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## FEATURE STORY

### ONE YEAR LATER: HANDMADE GIFTS - IT NOW MAKES EVEN MORE SENSE

A year ago, SOILS dedicated a full issue to handmade and responsible presents for the holiday season - and for the rest of the year.

Back then we took the **Handmade Pledge** and invited others to join us in this initiative. We mentioned there were thousands of excellent reasons to buy handmade presents: The fact that such gifts are made from the heart and come with a story, personality and character, and - most importantly - the fact that they are **environment-friendly**.

This year environment-friendliness has become even more crucial to us in Lebanon. There is no useless idea when it comes to the environment. Every little positive thing we do - no matter how small or insignificant it may seem - is a reason to celebrate. Whenever we plant a tree, compost organic waste, reduce our consumption of energy and other materials, recycle, or even buy handmade gifts, we are contributing to a greater, integrated solution.

So in the spirit of this holiday season, we encourage you again to consider handmade gifts. Here are a few ways you will be making a difference:

- Handmade presents **aren't mass-produced** and shipped halfway around the world, so you will be reducing your carbon footprint
- You are **encouraging artists and artisans**, and *becoming* part of the dream of freedom, financial independence
- Handmade items consume little energy, and are usually **made of natural materials or reused/upcycled/recycled materials**
- Handmade gifts can also be **edible**, like cookies, jams and other foods and beverages (yum)
- Finally, handmade gifts come with **very little packaging** (you can always wrap them in newspapers or reused paper to decorate yourself)

*Happy Holidays!*

From all of us at  
**SOILS**  
Permaculture Association  
Lebanon

The Editorial Team



## BUY HANDMADE

I PLEDGE TO BUY **HANDMADE\*** GIFTS FOR MYSELF AND MY LOVED ONES, AND I HOPE THAT OTHERS DO THE SAME FOR ME

\* handmade also means recycled or natural, local, and - most importantly - with very little packaging



## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### COMPOSTING YOUR ORGANIC WASTE IN THE CITY

With the ongoing garbage crisis, I get a lot of requests from people living in the city who would like to explore ways of dealing with their organic waste. Unlike recyclable materials (glass, plastic, cardboard, etc.) which can be picked by or delivered to some associations or companies, there is no collection service for organic waste in Lebanon for now.

When you have a garden, composting on soil is very easy to start. But when you live in an apartment with no garden, it gets trickier, especially when you require your neighbors' consent.

We recently started a collective compost bin in a garden in Achrafieh (See Page 4) to help residents reduce their organic waste. We will try to explore a series of non-soil based composting in our own homes or with friends, in order to come up with a series of tested and effective DIY suggestions. So, if you wish to join the composting trial please get in touch!

#### URBAN COMPOSTING SOLUTIONS TO CONSIDER-

##### **If your neighbors on the ground floor or next-door happen to have a garden:**

Check if they would accept to install a collective compost bin. To make it easy for them you can suggest to build the bin for them (from heat treated pallet wood, for example), or you can buy one or have one made by a local carpenter and share the cost.

Your neighbors would be more likely to accept the idea if you help raise awareness among them: show them the benefits of composting (reducing waste, creating free natural fertilizer), and assure them that composting is safe and odor-free.

*Note: It's important right from the start to have a list of what can be composted and what can't, and hang it on the bin.*

##### **If there's no garden nearby, then you have 2 options:**

1. If you are 1 or 2 people only, then why not consider setting up a simple vermi-composting system on your balcony? It doesn't take much space - although there are some items that compost worms don't like, such as citrus (See explanation on Page 3).

2. If you are more than 2 people then I'd suggest you consider composting on the roof. If you have access to the roof then you can install a barrel with holes for drainage and aeration, and make sure to protect it from exposure to excessive rain or sun. From time to time you can just rotate it on the floor like a tumbler to mix the contents and aerate them.

Personally, I don't know anyone who tried this on their rooftop, but I will try it myself this month, and post more details in the next issue.

If none of these options seems feasible in your urban environment, then you can collect your food scraps on your balcony in a bucket with a lid and take it to your village house when you visit on weekends, or deliver it to a friend or relative who has a garden somewhere.

