

Organic Land Care *with*

"[To live on this earth we] "have a contract for the soil and the sky.""
-Valerie Langer at the Rally for Ancient Forests, Victoria, 2008-

"The history of every nation is eventually written in the way in which it
cares for its soil"

-Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945) 32nd President of the United States-



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Our Mission:

"To support our communities in their transition to organic practices"

This newsletter is distributed free of charge to all SOUL members. Please feel free to share this publication.

SOUL

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www.organiclandcare.org.

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I hope that this newsletter finds you all well. It is amazing how quickly the time is passing this year. Halloween will soon be upon us and with that the further transition to winter. We have now recovered from a federal election that proved we had a federal election but little else. And many people are reeling due to the changes in the global economy. As well, it is remarkable how much information is coming forward about the changes we need to make to preserve energy, water and our environment.

Discussions about food security seem to be at the forefront of the public's concerns. The movement toward organic practices for the care of our soils and food production are becoming "mainstream" issues. Magazine and newspaper articles are promoting the necessity to care for our environments be it in urban or rural settings. This emerging awareness can no longer be viewed as the purview of people on the fringes. Rather, it is now in conventional media, influencing the general public. One just has to visit any store and look on the shelves to see the organic products available. Perhaps more significantly, though, are the number of municipalities that are considering banning pesticides from residential use. Change is certainly in the air. Because of the confluence of all of these issues, ideas, concerns and knowledge, it appears that SOUL is well situated to be instrumental in this change.

In this issue of the newsletter, I use information gleaned from the September-October 2008 issue of the UTNE Reader and the September 2008 issue of the National Geographic Magazine. From the UTNE Reader, I reference two interesting innovations about using an ancient Amazonian farming method to help make fertile, unproductive lands and using indigenous American bees to pollinate crops. As well, there is a large article in the September 2008 issue of National Geographic about the state of the world's soils.

Therefore, I hope that you find this edition interesting. It is good to know that there are so many like-minded people working together for the betterment of our planet.

Respectfully yours,
David Greig

In the September-October 2008 edition of the UTNE Reader, there were a number of interesting pieces of writing about eco-smart urban design, capitalists becoming the new environmentalists and how the recession could help the environment. Also included in this edition was an article on "Environmental Innovations to Give You Hope" (pages 36-49). Two of these innovations drew my attention. The first, as originally reported in the Boston Globe in April, described a method of using "a type of charcoal produced by heating organic waste (crop residues, manure, even peanut shells) without oxygen, a chemical process known as pyrolysis" (page 44). Mixing this charcoal (biochar) with soil enhances the soils capacity to hold water and nutrients, permits more air to reach the crop roots and "encourages microbial growth." It is speculated that using biochar can help to make the world's unproductive lands fertile. An interesting aspect to this story is that this ancient Amazonian farming method may help us in our "modern" times. [So much for progress where little value and understanding is given to past knowledge. - Editor's comment.]

Another summary piece called "Return of the Bees" talks about bee species native to the United States and how they can help pollinate food crops. Using information from the May-June 2008 edition of Audubon, it suggests that native bee species such as the long-horned bee, sweat bee and other indigenous bees are not facing the die offs or disappearances like their honeybee relatives. Some farmers in the United States are finding that the native bees are able to pollinate certain crops such as cherry tomatoes, almonds, peppers, and squash just as well as honeybees. These native bees do not require hives or honey to do their work, but have to be encouraged to live and work in a farming or gardening environment. Therefore, it is necessary to build habitats for them to live and to provide a diverse polycultural environment for them to have a year round supply of food. [Diversity is once again seen as a necessity for a healthy growing environment. -Editor's comment]

In a recent edition of the National Geographic Magazine (September 2008) it devotes a large article to soils and the precariousness of this precious resource. The article "Our Good Earth: The Future Rests on the Soil Beneath Our Feet" (pages 80 to 106) was written by Charles C. Mann. Mann uses prose, pictures, a diagram and a map to explain how our species is causing and has caused food shortages by diminishing the quality and quantity of the world's soils. He relates activities of farmers from around the world and how practices, both good and bad, government dictates and local ideas have both helped and hindered soil preservation and soil depletion. Ultimately, Mann's article, although chilling in facts about the state of the world's soils also traces the successes of local peoples in places such as Burkina Faso and Niger, Africa and in Brazil. In reference to Brazil, he refers to research about the charcoal found in "rich Indian earth" from the Amazon and how this soil, "terra preta, had far greater number and variety of microorganisms than typical tropical soils-literally more alive." Unfortunately, I cannot do justice to all of the information he presents in this most fascinating article. Nonetheless, this discourse is very timely and apropos to the work that SOUL is doing today. At the end of the article he quotes David Montgomery, University of Washington, who says that "With eight billion people, we're going to have to start getting interested in soil...We're simply not going to be able to keep treating it like dirt." [This idea has urgency for us today. - Editor's comment]



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