

Living Energy Farm February - March -April 2016 Newsletter

Upcoming Workshops

Planning a Home Orchard “Book Opening,” VENUE CHANGED
402 W Main St, Louisa, VA 23093, May 12, 6 - 7 PM.

Want to learn how to grow your own home orchard without chemicals? Last fall, Michael McConkey and Alexis Zeigler conducted an orchard planning workshop and produced a 5 hour video tutorial. To purchase the video, you can go to the Edible Landscaping website. We will have a “book opening” where Alexis will talk about the video and answer your fruity questions on May 12.

Field Grafting (AKA low budget grafting workshop)
TWO DATES, TWO LOCATIONS

Field grafting is when you find wild plants (persimmon, wild pear, wild plum, pawpaw) and graft your own domestic plants right onto the top of them. If you can find compatible wild species in the right location, then field grafting is by far the fastest, most effective way to create large, productive fruit trees. There is no transplanting. The root system of the plant you are grafting onto may be years, even decades old. Fantastic growth rates can be achieved. Full-sized fruiting trees can be created in just a few years. Also, sometimes when plants die in your orchard, if the root is still alive, you can graft onto the root. And, sometimes you can convert trees in your orchard to more desirable species (by grafting an edible pear onto an ornamental pear, for instance). These are all good reasons to learn how to graft trees “in the field.” We will be doing two workshops. A brief explanation of the principles of grafting will be presented at the beginning on each workshop. You will be able to watch and ask questions as we graft trees already in the ground. You will not take any trees home with you. Suggested donations is \$25, but no one turned away. Rain does NOT cancel.

First location and date, Sat, May 7, 3 - 6 PM, 912 Woodfolk Drive, Charlottesville VA, 22902

Second location and date, Sat, May 14, 1 - 4 PM, at LEF, 1022 Bibb Store Road, Louisa VA 23093

Living Energy Farm in the News

The Central Virginian Newspaper recently did a lovely article on LEF, focused on the solar features of our project. See <http://www.livingenergyfarm.org/cvarticle.pdf> (Zoom in if you need to. resolution is low to keep the file size small.)

Progress on Earthheart

Thanks to our dedicated intern crew, this winter and spring has seen some significant progress on Earthheart, our off-grid community house. With the rough utilities complete for the solar heating system, solar hot water, and DC electric lighting, we have also hung the sheetrock



Our living room looks more like a room now

on all the ceilings and most of the walls of the house. Many thanks to Brie, Shawn, Gevar, Liv, Will, Elena, Grace, and everyone who has come out on the weekends to smear mud on the walls.

We'll have a work party to install the strawbale perimeter walls in June or July, just after this year's grain harvest, in order to use the freshest straw we can get. Keep your eye out for the announcement, it should be a great party.

Trying out Different Cookers

We do not envision LEF as a technology development center and aim to avoid re-inventing the wheel as much as possible. Still, we are tinkerers (Alexis especially), and cannot help but try to improve on "professional" design from time to time. In some cases this has paid off: our air-based solar heating system, for example, not only works wonderfully for a fraction of the cost of a conventional water-based system, but also serves as an amazing solar dryer. But in a few other cases, carefully engineered commercial products work better.



StoveTec rocket stove

is deliberately (sometimes annoyingly) small, forces the use of small firewood, which along with the firebrick and insulation of the stove, provides a hot, efficient burn with very little smoke. (It still does smoke- never use one of these stoves indoors!) A few sticks is really all we need to cook breakfast- as long as the firewood, and the stove, is kept good and dry.

We also recently purchased a commercial solar oven. Years ago we commissioned a talented woodworking friend of ours to build a community-scale solar oven. The oven he built for us was aesthetically beautiful, but thermally disappointing- it doesn't get hot enough even to bake bread on a sunny day. So we bought ourselves a Sun Cook, a Portuguese made solar oven which is bigger than a Sun Oven (the popular American brand), and we are hoping, better suited for community scale baking. Stay tuned for our consumer report.



A Sun Cook oven.

Take our rocket stoves and solar cookers. We've gone through several generations of homemade rocket stoves before finally buying a rocket stove from StoveTec. StoveTec is the for-profit arm of Aprovecho, a non-profit with the mission to build and distribute improved biomass cook stoves in the developing world. StoveTec markets rocket stoves to western campers. We use ours almost every day. The engineering of the firebox, which



We're building a summer kitchen off the north side of our main kitchen, so our rocket stove and wood-fired canner can be used in a ventilated space out of the rain.

