

BLUE MOUNTAINS PERMACULTURE NETWORK

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SPRING NEWSLETTER

Hello

Welcome to the Spring newsletter. Is it Spring or is it Summer, what with the drought, last Wednesday's temperature and bush fires? Again we say goodbye from the mountains to one our regular contributors, Richard Lee. However we hope Richard will stay in touch.

The newsletter only happens because of a small number of dedicated contributors; support them by providing your comments and feedback. This month there is a prize for Feedback of the Month.

Pat
BMPN

WHAT'S ON?

Saturday 16 October
to Sunday 24th October

Blue Mountains Water : Ways, Means & Ends
PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION Exhibition at
Wentworth Falls School of Arts.

Friday 15 October
to Sunday 31 October

Houses of the Future Exhibition
Sydney Opera House Forecourt Open 9.30am to 6.15pm
daily
www.housesofthefuture.com.au

Saturday October 23

ECOhomes Tour to visit 5 Upper Mountains homes to see
best practice in environmental building. Money raised
supports Katoomba High School environmental youth
leadership program.
Bookings - www.blueskies-cottage/ecohomestour
or phone 4782 5375

First Saturday of every month. Hawkesbury Earthcare Centre: Open Days
Cnr Campus Dr & Science Rd
University of Western Sydney
Hawkesbury Campus
Richmond NSW 2753

PO Box 15, Richmond, 2753
www.earthcare.org.au

Saturday 23 October
Sunday 24 October

Seed Savers' Seventeenth Annual Conference in Bowral
Further Information Jude & Michel Fanton
Email: info@seedsavers.net

Friday 5th &
Saturday 6th November

Sydney's Hands-On Environmental Forum - Inspirations,
Motivations and Celebrations
Date Place: Eastern Avenue Lecture Theatre Complex,
Sydney University
To book: contact leanne.cusiter@dipnr.nsw.gov.au or phone
(02) 98955965

Sunday 28 November

Mid Mountains Seed Savers - 2783 mini workshop/skill
share
11 Hughes Ave, Lawson at 9.30
Enquiries Loret 4759 2118 or mcrun@hermes.net.au

Friday, April 8, 2005

Public Lecture and launch of APC8 at Australian Catholic
University in central Melbourne David Holmgren on "Global
Energy Peak: Threat or Opportunity?"

April 10 - 15 2005

APC8 - Permaculture Convergence in Melbourne 2005.
Further information: www.permaculturemelbourne.org.au

BIODYNAMICS WORKSHOP

By John McNaull

A group of 20 people gathered in early September at the Blue Mountains Steiner School for a one day workshop on Biodynamics. Lynette West, Biodynamics Educator, led the group through an exploration of how to revitalise the earth and work consciously with the spiritual forces which come from within the earth, the sun and moon, the planets and beyond.

The objective of biodynamic farming and gardening is to produce food of such quality that not only will it nourish the physical human body, but it will also contribute to spiritual development. Many of the basic biodynamic techniques aim to maximise the creation of humus, which is seen as the fundamental aspect of soil fertility and contributor to plant health (and an objective which sets it apart from most modern mainstream farming

systems). There are many areas of overlap between the biodynamic method and what we now know as organic gardening and farming.

Biodynamics was initiated in 1924 by Rudolf Steiner in a series of lectures to a group of farmers and landowners who were concerned about an observed decline in fertility on their farms. During the first 30 years, biodynamic practitioners experimented with Steiners indications and proved that the system of farming was indeed viable. Experimentation still goes on today, with Australia at the forefront of much of that research as biodynamics is adapted to our local conditions. Commercial scale biodynamic farming is on the increase with a variety of produce available, not only from food cooperatives and organic produce distributors but also from the major supermarkets.

Participants in the workshop were provided with a historical background, an overview of the theory behind biodynamics, and then had the opportunity to experience hands-on compost making and the preparation of Horn Manure also known as 500. The large straw covered compost heap that was built now stands proudly on the service road below the library at the school. Inside the heap, invisible to us, a horde of bacteria are multiplying and digesting the ingredients that were carefully assembled, much like a cake-mix. As the ingredients break down, chaos is created in the heap with form and complexity breaking down. The five biodynamic compost preparations which were added during construction assist not only with this breakdown, but with the subsequent re-creation of a new order in the form of humus. This process will take a few months to complete and then can be used by Class 2/3 in their garden lessons. Everyone passing the heap on their daily travels has been requested to have some empathetic thoughts and join the cosmic forces at play in the timeless cycle of decay and rebirth!!