In my family of 5, I use a 20-liter bucket which I empty once a week when I go to my village of Saidoun or to my sister's garden in Roumieh, because we live in an apartment in Awkar (but I will be trying myself roof composting in a first stage, then speak to the neighbor who has a garden on the second floor).

Going back to vermi-composting, this might be the most intimate type of composting if you're only a few living in an apartment, I will present a simple system that our friend Sara Moledor had developed after many trials in Lebanon.

*Continued on Page 3*



*Compost bin installed by SOILS at the Antonine Sisters' workshop in Roumieh*



*The compost barrel solution for apartments or rooftops devised by the T.E.R.R.E. Liban NGO*



*My faithful compost bucket I take with me to village every weekend (or empty it in a friend's compost bin)*



## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

*Continued from Page 2*

### HOW TO VERMICOMPOST YOUR KITCHEN SCRAPS

(Prepared by Sara Moledor)

#### Materials needed:

- Plastic fruit and vegetable crates that are abundant in Lebanon.
- The lint material made from 100% post-consumer recycled cloth and textiles. In Lebanon, the material is produced in sheets, rolled like a carpet, and is used in the "moving industry" to protect furniture from being damaged during transport (See photo on the right).

*Note: Instead of this material, you can use cardboard.*

- Shredded paper
- Some soil (optional)
- Local earthworms (the type that live on the surface of the soil, they can be usually found in humid soil under a cardboard or in a shady spot, or on a river bank)

*Note: If you live near a farmer, you can ask him/her for worms. Or you could contact the AUB Nature Conservation Center for more information.*

#### Preparation:

Allow kitchen waste to pre-compost for 1-2 weeks (just store scraps in a bucket and leave them to start fermenting). Avoid putting citrus peels.

#### Building the system:

Line the crate with the lint material or cardboard. Add a layer of either shredded paper or soil on the bottom. Then add the pre-composted waste and cover with a layer of shredded paper or soil. Add worms – the more the better!

#### Location:

Make sure the crate is located somewhere convenient enough for you to deposit daily waste, in an area as shady and cool as possible.

#### Monitoring:

In the beginning, it's a good idea to check on the worms every few days. Gently insert a shovel into the waste and see if the worms are still present and they look healthy. You may need to add some water if you notice that the contents are drying out. If you find that the contents are too wet, put a rock under one end of the crate so that excess water will drain. Don't worry about other bugs you will see in the waste – it's natural.

#### Harvest:

The time required for all the waste to be fully transformed into vermicast depends on how many worms are present. Once you notice that the contents are dark brown and there are no more recognizable pieces of fruits or vegetables, it is time to harvest the vermicast. Push the vermicast to one side of the crate and put pre-composted waste in the other side. Wait a day or two for the worms to migrate to the newer waste and then collect the mostly worm-free vermicast.

#### Application:

Mix small quantities of vermicast into the soil of your potted plants or garden. Vermicast should compose only 10%-20% of the total soil medium. You can also mix a small quantity of vermicast with a large quantity of water and irrigate your plants with "vermicompost tea."

*Shared by Rita Khawand*



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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### COMPOSTING SESSION WITH "COMPOST BALADI"

On **November 21, 2015**, SOILS held an awareness and demonstration session on **composting** for a dozen urban permaculture enthusiasts in Beirut, in collaboration with our friend *Laurent Wakim*, CEO of **Compost Baladi** (<https://www.facebook.com/compostbaladi/?fref=ts>).

We held the session in a garden that our friends *Abir Saksouk* and *Ahmad Khouja* share with *Alexis Baghdadi* from SOILS, in an old house in **Ashrafieh**. Laurent talked about his passion for composting and the proper way to do it with the best results. We then installed the prototype of a **communal compost bin** that Laurent hopes to market in Lebanon through Compost Baladi, the company he is starting. It is his hope that more residential buildings and communities will adopt this solution and help reduce the amount of waste produced in Lebanon.

