



South Whidbey TILTH

Cultivating community action to build a sustainable, environmentally sound and socially equitable food system

Volume 38, Number 1

Spring 2020

Market Opens May 3 with the Third Annual Nettle Festival

The South Whidbey TILTH Farmers' Market is pushing 50! We'll kick off our 49th market season with a celebration of nettles, starting at 11 a.m. Come shortly after opening and walk with Kaili Plummer-Slate in search of nettles in TILTH's upper meadow. Even if we don't find any late-season nettles, Kaili will

Kaili Plummer-Slate, an expert in natural fibers, is a local basket weaver, naturalist and teacher.

Julie Charette Nunn, Crow's Daughter is a shamanic herbalist and long-time teacher, herbal crafter, organic gardener/farmer, goat herd and successful business owner from Whidbey Island.

talk about nettle identification, basic biology, ecology, how and when to harvest nettles and how to tend your nettle patch sustainably. Later Kaili will demonstrate making cordage from nettle stocks.

Also on the program is herbalist Julie Charette Nunn, who will talk about nettle as a supreme nourisher, and its use in various applications, including healing. She will lead an exploration of the ways of shamanic herbalism; developing intimacy with the plant world, listening to the wisdom of plants, gentle healing and learning to be at home in nature. Julie will demonstrate how to make



herbal preparations with nettle.

And we'll wind the maypole, dancing for a fertile and festive season.

Come sample and celebrate nourishment made from nettles. Watch your email and the South Whidbey TILTH website for the day's schedule at southwhidbeytilth.org.

The Market Needs You

South Whidbey TILTH boasts one of the longest-running farmers' markets in Washington, and each year it depends on TILTH volunteers to make it happen. Last year was a great success, thanks largely to the incredibly hard work by volunteer market manager Kirstin Clauson and a handful of returning volunteers each week.



Two fine women who know how to volunteer

In 2020 the market will continue to be a volunteer effort, and in order to have a successful season, we need more volunteers. Consider the roles you can play in bringing it to fruition. Maybe you have a skill to share and can lead an activity. Every Sunday we need help with the setup (10 a.m.) and breakdown (2:30 p.m.) of tents, tablecloths and signs.

We welcome your ideas about how we can bring together the moving parts of TILTH in order to promote and develop the market, one of the best resources we have for spreading our message and ensuring TILTH's financial sustainability.

Volunteer Opportunity

Please get in touch if you can be involved, whether for one Sunday or the whole season; email market@southwhidbeytilth.org.

The community atmosphere that is so valued at TILTH is a product of all of your work; thank you for the part you play.

President's Message

by Gary Ingram



As your new president, I hope to bring some of my skills in fundraising and management to South Whidbey Tilth. I see my role over the next two years is to promote growth, in both memberships and donations.

In addition to my business skills, I have spent most of life growing plants, both edibles and ornamentals. I spent nearly 20 years as a professional gardener in and around Seattle, working in complex gardens and teaching others this art.

So, what is South Whidbey Tilth? This is the question I asked the Tilth council of trustees. We are in the process of refining our vision.

I know about soil and how to build it. My wife, Pam Nodus, and I have a vegetable garden and orchard in a section of our property that is typical of Whidbey Island: little, if any, top soil. People visiting our gardens are astonished with the results of our 20-year project of building the soil.

Tilth received a grant last year to build a pollinator hedge-row on our campus, on which we will begin construction this spring. I sell real estate and am working with a client that is in the process of relocating to Whidbey. They liked one house but had concerns because of the size of the yard. I told them about our pollinator project, and they got excited about turning most of their land into a native pollinator and beneficial animal sanctuary.

What is a beneficial sanctuary? It's a dedicated wild area of native shrubs and grasses where birds and other beneficial animals live and reproduce. My vegetable garden is surrounded by such plants and, as a result, I have little, if any, damage from pests. During the growing season I hand water daily and am always astonished with the birds in my vegetable gardens, hunting for weed seeds and insects. They work for me.

