Tilth’s First Winter Market

Chilly days, some sunny skies and a smattering of rain made the quintessential Whidbey setting for our outdoor winter market. For the volunteers and vendors who braved the weather, the consensus was that the winter market was a success and definitely worth it!

Each day of the market, we had ten to fourteen vendors and an average of 180 customers. Some fresh produce was available, thanks to Maha Farm and several members who brought their late season produce to be sold at the community booth. Many talented members also contributed crafts to sell at the community booth.

The market setup was cozy (while still allowing for proper distancing), centered around the busy café and Lone Creek Farm’s newly opened flower studio. A wood fire and holiday lights added warmth to the cold days.

A big thank you to our returning vendors and new vendors, who came to sell their wares, art, decorations and prepared food, allowing people to do some holiday shopping and enjoy a bite to eat. And, as always, thanks to the volunteers who made it happen.
Spring 2020, amid our worries with the pandemic and our concerns with running a safe farmers’ market, the South Whidbey Tilth council wanted to plant seeds of hope for the future. Many years ago, we had the opportunity of buying the Tilth campus at Thompson Road on very favorable terms due to the generosity of Caroline Gardner. Caroline has been a dedicated council member, vendor and supporter of Tilth. We are deeply appreciative. This year, our spring fundraising letter proposed the goal of paying off the mortgage on the Tilth land six years early. Achieving this landmark would free Tilth to focus more closely on our core mission of promoting an environmentally sound and socially equitable food system.

This island community is home to many wonderful people, people who commit their talents, time and resources to supporting the projects and ideals of which they are passionate. South Whidbey Tilth has many members who reflect these commitments. A phone call from one such member, Nancy Nordhoff, presented the council with the very generous challenge gift of $15,000 if we could raise another $15,000. We gave ourselves a year to meet the challenge. Nancy said, “It will be fun.” We thought, “It’s going to be a busy year!”

The plan was to send out four donation request letters between Fall 2020 and Summer 2021. Our heartfelt desire was to celebrate a successful year of campaign fundraising at our annual August dinner in 2021 (pandemic permitting).

And then our members and community handed us a spectacular success by donating $15,000 in matching funds within the space of four months. Our first contribution came from Holly Muenchow, daughter of council member Anza Muenchow, on the first of August—before we had even sent out our first appeal letter. That letter was mailed in early October; by mid-November, the entirety of the matching funds had been donated.

It is with immense gratitude and delighted astonishment that the council thanks each donor for their support. We look forward to celebrating this wonderful achievement with all of you. The coming year brings with it the hope that we will once again be able to meet, hug one another, and eat tomatoes together—for the emblem of this campaign is a tomato—the Mortgage Lifter tomato that helped many a grower in the 1930s pay off their mortgages. Whether one grows or buys tomatoes, whether one likes them fresh with basil and mozzarella, whirled into a gazpacho or preserved as a pasta sauce for winter months, tomatoes are the embodiment of a successful growing season. Ripe, warmed by the sun, with that fragrance that is like no other, tomatoes signal the end of a successful summer season and effort well spent.

Our Mortgage Lifter had a fruitful yield. Thank you!
A Message from Tilth’s Next-Door Neighbors, the Agrarian Trust—Your Questions Answered

by Rhys Hansen

Thank you for your warm welcome to Whidbey Island. The last couple of months have seen the Puget Sound Agrarian Commons gain momentum and lay down the foundation work for our local organization and systems. We wanted to take the time to introduce ourselves and share a bit about the next steps for the Gardener Farm, the land next door to the Tilth campus.

What is the Agrarian Trust?
We are a national nonprofit that supports community-held land and agrarian property for sustainable food production, ecological stewardship, community vitality and equitable land access for the next generation of farmers and ranchers. The Agrarian Trust launched Commons projects in 10 regions this year, including in Washington State with the Gardner Farm.

What is unique about this model?
While the Agrarian Trust provides oversight, legal support, and funding, each Commons is governed by a majority of local stakeholders, including community members and the leasehold farmers. A commitment to ecological stewardship, regenerative stewardship, equity and removing barriers to farming and ranching are the common values, but regional Commons have the independence to shape the project as best fits local needs and capacities.