Debbie's Trip to Possibility Alliance

In early April, Debbie and Nika attended a gathering at the Possibility Alliance in northeast Missouri. The gathering brought together about 80 activists and community organizers dedicated to fighting climate change by creating a network of Centers for Liberation: communities and sustainable living centers working for a just, equitable transition away from fossil fuels and towards community resiliency. Represented at the gathering were nine existing centers (including LEF). A few of them are established groups already living without fossil fuels, including the Possibility Alliance; Be the Change in Reno, Nevada; and the Downstream Project in Harrisonburg VA. A few other urban projects focus on community organizing, education and social justice while working towards liberation from fossil fuels, including TILT (Taos Initiative for Life Together) in Taos New Mexico, Casa de Paz in Oakland CA, and Vine and Fig (formerly New Community Project) in Harrisonburg VA. Also represented were Carnival de Resistance, a traveling liberation center that sets up a fossil-fuel-free camp in different city every year, and two new projects in northern California and Vermont, which both have land and are working on establishing fossil-fuel-free infrastructure.

It was exciting and encouraging to tap into this network of dedicated folks who recognize the urgency of the climate crisis and the need to act now to create a just and sustainable future. This network will make all of our work more effective, by linking the experience and skill sets of folks who have been living off the grid for years, like the Possibility Alliance and LEF, with the outreach capabilities of the urban centers, which will make our work more relevant to people who will be most adversely impacted by climate upheavals to come.

When it Rains, It Pours

Speaking of climate upheaval, we can hardly get through a newsletter without talking about the weird weather. After a drought for nearly all of April we're heading into planting season with about ten straight days of rain. Better late than never- spring droughts are the worst. While no extreme weather event can be directly attributed to climate change, we can be confident that the extremes of temperature and moisture that characterize a Virginia spring even in normal conditions, will only get worse as the century progresses. Currently we approaching 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming over pre-industrial levels. Most climate scientists characterize two degrees of warming as manageable. Business as usual fossil fuel consumption has us heading for four degrees of warming by mid-century. The impacts of four degrees of warming include catastrophic sea level rise, declines in food yields, and "heatwaves of magnitudes never experienced before." (This description comes from the radical climate activists at the World Bank.) In the words of climate scientist John Schellhuber, "The difference between two and four degrees is human civilization."



Nika watches the rain out the window of Earthheart

There are two paths to addressing the climate crisis, both equally important. One is stopping the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. The other is to adapt to the changes that are already happening, and will continue to worsen even if we all stopped burning fossil fuels tomorrow. Adaptation means growing our own food, and supporting sustainable local farms, to create a viable alternative to the toxic, extremely fragile corporate food system. It means creating and supporting farms that can weather extremes of temperature and moisture, by emphasizing hardy perennials, building organic matter in the soil, and making use of durable, efficient solar-powered irrigation systems. Adapting to climate change means re-learning resilient low-carbon methods of food preservation like drying and fermenting, moving away from high tech energy-guzzling refrigerators and freezers. It means building and retrofitting dwellings that can stay warm in winter and cool in summer without consuming huge amounts of energy.

At LEF we're trying to make it happen. Help us out if you can.

Links for Media Articles About LEF

LEF on CNN

<http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2015/09/us/communes-american-story/>

Cville weekly in Charlottesville VA

<http://www.c-ville.com/off-grid-model-environmentalism-made-easy/#.VcHobF054yo>

LEF article in the Central Virginian Newspaper

<http://www.livingenergyfarm.org/cvarticle.pdf>

First video on youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppTBO8d6jhY>

Second video on youtube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdSX_TIYkD4

Video on vimeo

<https://vimeo.com/128744981>

Slideshow produced by Alexis a while ago

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x_C3iScoAw

Living Energy Farm is a project to build a demonstration farm, community, and education center in Louisa County that uses no fossil fuels. For more information see our website www.livingenergyfarm.org, or contact us at livingenergyfarm@gmail.com. Donations to the Living Energy Farm Education Fund are tax deductible.