Why do people scrape the land clear of our native plants, grow grass, and then dump chemicals and water on it and spend hours mowing? I don't get it.

I was traveling through Italy a few years ago on a train, looking out at the suburban homes. I was impressed; all of the people grew edibles in their yards. To me, the ideal suburban yard is a mixture of ornamental and edible plants growing alongside each other.

South Whidbey Tilth is an educational organization. Our campus on Thompson Road is a gem. We are volunteers here to help others on Whidbey Island become better stewards of our land.

Grow organic and eat organic as much as possible is my personal mantra.

Whidbey Celebrates Earth Day 2020

by Prescott

Earth Day was first celebrated 50 years ago, nationwide. I remember performing a puppet show on the shores of Lake Washington at Seward Park on Earth Day 1970. I'd arrived in Washington State the previous summer after graduating from college in Ohio.

Since 2007, a cadre of volunteers on Whidbey Island have been promoting Earth and Ocean Month to spread awareness of environmental stewardship. Goosefoot has provided staff support and several businesses have sponsored it.

This year's activities were to include



a kickoff celebration at the Bayview Hall on Saturday, April 4, but due to the guidance of state and local governments, the kick-off is canceled. To give you an idea of what the month is about, the kick-off was to include a keynote address from Heather Trim, director of Zero Waste Washington, an electric vehicle show outside, plus breakout sessions on a variety of topics, one of which was to be Tilth president Gary Ingram presenting

how he and his wife, Pam Nodus, raise most of their food on their small farm in Greenbank.

The good news is that Goosefoot is putting together a digital festival. Sami Postma, the Events and Education Coordinator at Goosefoot, will add a page to the website with resources, videos, tutorials, and links that folks can use to educate themselves about actions they can take to improve their environmental impact all year long.

If you have ideas of how Tilth can contribute to the digital festival, contact us at education@southwhidbeytilth.org or Prescott at prscot@whidbey.net. Be sure to visit whidbeyearthday.org for updates to activities.

Service Day in the Garry Oak Meadow



As part of Earth and Ocean Month, Tilth is organizing a Garry oak service day on Sunday, April 19, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. An extensive Garry oak savannah was established on Tilth's wild lands above the market 16 years ago to encourage wildlife habit, particularly for the endangered Western bluebird. Now some of the oaks are over 40 feet tall. Native forbs such as Oregon sunshine, yarrow, chocolate lily, camas and more were planted as an understory. It's time to clear out brambles and grasses to allow these wonderful native plants to show themselves.

The event takes place at the South Whidbey Tilth Sustainability Campus, 2812 Thompson Road, Langley, and begins with a talk about the oaks and understory plants and what to look for to identify them. Bring tools if you have them (shovels, wheelbarrows, pruning shears, loppers and wire cutters). There will be refreshments, too. Please contact Prescott at prscot@whidbey.net or 360-682-8642.



New Neighbors at Tilth



The thirteen sunny, south-facing acres adjacent to the Tilth Campus have been gifted into the Agrarian Trust to be stewarded as a land commons in perpetuity for agroecological farming.

According to the Agrarian Trust's founding principles and covenants, this land will undergo ecological restoration, and a competitive application process to find a steward. The winning applicant will farm under structural conditions designed to support farmers and ecological restorative agriculture, share in

ecological stewardship investment and benefit the community.

You can learn more about the Agrarian Trust and their agrarian commons initiative at www.agrariantrust.org. Please help spread the word about the request for stewardship applications.

Fundamental to the success of a commons is the confidence of the wider community. Watch for the announcement of a welcoming ceremony this spring to bring the land into the commons.



AGRARIAN TRUST

Clay Oven Workshop at the Good Cheer Garden

In celebration of Earth Day, Good Cheer is hosting a two-day workshop on April 18 and 19 in the garden at 2812 Grimm Road, Langley. Instructor Eli Adadow will teach the basics of natural building while sculpting sand and clay into a beautiful and functional pizza oven. The bulk of the work will happen on Saturday, with the finishing touches put in place on Sunday, followed by a pizza party. Class starts at 10 a.m. both days. The cost is \$200 per person; scholarships are available. For more information and to sign up visit ancienteartbuilding.com/calendar-of-events.