The Puget Sound Agrarian Commons (PSAC) is starting with the Gardner Farm on Whidbey but will likely include other farms as the project grows capacity. You can find the list of current board members on our website.

What is happening with the land on Thompson Road?
We are doing some preliminary land restoration work, as well as investing in some basic infrastructure to set up any future leaseholders for success, including a well. Plans include care for the native prairie remnant, invasive species removal, planting for soil maintenance and more.

When will you begin looking for farm stewards? As soon as is feasible. The Commons board has begun drafting the application materials and process to evaluate possible leaseholders. We expect to release our Request for Proposals by Spring. If you would like to be notified when the application opens, please contact us at the email below.

How can I get involved? Thank you for your enthusiasm! We really value having Whidbey Island community members engaged in the process. None of this will be possible without your input and support. Reach out to us at the contact below to learn more about opportunities to support this project. You can also join our email list or follow the Agrarian Trust on Facebook and Instagram to learn more about the Agrarian Commons projects locally and around the country.

We welcome your ideas, knowledge of local needs, interest in being a leaseholder farmer, and look forward to when we can safely gather and celebrate the beginning of this project with you. Until then, be well.

Your neighbors at Puget Sound Agrarian Commons
Contact: rhys@agrariantrust.org
agrariantrust.org/agrariancommons/puget-sound/

Commercial Bee Houses Can Be Death Traps

Are you inclined to provide habitat for native, solitary bees? Bravo. However, be aware that you can cause more harm than help. Tom Vincent, a Tilth member and known advocate for native bee habitat, sends this article with an important message on bee house construction for solitary bees:

colinpurrington.com/2019/05/horrors-of-mass-produced-bee-houses

Also, check out this article published by the Xerces Society on creating native bee habitat. The article contains links to fact sheets on how build nests for native bees:

xerces.org/blog/5-ways-to-increase-nesting-habitat-for-bees
The Case for Biochar for Soil Regeneration and Carbon Sequestration

by Paul Belanger

Biochar, also known as terra preta, is nothing more than charcoal that has not been combusted. It is most commonly put in the soil, but other applications exist, as mentioned in the book, links and video recommended at the end of this article. Char is produced by the burning of organic matter in the absence of oxygen, a process known as pyrolysis.

I’m a paleoclimate geologist who has been a promoter of biochar for the past 12 years as a way of sequestering carbon, in this case in the soil, because it lasts hundreds of years. Since moving here in March of 2019, I’ve focused more of my energy on the topic of sequestration. This year I attended three conferences and workshops, where I met some wonderful like-minded biochar enthusiasts.

The other big benefit of biochar, and the focus of most of us at Tilth, is that it adds organic matter to the soil. Although inert, the honeycomb structure of char benefits the soil biology by encouraging and retaining fungi, bacteria and moisture in the soil.

I was originally scheduled to do a talk on biochar in Coupeville on Earth Day, and, along with fellow Tilth member Tom Vincent, demonstrate a Top-Lit Up-Draft gasifier stove (TLUD) and kiln in operation at the Pacific Rim Institute (PRI). We’ve been accumulating scrap construction timber in a couple of sheds at PRI for upcoming demos, as well as for case studies to look at the results of growing plants with biochar-compost blends versus without. Stay tuned!

More recently I convinced a neighbor to allow me to salvage and accumulate some one- to three-inch Douglas fir logs that he was going to burn in his slash pile. The wood contained 15-25% moisture, so I tarped it and recently flame-top kilned it in three burns making some 150 gallons by volume (0.75 cubic yards) of char (see photos). I purchased the kiln at Freeland’s recycle center and can make it available to others who want to make biochar.

I have plans for building various TLUDs and kilns; at present I’m looking for a 55-gallon drum with a cover to make a TLUD. I’m also looking for scrap metal and/or a welder to help. Ideally a retort unit would be the most efficient way to make char, but they are expensive.

I will post some personal videos and links on my biochar page by the time this newsletter reaches you: denverclimastudygroup.com/?page_id=28. Feel free to contact me by email or text/call (please put biochar in subject line to capture my attention): pebelanger@glassdesignresources.com, 303-249-7966.

