with specific guidelines as developed by Rudolph Steiner, who is credited with founding biodynamics in response to farmer concern for the depletion of soil, crop, and livestock health.

Galen and Nicole own 15 acres that are used for raising pigs, lamb, one horse, and one cow. They shared their ethic of farming, and with the exception of tilling, they cultivate entirely by hand. The pigs have been a useful tool for preparing soil for plantings and will eventually be sold for their meat. The sheep and lambs are also for meat. Their lone cow, Gerda, is an integral player in the farm's health and productivity, and is also a key component in the philosophy of biodynamics.

Biodynamics perceives the farm, the land, the earth, and soil to be a living organism, interconnected to the organisms that live on the earth as well as the entire cosmos. It places great value on soil health, and uses cover cropping, green manure, and a diverse cropping system to restore health to the soil while supporting the growth of plants and animals. We learned the importance of the cow to



biodynamics, and our tour began by accompanying Gaelen and Nicole to a very special location where they had buried cow horns full of dirt and manure to prepare it for treating their compost pile. The cow horn represents the cosmos, as it is a living part of the cow reaching towards the heavens, and by burying it into the ground, Nicole and Gaelen are affectively harnessing cosmic energy into the earth that they utilize for cultivation. CRAFT members not only got to see the farming techniques used by Gaelen and Nicole, learn about the principles of biodynamics, but they also got to help with preparation of the compost pile.

Biodynamic compost preparations utilize very specific medicinal herbs that have undergone a long fermentation process in various parts of the cow. The cow's digestive system is seen as an important part of preparing the soil as well, for it possesses invaluable living microorganisms.

Once the herbs are prepared, they are inserted into the compost pile at specific depths. The final preparation is to spray the entire pile with a protective coating of valerian root mixed with water.



Valerian possesses great healing and protection power, and Nicole shared that over the winter, when there was risk of frost, she sprayed the same type of valerian mixture on exposed plants that they lacked covers for, and the next day they were all healthy and protected from the frost.

Biodynamics is a fascinating method of farming that also takes consideration for the lunar and astrological cycles.

Preparations and plantings are all done in

accordance with certain times of the calendar to achieve the maximum benefits to the land. Nicole and Gaelen have had wonderful success with biodynamics, and the beauty and richness of their farm can confirm this.

The weather held off long enough for the tour and a delicious potluck with fresh bread, salads, homemade pasta, savory red wine cookies, and more that was enjoyed in the grassy field near the banks of the South Toe River. As a new member of Organic Growers School, it gave me the opportunity to meet all of you and learn about the wonderful network of farms scattered throughout our region. I look forward to the next tour on June 12 at Crooked Creek Farms with Meredith and Casey McKissick. Hope to see you all there!

Also, remember enrollment to CRAFT is rolling, and we are always interested in welcoming new members! [Visit our website to download a membership form](#) or contact HannahFurgiuele with inquiries at: [hannah@organicgrowersschool.org](mailto:hannah@organicgrowersschool.org)



## FARMER'S CORNER: ASK TOM



Tom – Your tailgate tent looks very “vintage” but mine breaks every few years. How do you make it last so long? - Curious from Celo

Curious –

I started selling shrubs at tailgate markets in the early 90’s without a tent. I graduated to a \$40 umbrella that I “fired” one day during a thunderstorm with rain that came under one side of the umbrella and out the other. On the advice of Pete Dixon I bought a “Quikshade” brand 10X10 tent that is entering its twelfth year and should be good for many more. Here are some thoughts on tent maintenance and repair that may help your tent last.

The number one preventive action is to ensure long tent life is to keep it from becoming airborne. I recall a gust at the West Asheville Market that lifted a tent up about forty feet without touching the table, wares, or vendor. It landed about 100 feet away in an empty (fortunately) parking space at the West End Bakery. For liability alone, we should all keep our tents anchored. The little pins that come with some tents look useless to me and most parking lot owners object to nails in their pavement. One consideration is the weight of the tent frame. Our tent is very heavy, perhaps four times the weight of many lighter versions. Our main protection is to tie the tent to the bumper of our pick-up. Some venues require weights on each corner. Gallon jugs of water are common. We added sash weights this year to the two legs that are not next to the truck. In my view, keeping your tent on the ground is the best way to make it last.

The covering is subject to wear so we always use the cover that came with the tent before we load it into the truck. Some vendors use a square of carpet to cushion the end that slides in first. Mildew can be a problem so we always dry out a wet tent when we get home. Winter storage in a dry location also helps the cover last. Punctures can be mended with heavy thread. Occasionally the seams give out but they are easily fixed if caught early.