A special thanks to Lynette and all who assisted in the organisation of this event for the school. Participants on the day were also treated to delicious fresh organic food and juice carefully prepared by a dedicated team, essential brainfood for the expansive concepts being considered!

Another biodynamic workshop is planned for the not too distant future, so if you missed out on this one, you can look forward to the next.

A special thank you also to Bowral Steiner school for their special gift in support of the workshop. Lynette stopped in at the Bowral school on her way up to Hazelbrook from Queenbeyan and met with Rob Skinner who is the gardener there. Rob had just finished making a batch of 'cow pat pit' (another biodynamic preparation) and gifted some to our school. A noble gesture and one which was warmly received and treasured. The preparation will be spread over the school grounds to assist with fertility and health.



PS Can you recognize Wayne and Brian as well as your editor?

GARDENERS OUT WEST

Greetings from Wayne & Brian

Apart from attending a biodynamic training day and learning composting skills both of us have been up to our regular gardening jobs out west.

One of my favorite and most challenging gardens is Collits Inn (circa 1823). Three years down the track with some plans in place and assistance from a recent permaculture class we managed a soil change. Soil here in the Hartley Valley, is straight loan on rock, difficult to stand a rooted plant in let alone have it grow.

The challenge in changing the culture of the soil was done using the recycled water system and adding heavy fibre mulch to the soil. The three huge 100 year old radiate pines, which were reduced to chips three years ago, have been invaluable. Improving the water holding quality of the soil firstly and then adding topsoil depth, has slowly allowed plants a longer life. Nutritional green manure is grown.

During the hot dry summer months and in winter we've kept the mulch up so that as it breaks down we top it up. The garden has many fruit trees close to the house and flowers used for arrangements in the restaurant. For drought precautionary measures all gardening has been close to the farm house. This year we crept out into a five acre paddock to plant our first ever cash crop orchard of nut trees. We've not fenced in the paddock and have no animal problems thus far.

The watering system in the orchard is newly laid under each line of trees. The water is recycled after a septic, peat and gravel bog then it goes through a light sterilization unit. The clear almost odourless beige coloured water is pulsed under each tree in the dry season. A wet sensor system has been fitted to allow minimal hands on and provides regular water to all the trees as well as to the garden beds.

In hindsight I would not have this system but use many more willing hands to build a less expensive and more sustainable system to recycle water. This system serves two permaculture principles; to use what necessary resources are available, and minimise the impact on the immediate region. It is not an overtaxing disturbance of the soil so that continued building can take place in the garden beds and time and energy can be allocated to gardening.

Until next time from the boys out west. We're happy to answer any agriculture questions

Wayne & Brian

BLACKHEATH COMMUNITY GARDEN

by Suzanne Reaney

New members welcome contact Suzanne 4787 5229 or Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre 4787 7770.

WINMALEE NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE GARDEN GROUP

by Mark Lutherborrow

The Winmalee Neighbourhood Garden is really thriving! Considering drought, storm, and the unrelenting pace of our modern lives it is nothing short of a miracle. The grand Spring launch has been held over for a couple of months as Council is carrying out major landscaping works around the garden area. Once this is completed the garden will be looking fantastic and we will be ready to host a launch party.

Our committed group of volunteers continues to meet on the second Sunday of the month from 10 to 12.30 or so. For this month only we are meeting on the 17th October which is the 3rd Sunday. A great day of planting, weeding, mulching and communicating is in store for anyone who would like to attend.