Carbon Sequestration—What Governments Are Doing

by Judy Kaplan

Those of us interested in healthy soil for a sustainable future can look toward carbon sequestration in soil for the saving grace this provides the world—taking carbon out of the atmosphere to mitigate the worst effects we’ll see as the climate continues to warm. As I researched the places, methods and possibilities of managing carbon in soil, I was encouraged that governments around the planet are contemplating doing more to respond to the increasingly dire effects of climate change.

At the end of this article, which just dips its toe into the available ocean of information about carbon sequestration, I will share two websites not to be missed. I will also share the means by which market forces can be enlisted to move governments toward this healthier future.

Seventy percent of India’s population is employed in agriculture, and almost half of the country’s land is dedicated to crop cultivation. With intensifying effects of climate change (in the form of droughts, floods, and erratic temperatures), the viability of agriculture and the livelihoods of millions of citizens are increasingly at risk.

Soil carbon sequestration is one area just taking off in India with huge potential for growth. Now, years after the Green Revolution (the intensification of crop production using fertilizers, pesticides and “high-yield” varieties), agricultural changes have caused soil degradation and created a major problem for crop yields in India. Efforts to promote agroforestry programs, soil carbon sequestration and land-use practices such as low-till farming, intercropping and the removal of synthetic fertilizers and chemicals, have the potential to sequester much more carbon than current land-use practices. Some innovative programs in voluntary carbon offsets are also being explored, which allow farmers to “sell” unused carbon units and reap financial rewards if they adopt low-carbon farming methods.

Previously at climate talks, disagreement focused on whether to prioritize adaptation (helping farmers adapt to climate change), or mitigation (reducing the greenhouse gases produced by the sector). Developed countries, already equipped with successful techniques for ramping up agricultural production, are more interested in mitigation by making existing techniques more climate-friendly. On the other hand,

in developing countries, drought, floods and hurricanes all play havoc with the mostly smallholder-driven agriculture sector. Their priority is to help farmers adapt and create food security.



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In 2017, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bonn, a compromise was reached to allowing two technical bodies to cooperate in identifying solutions that would rein in emissions in agriculture, while making farmers more resilient to whims of the weather.

One solution stands out. Eighty-nine percent of agriculture’s future mitigation potential could lie in capturing carbon on farmland soils: carbon sequestration. Not only does this process suck harmful carbon out of the atmosphere, it makes soils healthier and more fertile for future food production, boosting resilience to climate change.

A new paper published in *Scientific Reports* determines how much carbon sequestration different areas in the world could contribute. Findings show that the world’s farm-

land soils have the technical potential to offset as much carbon as the United States emits, if they are managed better. The analysis focused on croplands, which make up about one-third of agricultural lands globally. The results show that North America has the highest potential for soil carbon storage. So how can American farmers take action?

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Good News for Sustainable Farming

The Sustainable Farms and Fields Bill (SB 5947) passed the Washington State legislature on March 10 and is on its way to the Governor’s desk to be signed into law. The bill establishes a grant program to support farmers and ranchers in adopting practices that sequester carbon or reduce emissions (see the article in the *Fall 2019 Tilth Newsletter*).

South Whidbey Tilth joined other farming and food system organizations in signing a letter of support for this bill and similar legislation to encourage sustainable farming.

The Hidden Half of the Food Cycle

by Janet Richards

Imagine for a moment living in a garden community bursting with nutritious plants, nurtured with clean water and soil, grown in harmony with nature. As lovers of tilth, we know that organic matter is good for soil, and that nitrogen, phosphorus and other nutrients are good for plants. Take another moment to imagine—and this is harder—composting our own waste and returning all those nutrients to our local farms and gardens, increasing tilth by completing the cycle of our own food system. Sounds sustainable.