Frame failure seems to be the leading complaint, particularly as manufacturers move toward lighter and lighter metal. Four of our ribs have broken and have been temporarily repaired with duct tape. Twice we hired our neighbor welder to insert a sleeve and then to drill a hole for the bolt at a hinge point. More recently we have developed a better patch involving plastic conduit. We pick a conduit size slightly larger than the broken rib, press its round cross section into an oval with a vice, insert the broken rib, and then remove the vise pressure, allowing the conduit to squeeze the rib. We drill a hole in the right location and the repair is done. One of these patches has lasted for over a year so I am optimistic that it will be somewhat permanent. This description may be a little hard to follow so refer to the photo below. The photo shows a welded patch in the foreground and the more recent conduit patch to the rear.

Happy selling. – Tom

**Farmers: Got a question for Tom? Email it: [enews@organicgrowersschool.org](mailto:enews@organicgrowersschool.org)**

*Tom Elmore is co-owner of Thatchmore Farm, a certified organic farm specializing in vegetables, early tomatoes and landscape plants. Located in Leicester, NC.*

## GARDENER'S CORNER: ASK RUTH



*Dear Ruth,*

*Since I moved to upstate South Carolina two years ago, something has been eating my seedlings. One day I have lettuce, carrot, basil, or broccoli seedlings just barely showing up through the soil, the next day they are all gone. Not a trace. Damping off and cutworms would leave the fallen seedling. I think animals even the size of rabbits would leave prints or scat. I want to blame grasshoppers (there are certainly plenty around), but in 2 years I've never actually seen the culprit. I've made little 2"x2" window-screen houses and that seems to keep whatever-it-is from ruining my crops. Still, it's a pain. Any idea*

*what the root cause might be?*

*Thanks!*

*Upstate SC Gardener*

Dear Upstate,

I would love to see your tiny window screen houses! Even though they sound adorably elfin, I bet having to build all those 2" x 2" mini-houses begins to dampen your gardening enthusiasm after a while.

The mystery villain is probably **slugs!** These slippery creatures typically make their visitations during the night, do the damage, and disappear in the light of day; leaving you to wonder where on earth your seedlings went.

You can **test for slugs** by laying a wide board flat on damp ground near your plants overnight. The next morning, check underneath the board to see if slugs are present. If they are, drop them into a jar of soapy water or sprinkle them with salt (sounds cruel doesn't it?). Slugs are active at night and love damp conditions. To substantially reduce slug damage, *avoid watering in the evening* ~ but in a wet year, you may have to take more drastic measures.



*Warning! Regular snail bait often contains Metaldehyde. It is frequently flavored with molasses and it attracts slugs, but it also attracts pets who think it resembles food. Very*

small amounts of **metaldehyde can be toxic, and even fatal, to pets.** Liquid and powdered metaldehyde baits can get on paws and then be licked off, poisoning animals. Additionally, metaldehyde baits are ineffective after getting wet.

**There are slug & snail baits that are safe for pets and wildlife,** and suitable for organic gardeners. They are effective; some people say they are even *more effective* than metaldehyde. The *active ingredient in these pet-friendly products is iron phosphate*, and some brands are OMRI approved. Typical brand names are SLUGGO® and Escar-Go! They will not lose their effectiveness after rains, they continue working for up to two weeks, and the bait that is left uneaten by slugs will biodegrade. Slugs stop feeding after eating the bait, they become less mobile, and they begin dying within three to six days. Dead slugs/snails are not usually visible in the treated area, as they crawl off to die in secluded spots.

**Prior to application** of Sluggo® type baits, wet the ground if it is dry, and scatter the bait evenly on the soil around or near the plants to be protected, and around the perimeter of the garden. Do not leave in piles. Scatter the bait at a rate of 1 lb. per 1000 square feet, or 1 teaspoon per square yard, and more heavily for severe infestations. Evening is the best time to apply, since slugs mostly feed at night. Reapply as the bait is eaten, after extremely heavy rains, or at least every two weeks. Sluggo works on just about everything, including landscaped areas, gardens, orchards, and container pots.

#### **More slug solutions for organic gardeners:**

- You *can* significantly **reduce your slug damage by watering in the morning**, so your soil is dry by evening ~ since slugs enjoy damp conditions and work at night.
- Lay out a **wide board**, half a down-turned citrus fruit, or a flowerpot wedged up to allow access. This creates the sort of moist oasis that slugs love. Each morning, destroy collected slugs by dropping them in soapy water. If picking slugs up with your fingers makes you squeamish, use a trowel, a spoon, tongs, or even chopsticks.
- Be sure to **pull the mulch back** from your plant stems to protect them from slug damage. Mulch makes a perfect, dark, moist daytime habitat for slugs. Larger plants are less susceptible than seedlings.