Any enquiries would be most welcome. Mark Lutherborrow 0418694969

SUSTAINABLE WORK AND HOUSING

For more information:

20 Ridge St Woodford NSW 2778 Australia (02) 4758 8411

Website - www.caretakers.org.au/CHEC.htm email - caretakers@earthling.net

MID MOUNTAINS SEED SAVERS - 2783

Loret and John are going to attend the Seed Savers' Seventeenth Annual Conference at Bowral on 23 and 24 October, from whence they will return enriched and enlivened for a mini workshop/skill share which will take place at their home 11 Hughes Ave Lawson on Sunday 28 November from 9.30 to 12.30. Bring morning tea to share and a gold coin towards cost of materials and affiliation fees.

Please contact Loret 4759 2118 or email mcrun@hermes.net.au

WHERE'S RICHARD? (Lee that is)

Richard and Alix, have left the Blue Mountains for New Zealand. They have bought their "little dream farm", 47 acres in the far north of the North Island. Richard has asked to stay on our mailing list and may provide us with a contribution from the land of the long white cloud.

I would like to thank Richard for his thought provoking articles for the newsletter and also for answering my numerous enquiries. I wish him and Alix well in their new life and look forward to an update on life in rural New Zealand.

HOW'S ROWE?

Rowe has asked us to extend to everyone her sincere thanks for their interest and concern during her recent illness. She is approaching the task of getting better with her usual enthusiasm and single-mindedness. She is running a Permaculture Certificate Course at her home with Vanessa Steele, three days a week for 4 weeks.

For those following the saga of Rowe's dam, the dam is about 60% full but the water level dropped two inches though evaporation on Wednesday 13 October (record October temperatures).

Rowe's thought for the coming dry summer: if you provide water for native animals and birds in bird baths etc, keep the water up as birds and animals come to rely on it.

PEST REPORT

by Sue Girard

TINY RAINBOWS.

On September 7 I was lucky enough to be part of the Threatened Species Day activities in Lithgow. This day is special in Lithgow because it is one of the few areas where the Purple Copper Winged Butterfly, *Paralucia spinifera*, can be found. To be able to observe this rare and endangered butterfly under the guidance of Simon Nally, the National Parks Threatened Species Officer, was a great honour, and I gained lots of great inside information.

I learnt for example that the Lithgow area has several of the 35 known sites for this butterfly, both east and west of the Great Western Highway. There's only a small amount of shared genetic diversity at these sites, indicating that individuals are unlikely to fly even that far to interbreed. Other notable sites include Yetholme, Winburndale, Lidsdale, Hampton and Oberon, but the total area of their habitat is possibly as small as 30 hectares.

This little member of the Lepidoptera species was not described until 1964, then lost, and rediscovered in 1978. Now six sites have been so threatened that evidence of the butterfly has not been observed there in recent years. It is only the size of a 10 cent piece, and we have limited knowledge about its habits and life cycle. When you discover what we do know about the intricate relationships involved in its existence, you begin to understand why it is described as threatened.

The Purple Copper Butterfly only eats a spiky shrub, *Bursaria spinosa spp lasiophylla* which only grows above 850m above sea level. So why no butterflies in the Upper Mountains you ask?

Add to this restricted diet a symbiotic relationship with an attendant ant, *Anonychomyrma itinerans*. This little ant actively farms the caterpillars of this butterfly - by herding them in and out of food grazing areas during the night, then herding them down to the ant nest during the day to milk them of a byproduct known as 'honey dew' to feed their own young. In effect the ants keep the caterpillars safe from predators during the day. The caterpillar pupates in the ant nest, and then emerges around September, when it has two weeks in which to mate before it dies. The adults are poor fliers and rarely move up higher than 2 metres and no more than 10 metres from the area they grew up in.

Take any of the elements out of the life cycle and the butterflies suffer. Clearing of land, spraying, grazing, weed invasion and even illegal collection by entomologists have all contributed to disturbance of the *Bursaria* and of the attendant ant populations.

Butterflies as a genus need a temperature from 42-48° C to be able to move around effectively. Being so small the Purple Copper Butterfly has few body reserves, and relies on the warmth of the sun to get up to that temperature. As the name implies, the reflective surfaces, or scales, on the wings of the butterfly are predominantly purple and orange; but I think they are more like all the colours of the light spectrum. They sunbake during the middle of the day with their wings wide, looking like so many tiny rainbows.