In the meantime, save your scrap dry wood and/or tarp it to dry out next summer for a fall burn. I recommend doing a burn on misty, cloudy days with high humidity, which helps nucleate particulates. Also, use a raised sheet-metal skirt to burn off smoke and particulates, and quench with a spray hose versus a water dump. There’s no denying that making biochar is a labor-intensive process—but worth the value for soil-enrichment and sequestration.

Resources:
Learn more about biochar at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biochar
See the learning center at U.S. Biochar Initiative’s website, filled with introductory materials, applications, studies, videos and more: biochar-us.org/welcome-new-biochar-learning-center
Wilson Biochar is a great resource that includes purchase of kilns and handbooks: wilsonbiochar.com
Alan Bates talks about biochar as a climate solution: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2B2GQ2FQmWs

Kiln filled with drier, smaller stock lit from the top; ultimately the bottom becomes oxygen starved where the char collects.

Once the fire is going strong and burning down, add larger pieces and/or higher moisture pieces.

Kiln at the final stages of the burn immediately before quenching to avoid total combustion of char. A stout metal rod needs to be raked through the coals to break up larger pieces for complete charring.

Dumped char after quenching in kiln: approximately 40 gallons of char. The process took some four hours.
President’s Message

by Gary Ingram

The year 2020 is closing out and it has been a time that historians will write about. As your council of trustees, we debated about whether we should even have a farmers’ market this year. After consulting with the Island County Health Department, we decided to have it, with many changes. It turned out to be the best choice, as many of you felt outdoor shopping was the way to go. Summer sales set records for us, and we have continued into the holiday season.

As you all know by now, the Mortgage Lifter campaign was successful beyond our wildest hopes. Our website for making online donations gave us a year to raise the $15,000 that Nancy Nordhoff offered to match. Donations passed the goal less than a month after our campaign letter was mailed! Once the paperwork is completed, we will be mortgage free. Very cool.

I asked myself, in a pandemic, when so many are in need, will the community actually feel that paying the mortgage is an important thing to use our money for? What this taught me is, if we have a worthy project or goal, the community will step up and fund it.

There are few things in life that are constant, and change is one. Pandemics don’t last forever. COVID-19 is ongoing, but we are all hopeful things will return to normal in 2021. As my wife often tells me, “time will tell.”

The council meets via Zoom every month, generally the 3rd Thursday at 6 p.m. All members are welcome to attend. Just email me or any council member to get the Zoom link. We had our 2021 Planning meeting this month and are hopeful that we can do many improvements to the Tilth campus. You can see all our meeting minutes on the website at southwhidbeytilth.org/about (scroll down to “Organization”). Stay tuned for news of our new projects.

WHAT IS TILTH?

Tilth (tilth) n. [fr OE Tilian = th]

a. the quality of cultivated soil,
b. the cultivation of wisdom and the spirit.

MISSION

South Whidbey Tilth Association is an educational association, the purpose of which is to support and promote biologically sound and socially equitable agriculture. Our commitment is to advocate, study and teach agricultural practices consistent with stewardship of the natural world. We promote and demonstrate principles and practices of sustainable agriculture, as well as cultivate a variety of opportunities for local market gardeners and farmers. The organization is organized exclusively for educational and scientific purposes under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

2020 COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND OFFICES

President: Gary Ingram .......................206-718-8938  president@southwhidbeytilth.org
Vice President: Don Krafft (interim)......408-595-3070  dfk@donkrafft.com
Finance: Edward Hueneke ...............360-499-1682  edgrant012@gmail.com
Secretary: Janet Richards .................425-361-9242  janeth9@outlook.com
Membership, PR & Dev.: Andréa Linton 360-221-1310  membership@southwhidbeytilth.org
Education: Anza Muenchow ..............360-579-2890  education@southwhidbeytilth.org
Land Stewardship: Ida Gianopoulos 503-730-0199  landsteward@southwhidbeytilth.org
Market: Prescott..........................360-682-8642  prscot@whidbey.net

PROJECT LEADERS

Native Landscape: J.C. May..............360-331-1004  mayjo45@gmail.com
Community Garden: Ida Gianopoulos 503-730-0199  landsteward@southwhidbeytilth.org
Community Produce: FRed Rouge.........360-579-2890  info@southwhidbeytilth.org
Webmaster/Email: Marc Wilson...........360-579-2890  info@southwhidbeytilth.org
Newsletter editor: Janet Richards ....425-361-9242  janetri9@outlook.com