But our current reality is not like that. We invented indoor plumbing to whisk household wastes out of sight. This solved the problems, often devastating, caused by releasing untreated sewage into waterways, but at the expense of incredible amounts of drinking water. (If we assume everyone has a low-flow toilet, America flushes on the order of 2 billion gallons of drinking water a day.)

Many of us who live rurally have septic systems (about 72% of homes in Island County), so our waste is initially treated in our own backyards. Most septic systems consist of one or two tanks where solid waste settles, becoming sludge. Liquid runs into a drainfield where it slowly trickles into the ground. As water passes through the drainfield and continues down through the soil, pollutants are removed by microbes living in the soil. Any contaminants that



persist after this treatment go into our water table. If we don't want to pollute the groundwater, we must be careful about what we put down the drain. Periodically, the sludge in the septic tank is pumped and sent to a sewage treatment plant. In urban areas, household sewage is sent away to the treatment plants directly. This sludge is the input to biosolids (see the related article Local Biosolids).

If our environment is polluted, so is our food and water, and so is our waste. We use cleaners, medicines, and personal products, perhaps somewhat mislabeled as “hygiene” products, that contain human-made compounds that are of particular concern because they persist in the environment (for example

PFAS, flame retardants, PCBs, phenolic compounds like BPA, and phthalates). Does this remove the possibility of closing the loop and using biosolids in our gardens?

Our waste treatment plants have gone to a lot of trouble and expense to make biosolids safe for the environment. They are 100% pathogen-free. Metals are addressed and reduced, but there are these other contaminants, and we know very little about the risks they pose. Current research shows that the benefits of using biosolids in agriculture (increased soil fertility and carbon sequestration) outweigh the risks.

In 2019, the Washington State legislature signed into law the Pollution Prevention for Our Future Act, which allows the Department of Ecology to regulate these persistent chemicals in some consumer products. It's a start. Hopefully it will lead to more research into cleaner products and better assessment of risks.

Our biosolids are not from an ideal garden community; there are unknowns. But they must go somewhere, so why not in our backyards? Let's put biosolids back in the loop, do what we can to clean up our inputs, and build a food system that is a complete, healthy circle.

Stay tuned for a future article about choosing cleaner household products. Maybe you know of some. Email your thoughts and ideas to the editor at janetri9@outlook.com.

Local Biosolids—A Resource Worth Considering?

by Janet Richards

The initial material for biosolids is what goes down the drain in our homes, including, ahem, what we flush. For most of us, this domestic wastewater goes either into a private septic system or a municipal wastewater system. During wastewater treatment, the solids are separated from the liquids using gravity. These residual solids are called sludge.

Using sludge, class A and B biosolids are created. Understanding these will help us decide how we want to use a

potentially important resource created and available to growers on Whidbey.

Class B Biosolids

Sludge is treated—mostly with microorganisms and heat—to reduce pathogens, then treated and tested to ensure that certain metals are kept to minimum levels set by the EPA. Treatment

Biosolids, from page 5

also includes reducing attractiveness to organisms that can transport pathogens (such as rodents and flies). The result is Class B biosolids, which are nutrient-rich and 95% to 99% pathogen-free. The extensive testing required means that we know more about the quality of biosolids than about other chemical and manure-based fertilizers.

In Washington State, class B biosolids have been used as fertilizer for decades in large-scale agriculture (for example wheat and alfalfa), and in forestry and grasslands to increase soil carbon.

A site permit is needed to use Class B biosolids because grazing and public access are not allowed for a determined number of days. This allows for further composting to remove any remaining pathogens. Applications of biosolids are scheduled and monitored to avoid over-fertilization (globally, over-fertilization is one of the leading causes of water pollution).

Island County produces class B biosolids in its plant in Coupeville from septic sludge received from the whole island. Until 2018, these biosolids were used in a nearby agricultural area, but are now shipped to Blaine at a cost of about \$700,000/year. In 2019, Island County proposed a pilot project to test the feasibility of producing class A biosolids in Coupeville.