Abir and Ahmad have plans to rehabilitate the garden to grow a few crops in it and also host communal gatherings. A team from SOILS had conducted a preliminary assessment of the space this summer in preparation for the work ahead.

Installing the compost bin in the garden was the first step in that direction. This is the first initiative intended to bring residents of the neighborhood together and starting a constructive dialog between them around reducing waste and disposing of it properly, sharing space and resources, and building a better quality of life through helping each other out and mobilizing to preserve old neighbourhoods' buildings and other features.

At the time we are publishing this issue of L.E.T.S. Lebanon, we are happy to report that 3 houses in the neighborhood have committed to composting their organic waste, and the first compost harvest will be a promising one. Alexis, who has already been producing compost for the past 3 years, is helping Abir and Ahmad look after the new bin and educate the neighbors on how to dispose of their organic waste. We will keep you posted on future progress.

*Reported by the Editorial Team*



To find out more, visit *Compost Baladi's* page: <https://www.facebook.com/compostbaladi/?fref=ts>

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### SHOOT ONLY WITH A CAMERA: LEBANON'S PIED KINGFISHER

The pied kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) is a relatively small bird found in the Levant and northeastern Africa. It can grow to 17 cm in length and is black and white, with a black crest. Males are distinguished by two black stripes across their chest, whereas females only have one stripe.

This is not a game bird. Despite its simple black and white coloring, the pied kingfisher is considered among the most beautiful birds residing in Lebanon. It may sometimes fly short distances to neighboring countries, in short migrations.

This amphibious bird feeds on fish, frogs and crustaceans, and has a distinctive way of hunting. It hovers over a water body for several seconds without moving its head as it looks for its prey and observes it. It then dives at high speed using an advanced technique to capture its prey in the water.

It can be observed near the seashore or near lakes and rivers. However, it clearly prefers freshwater bodies. It is there that it builds its nest, which consists of a burrow almost 1 meter long, and lines its floor with fish bones.

*Shared by Fouad Itani*

An Arabic version of this article was published on December 2, 2015 on Sayd Magazine's website: <http://www.sayd-magazine.com/?p=3002>



All photos courtesy of Fouad Itani. See more photos on **Birds of Lebanon and the Middle East** <https://www.facebook.com/birdsoflebanon/>

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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

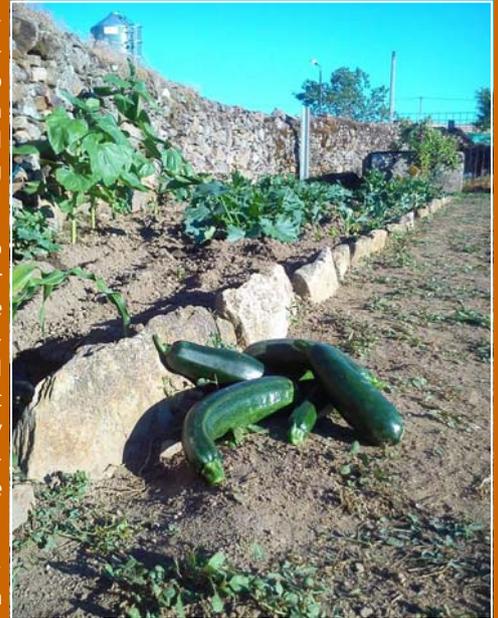
### A SEASON OF EXPERIMENTATION WITH SELF-SUFFICIENCY FROM AGRICULTURE

As the Arabic proverb says: *Fallah meketfi, sultan mekhfe* (a satisfied/content farmer is a hidden sultan). A colleague of mine had said that to a group of farmers with whom we were holding a workshop. They smiled at her and agreed. Then they told us that they would prefer to keep growing crops designed for exportation and that the project we were proposing to them required too much effort and wouldn't bring them money. The project involved valorizing local figs in the north of Morocco, drying them and selling them on the local market, respecting health and quality criteria as well as organic agriculture techniques.