CONTRACT SERVICES

Market Manager: Kirstin Clauson.......360-395-8842  market@southwhidbeytilth.org
Bookkeeper: Sharon Asplund............360-221-6232  sharon@goperitae.com

MEMBERSHIP

South Whidbey Tilth membership is $25 annually. Additional people in a household may join for $10 each. The newsletters can be received by email or by USPS mail. To update membership information, contact Membership at membership@southwhidbeytilth.org or leave a message at 360-321-0757. Membership renewals are due every June and members will be sent a reminder.

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

The South Whidbey Tilth newsletter is a bimonthly publication of South Whidbey Tilth Association. The primary purpose of this publication is to foster communication among our membership and friends with information about our mission and our organization. We encourage submissions of letters, articles, book reviews and photos. The editorial committee reserves the right to edit for clarity, style and concision. Advertising and opinions in this newsletter are not necessarily the policy of the South Whidbey Tilth Association.

Newsletter committee: Janet Richards, A.T. Birmingham-Young, Prescott, Paula Richards and Andréa Linton.

ADVERTISING RATES IN THE NEWSLETTER

Full page $70, half $40, quarter $22 and eighth $12. Classified ads are also available for a dime a word.

Mail: South Whidbey Tilth
PO Box 252, Langley WA 98260
Phone:360-321-0757
Email: info@southwhidbeytilth.org

Website: southwhidbeytilth.org
Facebook page: facebook.com/SouthWhidbeyTilth
Physical location: 2812 Thompson Road, off State Route 525
The hectic days of summer are over, and all that green growth has slowed almost to a standstill. The few hardy leaf and root crops, like kale, chard and parsnips, are still resting in their beds where we can casually harvest them as needed. Any above-ground growth has virtually stopped, since we have less than seven hours of dim daylight and the temperatures are near freezing. But below the ground, where the temperatures are 45-50 degrees, growth of microorganisms is exploding. Many root structures are taking off. I especially think of all those little garlic cloves planted early last month, already sprouting several inches of new root growth.

If you didn’t manage to plant all the varieties of garlic you had planned for, don’t give up completely. You can still plant some this month, though the bulbs will be smaller than those planted earlier. It may be worth a try because you will love that fresh flavor when you harvest them in July. If you find that you missed harvesting some of your garlic bulbs this past summer, you will notice the bulbs re-sprouting now. Though the cloves come up too close together to grow into full-sized bulbs, you may enjoy them in the spring as “garlic ramps,” which are immature, sprouted garlic cloves. After seeing ramps on menus in gourmet restaurants, I decided to try them out and found them to be a wonderful spring green for stir-fries with Asian or Italian flavors.

If you haven’t finished your planting records for 2020, update your maps and reports now. The seed catalogues are beginning to arrive in the mail, and you’ll need your updated garden maps and journals to make the best selections. Good seeds can be hard to find, and catalogues do run out of some choice varieties. Some of my favorite catalogues include Territorial (from Oregon), Johnny’s, Fedco and High Mowing (from Maine). They vary on their customer service and timeliness, so shop early. The local seed companies, like Deep Harvest and Uprising, have reliable seed that does well in our climate. You may have the choice of hybrid versus heirloom (open pollinating) seed. I usually grow a mixture depending on the timing of maturity (days to harvest). Some of the hybridized traits are really helpful in increasing viability and production. However, you can’t save your own seeds from hybrid varieties and expect the same type of crop results. The genetics rarely cross in your favor.

Speaking of seed saving, I hope South Whidbey finds a way to have the usual seed exchange in February. Usually held at a library, the seed swap is a great place to share partial seed packets that you may not want this year. It has been a real treat when the Organic Farm School brings their excess seeds, too. I appreciate Deep Harvest for coming to the exchange regularly.

Many seeds can stay viable for several years, with perhaps a lower germination rate. But do not try to save any in the onion family or parsnips. These seeds just don’t last. Tomato seeds are usually good for a few years. High Mowing Organic Seeds has a good chart on seed viability, see www.highmowingseeds.com/blog/seed-viability-chart.

Good luck in the coming growing season. May we all flourish, stay well and experience bounty.