Class A Biosolids

Class A biosolids are class B biosolids that have been further composted and tested. As a result, they are 100% pathogen-free and available to the public to use as garden compost.

A Seattle sawdust company (sawdust-supply.com) composts King County class B biosolids with sawdust for a minimum of one year to create GroCo, a class A biosolid compost that is nutrient-rich and weed-free. The general public and many community gardens have been using GroCo since 1976.

Closer to home, Langley produces class A biosolid compost by composting the city's class B biosolids with yard waste. This compost is available free to anyone who will pick it up. For more information, email langleyutilities@whidbey.com.



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.

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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 can expect 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. A newsletter subscription is \$25. 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
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Website: www.southwhidbeytilth.org
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Physical location: 2812 Thompson Road, off State Route 525

Non-Toxic Slug Killer – Too Good to be True?

by Janet Richards

About this time of year, I'm stockpiling my anti-slug weaponry—cases of cheap beer, extra flash-light batteries—but, wait! What about that slug killer that's so safe, it's approved organic? At the store, as I reach for the canister, then waiver, then reach again, a little voice in my head says, Maybe you should Google it first.

So, I did, and went down a rabbit hole (lined with slugs) of information, marketing, sparse scientific studies and contradictions. This article is my attempt to pass on to you the nuggets of information I found interesting.

Sluggo is approved by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) to kill slugs and snails. Other OMRI-approved slug-killers have different names, such as Garden Safe and Escar-Go, but they all contain the same base product owned by Neudorff, a German company.

The product's active ingredient is iron phosphate, which is non-toxic and prevalent in the environment. Because iron phosphate is so benign, during the registration and approval of the product, the EPA waived most of the tests for effects on human and environmental health that are normally required to register a pesticide. I wondered how something so benign can be fatal to animals in our garden. And what might it be doing to the soil microbiota?

As it turns out, Sluggo and related products contain a human-made ingredient called EDTA (ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid). EDTA is a chelating agent that causes the iron phosphate to release its elemental iron easily in the digestive systems of the slugs. It is probable that without EDTA, iron phosphate would be as non-toxic to slugs as it is to anything else.

EDTA as a chelating agent is prohibited by OMRI. Because EDTA is considered an inert ingredient, it is not required to be listed on the label and is not subject to the same testing. It appears that a loophole in the EPA registration process allowed Sluggo to be OMRI-approved, since, I'm guessing, OMRI is only looking at the active ingredient.

Should we be worried about EDTA used as a chelating agent in pesticides? EDTA is used widely both industrially and in our homes, in detergents, in food and cosmetics as a preservative, to remove potentially toxic metals from contaminated soils, and as therapy for people with toxic metal poisoning. EDTA is thought to be minimally toxic to humans, though some studies have cast doubt. A major concern with using EDTA is that it is not biodegradable, especially once it is bound with metal ions, raising concern about the bioaccu-



mulation of heavy metals in the food chain. Studies show that EDTA can be toxic to soil microorganisms and plants, though at higher concentrations than what a home gardener applies. But, because EDTA doesn't biodegrade, it is a major pollutant in discharge water. There is call for more study because EDTA's persistence and prevalence contributes significantly to the chemical balance of our aquatic environment.

My research also led me to Sluggo Plus, which, in addition to the same active ingredient as Sluggo, contains Spinosad. The label says it kills slugs, snails *and* insects, and goes on to mention specifically earwigs, cutworms, sowbugs and pillbugs. I was surprised to learn that Sluggo Plus is also OMRI-approved. Both sowbugs and pillbugs eat mostly decaying organic matter and, in ecological terms, benefit your garden more than they harm it. Earwigs are also mostly beneficial because they feed on many pests such as aphids (including apple aphids), mites, and nematodes, as well as on algae, fungi, and decaying plant material. Cutworms, though they might like your planted seedlings, mainly feed on native weeds. At this point I took a step back and asked myself, how, by using this "organic" product, might I be changing the balance in the little ecosystem of my garden.