September 7 was a wet, cloudy day and the butterflies were not at their best. So I'm looking forward to taking my insect-loving family back to the hill behind Lithgow Community Nursery on a sunny day within the next few weeks. It will be well worth the effort.

The Purple Copper Winged Butterfly, *Paralucia spinifera*, is on the NSW Government's Schedule 1 of the Threatened Species Act of 1995, and in Section 17 of the Federal Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act of 1999. Consequently National Parks require a Recovery Plan for its protection, which can be found on the net by anyone that is interested - [www.npws.nsw.gov/news/recovery_plans/approved Bathurst Copper Butterfly.pdf](http://www.npws.nsw.gov/news/recovery_plans/approved_Bathurst_Copper_Butterfly.pdf).

Sue Girard

THOUGHTS FOLLOWING A BIODYNAMIC WORKSHOP

by Pat Rayner

I attended the Biodynamic Workshop on the 5 September with mixed feelings. What do I think about this? I knew a little about Biodynamic Agriculture, I had seen traditional farmers on TV explaining how they had improved the fertility and water retention of their soil after using biodynamic preparations but I had trouble reconciling my limited knowledge of applied science with some of the basic tenets such as burying cow manure in a cow horn for the winter months, or the importance of creating the vortex when stirring the preparations.

However I went along to find out more. Of course I was met with welcoming familiar faces. After some initial standing back I found myself stirring Biodynamic Preparation BD500, and spraying it on the gardens at the school.

I came home with many questions, more members for our email list and a feeling of dissatisfaction with how I make compost. I was resolved to build a heap such as we built during the workshop. (see picture with John's article).

Compost Heap

We were taught that one of the important factors in successful composting is the correct balance of carbon to nitrogen 30:1 or 25:1. My compost seemed mostly to be made up of nitrogen. Where would I find sufficient materials high in carbon? I wasn't sure I was aware of which materials were which. Again I regretted my limited knowledge of basic science.

Armed with the list Lynn provided at the workshop I looked around for materials high in carbon. I soon found dry leaves, shredded wood prunings, old straw and wood ash. I thought of getting sawdust from a timber yard but my enquiries were met with the fact that some sawdust from treated timber is mixed in. That was the end of that idea. I then applied to my former workplace for paper from the shredder; it had just been emptied and then a friend said she thought the inks were toxic. I am now following up to see if this is true. Though the most recent *Blue Mountains Gazette* answers a query that the ink they use is non toxic.

I started collecting all the material I found, instead of just topping up my heap, realised that I had an endless supply of casuarina litter and made my heap. It is probably too small and may dry out because I would not hose the heap for long. I now have to be patient and wait for 6 weeks to check on it and let it mature for 5 months.

I'm pleased I attended the Biodynamic Workshop, I am not a convert but I learnt a lot, as the notes given out state biodynamic agriculture

"requires the participant to maintain an open mind, not accepting blindly, but equally not blindly rejecting, happenings brought about through the operation of some natural law we do not yet understand." (Biodynamic Education Centre).

I have since looked at a most informative website (thanks to John McNaull) which gives a comprehensive list of compost ingredients and even says if they are mostly carbon or nitrogen. www.mastercomposter.com

FEEDBACK

One lucky subscriber will **win** a copy of *Organic Vegetable Gardening* by Annette McFarlane. Send your Feedback, comments ideas to bmpermac@telpacific.com.au

WEBSITES

Do you know of a site you have found most useful, informative or thought provoking? Let us know. Write a brief review or send you comments or just let us know about the site.

ODDS & SODS

Do you know:

- Rowe picked the last ripe tomato from her glasshouse in Katoomba on September 28 and I picked my last ripe tomato from my garden in Springwood late August. Scary!
- Collits Inn won the Award for Most Innovative and Effective Water System at Lithgow and District Garden Club Awards. They were also awarded a certificate for contribution to the Lithgow environment. Congratulations Brian and Wayne.
- **Wanted** - regular contributor on Katoomba Community Garden. Richard Griffiths and Richard Lee provided this information in the past.

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Contributions for the Summer Newsletter by Friday January 14 PLEASE.

To **unsubscribe** please reply with subject 'Unsubscribe'.

Disclaimer: The Editor cannot be held accountable for any content but has endeavoured to check all she can.