The Tilth Alliance Maritime Northwest Garden Guide

The Best Gift for a Gardener!

To buy a copy leave a message 360-321-0757 or education@ southwhidbeytilth.org

A month-by-month manual tailored to our climate and growing season and useful for beginning to advanced gardeners. The 78-page guide outlines each month’s garden tasks and lists hundreds of vegetable, herb and flower varieties to plant. It also includes strategies for year-round gardening, articles about organic gardening techniques and activities for kids.

Farmers Market Conference

The 2021 Washington Farmers Market Conference is coming February 23 to 26. Boot Camp for market managers is February 18. For information and to register, see wafarmersmarkets.org/2021-wsfma-conference.

Save the date
My Favorite Fall/Winter Foods

by Gary Ingram

Pam and I grow nearly 90% of our food in less space than you can imagine. Winter is upon us and our garden is nearly empty now with three exceptions: kale (for fresh greens), Brussels sprouts and collard greens.

Pam starts kale from seed in our cold frames in early February and we continue to harvest these plants until the following spring. We have never lost a kale plant to freezing temperatures, and love the strong flavors they develop as they age. We’ll let a few of the old plants flower in the spring, as the local bees are attracted to the yellow blossoms. Our goats and chickens happily munch the old plants when we finally dig them out.

We eat Brussels sprouts almost every evening in the fall and winter. These plants prefer a rich and loose soil and thrive in our garden. Flavor improves

Leaving a Legacy to Tilth

by Prescott

Like many nonprofit organizations, Tilth has a fund, held separately from our operating funds, intended to maintain a financial base for ongoing support. The South Whidbey Tilth Sustaining Fund was approved by the council of trustees in May 2007, after a bequest subcommittee was appointed to develop a process.

Each year the council determines an amount (a percentage of the average value of the fund over the preceding five years) that can be withdrawn to contribute to the annual budget. The fund currently contains $14,234.

The first bequest to this fund came from the estate of Janet Yee, a research librarian at the University of Washington, who retired to Whidbey Island in 1986. Margaret Kish helped her find her home on Edgecliff Drive in Langley. Her interests included art and gardening, and she quickly found South Whidbey Tilth. Most of us remember her as Todd (her maiden name) and sometimes as the “Dragon Lady.” She had a quick temper, a sharp intellect and strong community spirit.

Todd invited me to start an herb business with her, and we planted many herbs and made flavored vinegars on her acreage. We sold both dried and fresh herbs and our vinegars at the South Whidbey Tilth Farmers’ Market while it was located at Bayview.

Many business meetings were held in Todd’s kitchen. She advocated and persuaded the Tilth leadership to set aside 10% of the Farmers’ Market earnings toward a maintenance fund. She was passionately interested in Tilth having its own campus. In 1998, the Bayview Corner went up for sale and the future of Tilth’s Farmers’ Market was unknown. Thanks to the maintenance fund, Tilth had $10,000 to put into the Thompson Road land acquisition in 2000.

Todd passed away in 2006 at the age of 81. Tilth member and friend, Myrna Twomey, had helped her prepare her will, which left a third of her estate to Tilth.

A second bequest came from Marlene and Eric Will, who joined Tilth in the late ’80s. Marlene worked as an accountant and served on Tilth’s finance committee and the bequest subcommittee. She was known for her many ideas and quick humor.

Eric worked as a civil engineer in the Island County Public Works Department. Eric had the technical knowledge Tilth needed when the Thompson Road campus was obtained. He and Marlene were active growers at the Tilth Farmers’ Market. Like Todd, Eric was very interested that Tilth have a sustained financial base. When he died in February 2007, Marlene arranged for some of their estate to go into the Sustaining Fund. Marlene died in 2016, and a pair of walnut trees were planted in their memory on the rise above the market area.

We invite you to set aside something for Tilth in your estate plan to further develop and promote our Sustaining Fund. Please let us know so that we can prepare for our future. You can contact treasurer@southwhidbeytilth.org for more information, and send documentation to South Whidbey Tilth, PO Box 252, Langley, Washington 98260. We’d love to work with you to help sustain the future of South Whidbey Tilth together. We are also looking for bequest committee members.
Join, Renew or Donate to Tilth’s Projects

☐ Join South Whidbey Tilth. A single household membership is $25 and $10 for each additional adult household member who wishes to join. One newsletter is emailed or mailed to each household. Please list each member’s name.