So, is Sluggo really non-toxic? Like so many of the human-made compounds we put into the environment, the answer is, we don't really know. I left the canister on the shelf. An interesting follow-on article would be to share our non-chemical slug deterrent methods. What have you tried? How effective was it? Email your thoughts to the editor at janetri9@outlook.com.

Sources for this article are available on request to the editor janetri9@outlook.com.

Carbon, from page 4

Some of the simplest methods involve reducing use of heavy machinery to till land and mulching harvested areas to protect the surface. But most farming is intended to produce something that's harvested from the land. Carbon farming is the opposite; it uses plants to trap CO₂, then strategically uses practices such as reducing tilling, planting longer-rooted crops and incorporating organic materials into the soil to encourage the trapped carbon to move into—and stay in—the soil.

“Currently, many agricultural, horticultural, forestry and garden soils are a net carbon source. That is, these soils are losing more carbon than they are sequestering,” noted Christine Jones, founder of the Australia-based initiative Amazing Carbon. “The potential for reversing the net movement of CO₂ to the atmosphere through improved plant and soil management is immense. Indeed, managing vegetative cover in ways that enhance the capacity of soil to sequester and store large volumes of atmospheric carbon in a stable form offers a practical and almost immediate solution to some of the most challenging issues currently facing humankind.”

Soil's carbon-storing capacity could go even higher if research initiatives by the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (a U.S. government agency that provides research support for innovative energy technologies) and others aimed at improving a crop's capacity to transfer carbon to the soil are successful. Eric Toensmeier, author of *The Carbon Farming Solution*, points out that including trees in the equation dramatically increases the capacity of farmland to store carbon. “Generally, it is practices that incorporate trees that have the most carbon [storage]—often two to ten

times more carbon per hectare, which is a pretty big deal,” Toensmeier said.

Although forests and farmland have drawn the most attention, other kinds of vegetation—grasslands, coastal vegetation, peatlands—also take up and store CO₂, and efforts to enhance their ability to do so could contribute to the carbon storage cause around the world.

As I promised, I want to share two websites I found to be useful and encouraging. One is carbon180.org, which presents many of the efforts to deal with our carbon excess happening around the globe. Another site I highly recommend is congress.gov. Search for “soil sequestration” and you will find the list of many bills before Congress dealing with this issue and where they are in the process of becoming law. Armed with bill numbers, you can choose to affect governmental change by asking your representatives to sponsor or support certain bills.

If, like me, you are particularly interested in climate-change good news, the Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL) meets every second Saturday of the month at 9:45 at the Pacific Rim Institute in Coupeville. This bipartisan group meets to hear the national video call, presenting organizations, professors, scientists and officials working to support a national plan to charge a fee for carbon pollution. The CCL has a plan to reimburse every household for the increased expense the oil and gas industries will pass onto us (The Energy Innovation and Dividend Act - HR 763). You can email me if you want more information at peacefuljudyone@gmail.com.

Sources for this article are available on request to the editor janetri9@outlook.com.

Quantities of Seeds Exchanged

About a hundred gardeners brought and swapped thousands of seeds at the Third Annual Seed Swap on February 8 at the Coupeville Library. Organizer Kathryn O'Brien challenged attenders to plant and save open-pollinated varieties of lettuce, beans and peas for next year's Seed Swap in Clinton.

“We'll start simply,” she said, “these seeds are self-pollinating and easy to dry and preserve.”

She warned that, unlike open-pollinated seeds, seeds from hybrid plants will not be true to what was planted the previous year. She presented an overview about seed saving and offered handouts of various techniques for the home gardener. Kathryn O'Brien is a librarian for the Sno-Isle Libraries and hopes to secure a permanent seed bank in the system.



South Whidbey Tilth distributed 50 seed packets remaining from the Giving Tree ornaments and Old School Market Farm's Jericho romaine lettuce seeds, plus the seeds donated by the Organic Seed Alliance when Katie Miller presented at the Annual Membership Meeting in January.