As a project coordinator for rural development projects, I was often challenged in my job to understand the realities of the people I was working with, to be able to put myself in their shoes, so to speak. Farmers can generally be skeptical of any new ideas or techniques and the project technical team has to offer them guarantees about the positive outcome of the activities we were proposing. The economic incentive has to be very appealing, or the farmers will not be interested. The outcomes of the project included not only money, but also environment protection, healthier production techniques, women's participation, conservation of centenary local varieties of trees and crops, and raising awareness about the natural richness and abundance of the region, among others. But it didn't pay as much as exporting some crops, so we couldn't attract a large number of farmers.

After completing this project, I wanted to know what it would be like to really live from agriculture, as a farmer, and **reach self-sufficiency**. I wanted to see if agriculture could provide a person and their family with most of the products they need to live. Was this possible? I was only familiar with scenarios in which farmers sold their monoculture crops and have to be able to buy other things, including vegetables. So I joined a project that was starting in a small village in **Spain** with **200 inhabitants**, most over 70 years old. It was a self-sufficiency project with 8 people from **Spain, Morocco** and **Lebanon** of different ages and from different backgrounds. We rented a big house and each paid €70 a month for rent and expenses. Some villagers welcomed us and gave us land to cultivate in return for a small part of the production. We worked in the olive orchards, bought some chickens for eggs and started to plant crops for the summer. We also contacted a neighboring small town to establish a weekly market for organic produce, as well as some restaurants in an initiative called Km0, similar to the Slow Food Initiative. The project was going well. However, some of us couldn't continue to wait for the money from the future anticipated product sales, so at one point only three of us were left. I could write pages about the many details of this experience. I would like to write about our neighbor, who was at first reluctant to talk to us, but with whom we eventually ended up developing a very close relationship. The first time I entered her garage, it was time for the pig slaughter. In Spain every part of the pig is used and eaten, every single part. I entered the garage and there were 4 or 5 people working with the meat, transforming the different parts into ham, chorizo, salami, bacon and others things, pig meat everywhere, on the floor, on the ceiling. I got out as quickly and politely as I could. One pig provides meat for a family of three for almost one year, giving them the necessary amount of meat their bodies need.

Luckily this garage was later the stage for more pleasant scenes, including the storage and transformation of vegetable production. You could find everything there, all year long, fresh or conserved through different techniques. Our neighbor carefully planned her production so she almost always had a wide variety of vegetables. Of course that means eating the vegetables in the appropriate season, so no fresh cucumbers or tomatoes during the winter. This is a great effort for many people not used to this type of living, including myself. One product worth mentioning is the swiss chard. This vegetable is easy to grow and is suitable for humans and chickens as well as other animals, you can eat the leaves as well as the white part, and it grows all year long (recipe at the end). So for the winter this lady had stored: potatoes, onions, garlic, chickpeas, fava beans, an indigenous bean called *muela*, black-eyed peas, and canned tomatoes. She grew different varieties of cabbage as well as leeks, carrots, escarole, and beetroot. She also made goat cheese. Not to mention a great variety of fruit jams (fig, quince, apple and blackberry), which she had prepared during the fall. With the pig meat, she had covered a great part of her family's needs. And this is just for the winter. Of course the summer is even more complete and diversified.



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## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

*Continued from Page 5*

To go back to our experience, we had a lot of olive oil from our work in the olive orchard, and we had planted many vegetables and fruits that grow in the summer: tomatoes (6 varieties), cucumbers, eggplant, zucchini, potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, radishes, swiss chard, spinach, lettuce, corn, strawberries, watermelon and Spanish melon, as well as different varieties of beans, peas, chickpeas, and muelas. My companions were vegetarians so we didn't need a lot of meat, and we made cheese with the milk our neighbor gave us. We canned some produce following different recipes. We greatly reduced our expenses. Even though we still needed money to buy many things and for leisure activities, the experience of self-sufficiency was satisfying.

The relationship we had with our neighbor taught me many things, aside from planning production all year long. The possibility of **bartering** with the surrounding community gave us peace of mind and satisfaction. Changing one's perception of working only for money, if a person is interested in this, is very rewarding. It allows people to discover many skills they have yet don't use due to the generally closed-minded education and work systems in which we live. Living according to the rhythm of nature and agricultural production allows us to rediscover our internal rhythm, it allows us to hear ourselves breathing.