Enclose $25 (for one) + ___ (number of additional adult household members who wish to join x $10) = $_________.

Membership renewals are June of each year. If you missed this year’s date, please renew now.

I am interested in volunteering: ☐ event planning, ☐ gardening or landscaping, ☐ other

☐ I/we also want to make a $_______ donation to help with the goals of South Whidbey Tilth, a nonprofit corporation, EIN #91-1456495. ☐ Contact me about estate donations to South Whidbey Tilth’s Sustaining Fund.

☐ Please keep my/our donation anonymous. ☐ I/we authorize publication of my/our name(s) as a donor.

Name___________________________________________________ Email__________________________

Name___________________________________________________ Email__________________________

Name___________________________________________________ Email__________________________

Mailing address __________________________________________ Town________________ Zip________

Phone ___________________ Mobile ______________________ I want to receive: ☐ email updates ☐ newsletter online

Please mail to: South Whidbey Tilth Association, P.O. Box 252, Langley, Washington 98260, or send via PayPal.

Favorite Foods, from page 7

throughout the winter, especially a cold and frosty one. Early in the fall, the sprouts have a strong taste, and after the first heavy frost, they become very mellow.

We harvest Brussels sprouts daily just before cooking them. Our favorite preparation is roasted in the oven (375 degrees) for about 45 minutes after dribbling them with olive oil and salt. They are brown when done and the core of the Brussels sprouts are like caramel. Oh my, so good. They get a bad reputation because people either steam or undercook them.

Collard greens are easy to grow and will provide us our cooked vegetables throughout winter into the spring. This plant is very hardy and seldom (if ever) bothered by pests, at least not at our place. Our favorite way to prepare them is to slice the leaves in two-inch by quarter-inch strips. Using a two-quart pan with a steamer inserted, I cook the greens just until the water boils. In the bowl, I add the juice of a lemon (about two tablespoons), and crushed garlic (two large cloves). The collard leaves have a perfect texture cooked like this. Pam starts them in the garden at the same time as she does the kale.

We grow a few types of winter squashes. Our favorite to roast is the Kuri. This was our first year growing Kuri squash, and we had a bumper crop. One squash gives us four servings. We roast them at 350 degrees and add olive oil and a little salt at the table. As they age in our closet, they get sweeter. Even the skins are edible, so be sure to wash them well.

We also grow pie pumpkins, Long Pie and Pie-Pita. We cook and freeze the pumpkin and use it in place of tomato sauce in tomato-based dishes, as tomatoes don’t agree with Pam. Personally, I prefer pumpkin to tomatoes in most dishes anyway. This year Pam discovered the Pie-Pita pumpkin. It’s a small pumpkin, averaging about 2.5 lbs. The flesh is very good and sweet, but the seeds roasted with a little salt and olive oil are heavenly—no exaggeration. Pie-Pita is a hybrid, so the seeds can’t be saved to plant. We buy the seeds from High Mowing Organic Seeds.
Check the online calendar at southwhidbeytilth.org/calendar for the latest updates.

**JANUARY**

- **5** Farmer's Shadow garden discussion group 6 to 7:30 p.m. education@southwhidbeytilth.org
- **10** Registration opens for the Whidbey Gardening Workshop (to take place online) on March 6, 2021. Schedule of courses available now, see whidbeygardening.org
- **21** Tilth Council business meeting, 6 to 8 p.m. Zoom meeting, president@southwhidbeytilth.org
- **30** Annual Membership Meeting, 1 to 2:30 p.m. Zoom meeting, president@southwhidbeytilth.org

**FEBRUARY**

- **2** Farmer's Shadow garden discussion group 6 to 7:30 p.m. education@southwhidbeytilth.org
- **18** Tilth Council business meeting, 6 to 8 p.m. president@southwhidbeytilth.org
- **18** WSFMA Boot Camp for Farmers Market Managers and Board Members, wafarmersmarkets.org/2021-wsfma-conference
- **23-26** Washington Farmers Market Conference, wafarmersmarkets.org/2021-wsfma-conference