Tilth was among the cosponsors of the event with Sno-Isle Libraries, the Organic Farm School, Slow Food Whidbey Island and the Whidbey Master Gardeners of Washington State University Extension Service.

Tilth will make the remaining seeds available to the Island's school gardening programs, Good Cheer Food Bank, as well as at the April 4 kickoff to Earth and Ocean Month and the Tilth Farmers' Market. Thanks to Anza Muenchow, Michael Seraphinoff and Prescott for staffing our table display.

The Vole

by Gary Ingram

Washington State has 10 different species of voles. A vole can be about the size of a mouse, but is smaller than a rat. They feed on plants, and live in burrows that they dig. I read that there can be several thousand voles per acre of wild land on Whidbey. I live in a remote and wild area near Greenbank surrounded by hundreds of acres of wild areas, so I've realized that I can't kill them, and why should I?

I'm happy to share my vegetables with our wild creatures but when they take more than 20%, I have to do something. Last year I had a vole problem. They ate nearly all of our beets, leaving none that were not damaged, and ate the top parts of our carrots. They also ate all of our broccoli shoots that we harvest after we remove the main flower head.

Why now? This is our 20th year gardening here and never before have I had a problem with voles. Some say it is because the climate changed and my plants are now higher in water than the native plants during the spring and

summer. Others tell me it is a cycle and the vole population is now peaking. Every day last year when I went into our garden, I would see several voles running around.

First, I set out an OMRI-approved rat bait, but the voles were too smart to eat that. I then set out live box traps. I caught no voles but did catch some birds. Next, I went to rat snap-traps baited with peanut butter. I caught one vole and two birds, so I got rid of the traps and gave up for the year. If we do have that many voles around, the only way to control them is to keep them out.

I'm now doing it the hard way. My vegetable garden is about 100 feet by 50 feet and I have it fenced to keep my chickens and the wild rabbits out. I bought 300 feet of 2-foot high hardware cloth with ¼-inch square holes. I'm trenching a ditch along the fence 10 inches deep and will attach it to my



current fence, rising 14 inches above the ground. I'm doing what the UC Davis Extension service recommends. They said voles will only go a few inches under a fence and that they can't climb.

This next growing season will be the test. I'm hopeful.

Do you have a gardening or animal question you would like to see answered in the next newsletter? Email it to president@southwhidbeytilth.org.

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.

CALENDAR

Due to cancellations and postponements, be sure to check the online calendar at southwhidbeytilth.org/calendar for the latest updates.

APRIL

- 4 Canceled**–Whidbey Earth and Ocean Month kick-off celebration, for activities during the month go to whidbeyearthday.org
- 5** Year of the Doe dairy goat class, 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. contact yearofthedoe@yahoo.com
- 5** Tilth Film Night, *Look and See: Wendell Berry's Kentucky*, Sunday 6 p.m. Since Tilth is practicing social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, we'll be watching from our homes, find the link to the film at southwhidbeytilth.org
- 7** Farmer's Shadow garden discussion group, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Old Bayview School, 5611 Bayview Road, Langley
- 16** Tilth business meeting, 6 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran's annex, Freeland
- 19** Garry Oak work party, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. on the Tilth campus
- 10** Compost tea demonstration with Tom Vincent at the Farmers' Market, Sunday, 12 p.m.
- 17** Farmers' Market with music by Sommer Harris, 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.
- 21** Tilth business meeting, 6 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran's annex, Freeland
- 24** Farmers' Market with music by Danny Ward 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.
- 31** Farmers' Market with music by The RF's 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.

MAY

- 3** Nettle Festival, Tilth Market Opening Day, 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.
- 5** Farmer's Shadow garden discussion group, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Old Bayview School

JUNE

- 3** Farmer's Shadow garden discussion group, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Old Bayview School
- 7** Farmers' Market with music by Sommer Harris, 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.
- 14** Farmers' Market 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.
- 18** Tilth business meeting, 6 p.m. at the Tilth campus
- 21** Farmers' Market 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.
- 28** Farmers' Market 11 a.m. to 2ish p.m.