- **Encourage natural predators** such as ground beetles, frogs, and birds by providing habitat. Ground beetles will live under the wide boards you have laid out to trap slugs. Frogs love damp conditions and enjoy eating slugs. Birds require vegetative cover and water.
- In *The New Organic Grower*, **Elliot Coleman recommends ducks** for slug control, but remember that ducks and chickens may also eat your seedlings. You can let your domesticated birds forage on newly turned ground, which should help eliminate slug eggs and diminish subsequent population numbers. According to Permaculturist Bill Mollison, "*You don't have a slug excess, you've got a duck deficit!*"
- Make or purchase a **beer trap**. Slugs are attracted to beer, so bury a container (like a cottage cheese container) in the ground, with the rim about 1" above soil level. This will capture the slugs and drown them, but keep ground beetles (their natural predator) from falling in. Empty the trap regularly, and top off with more beer - flat beer is fine. Research shows that slugs like grape juice too; cheap juice is fine.
- **Copper deters slugs by causing them to experience an electrical-type shock. The area must be completely encircled in copper, and the copper must be wide enough, or tall enough, that the slugs are forced to touch it.**
- **One Internet source swore that mullein leaves (fresh or dried) "repelled slugs like the plague" when applied around plants like a mulch.**
- **Salt** kills slugs, but an addition of lots of salt to your soil is not a good thing. One source suggested sprinkling Epson Salt around your plants.
- **Abrasive materials** like eggshells, builders sand (it's sharp), coffee grounds, or diatomaceous earth can be sprinkled around the plants as a physical deterrent that slugs find disagreeable. Diatomaceous earth works best when the weather is dry, so reapply after a rain. Microscopically, DE is very sharp and acts to shred slug

tissues. \*Utilize the safety precautions on the label when applying diatomaceous earth. Abrasive materials were the least-favored option in my research.

Here's to slug freedom!

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 [www.tailgatemarketfanclub.wordpress.com](http://www.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.*

## 4<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL TRUE NATURE COUNTRY FAIR!

true nature  
country fair



Don't forget, the 4th annual True Nature Country Fair will be September 25 & 26 at the Big Ivy Community Center in Barnardsville, NC. Want to get involved? The more the merrier! There are opportunities to sponsor, exhibit, volunteer, donate to the silent auction, participate in the annual fiddle contest, and more! [Visit our website](#) for more details. See you at the Fair!

## NEWS BITS

NewsBits are reader submitted news, events, and other happenings. Submit your bit to [enews@organicgrowersschool.org](mailto:enews@organicgrowersschool.org)

## POSITION OPEN ANNOUNCEMENT

**Position:** Instructor, Horticulture Technology and Sustainable Agriculture

**Proposed Hire Date:** August 16, 2010

**For First Consideration, Applications Must Be Received By:** June 21, 2010

**Brief Description of Position:** Under the direction of the Dean of Science, Engineering and Mathematics, the instructor will be responsible for developing and teaching classes in Horticulture, Sustainable Agriculture and related disciplines. Courses to instruct include: Landscape Design, Plant Materials, Applied Plant Science, Biological Pest Management, Soils & Fertilizers, Plant Propagation, Greenhouse Production, Organic Crop Production, Basic Farm Maintenance, Sustainable Livestock Management and Agriculture Marketing.

**Minimum Qualifications:**

1. Bachelor's Degree in Horticulture, Sustainable Agriculture or related field required. Master's degree preferred.
2. Minimum of three years of related industry/field experience required.
3. Teaching experience at the community college level or higher preferred.
4. Experience and/or training in Horticulture and Sustainable Agriculture, Animal Science and Alternative Energy preferred.

**Salary:** Commensurate with experience and credentials.

**Application Procedure:** Go to WPCC's website, [www.wpcc.edu](http://www.wpcc.edu), print off a WPCC Employment Application, or call and request a WPCC application be mailed. Submit the following:

- Application
- Resume
- Copies of college and/or university transcripts (unofficial copies will suffice; if hired, official copies will be required).
- Three (3) current letters of recommendation submitted to WPCC on your behalf.

The above materials are to be sent to:  
Human Resources Assistant  
Western Piedmont Community College  
1001 Burkemont Avenue  
Morganton, NC 28655  
(828) 448-3127