On a more practical level, we did have some issues to deal with during the process of this project: living together in one house, decisions regarding managing shared economical resources, our expectations from the project. We tried to build a community, and we succeeded on some level. However, it is a very challenging process that requires a lot of will power and organization. The group has to have a common goal and a detailed strategy, as well as honesty and commitment in the relationship with others. One has to work a lot on changing the individualistic way of life in which many of us are raised. We had to encounter the balance between being a part of a group without losing oneself.

As a result of the economic crisis in Spain, awareness increased, especially among young people, concerning their dependence on the dominant economic model, which enslaves them to a certain degree. The power of the banks was revealed as well as the weakness and inability of the Government to manage this power. Many acts of the economy of solidarity were invented. The idea of sharing began from necessity: sharing a house, sharing land for production or sharing a car. Many people began to "go back" to rural areas. There they felt they could be productive for themselves and address many needs without being forced to work in an office for a money-making company. My hope for the future is that sharing will continue to rise, not only out of necessity, but rather due to a will to come together and live our lives in harmony with each other and with nature.

It is important to note that this way of life is easier in European countries, where education and health services are provided by governments. So it makes it easier for people to focus on other things, especially for people with children. (NB: the existing education system may not be the most adequate, in that we could use more classes on how to better prepare to live as adults, which are not offered at school. When was the last time you calculated the derivative of a mathematical function? It could be more useful to know how to build simple houses, how to grow food, how to use renewable energies or how to be healthy physically and spiritually, among others). However, the basics provided by the mainstream systems are still useful, and clearly it is necessary to continue with the preparation for specialization in universities.

Going back to rural areas is not a universal solution for the sustainability problems facing our planet, as there is not one solution to problems in our very diversified world; it could however be a very viable and pleasing option for people who choose to live this way.

I would like to share with you a recipe for the conservation of Swiss chard ribs, if you like vinegar:

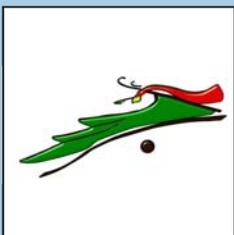
You take only the thick white parts and coat them in batter, then you fry them and you can eat them directly, but if you want to keep them for a few weeks, you can store them in a deep Tupperware in layers, covering each layer with vinegar and garlic, and keep it in the fridge.

*Shared by Habiba Youssef*

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### "LEBANESE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMPETITION"



**DEADLINE:**  
**JANUARY 6, 2015**

Open competition for sustainable development projects in Lebanon. Up to \$10,000 in prizes.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/108781311868/>

#### "TOUT JUSTE AVANT NOEL" EXHIBITION AND FAIR



**DECEMBER 12-13, 2015**

**10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.**

**Taanayel farm and convent - Bekaa**

Exhibition of traditional Bekaa crafts and foods, activities, circus, and more

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1745505955678269/>

#### "DAMJ END OF YEAR OPEN STUDIO" EXHIBITION AND SALE



**DECEMBER 16-19, 2015**

**4:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

**Gemmayzeh, near Artisan du Liban**

Exhibition of wood design and craft items

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1503931723243592/>

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## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:  
To send us your photos, email us on [contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com](mailto:contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com)



Raindrops on a purple flower in Kfarhabou, Danieh - North Lebanon  
Photo by Sally Sawan  
<https://www.facebook.com/SSgreenphotography/?fref=ts>

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## GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED

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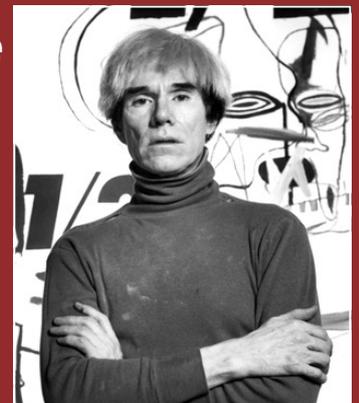
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## A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**“Land really is the best art.”**



**–Andy Warhol (Andrew Warhola) (1928-1987)**

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