



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

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FEATURE STORY

GIVING LIFE AS A GIFT

As we mark our first year anniversary, we are grateful for the true friends who supported and encouraged us. There were many inspiring stories and people to celebrate but we chose to share one particular event that really illustrates the message that L.E.T.S. Lebanon wants to communicate:

Our friend *Elias* recently shared one of the best moments in his life on Facebook when he became a proud father for the first time. The joy of parenthood is something most people can relate to. But beautiful baby *Dylan's* coming into the world brought with it an inspiration of another kind altogether.

The proud mother and father had the idea of presenting close friends and family with a plant as a keepsake commemorating their son's birth. This wasn't just any fancy potted plant either, but a carefully planned choice; there were 4 varieties of local cactuses: "Local cactuses are very pretty but we forget that all too often". The plants were bought from trusted sources and carefully arranged in small pots that reproduced their ideal growing conditions: well drained calcareous soil (none of that unfit water-retaining peat moss mix that some flower shops propose).

Each person who accepted this gift had to satisfy one condition only: To promise to repot the cactus in a larger container and look after it. The choice of cactus plants was well thought-out, as they are sturdy and require little maintenance and watering. They also grow easily because they are local varieties. This would ensure a higher survival rate and help the recipients feel confident about their "green thumb".

The new parents had sought to inspire others but the positive response to this initiative was more than they had expected. A great number of people - even strangers - were touched on a personal level by the power of this symbol and its simplicity: Giving life as a gift.

Now, in a beautiful and unexpected turn of events, the parents found themselves inspired once again to undertake more similar initiatives similar to this one and maybe encourage a movement around them.

We are grateful for this lovely young family for their message of hope. *Dylan's* birth has certainly inspired us to make more positive changes around us, and we are confident that others will join in too.



*Happy birthday Dylan!
And thank you for giving life as a gift*

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LET'S FOCUS

PERMABLITZ: JOIN THE ACTION AT THE PEACE CENTER IN BKARZLA - AKKAR !

Dear friends, permacultivators, social activists and artists in the SOILS network, it is my privilege to invite you to a day of **applied permaculture** in **Bkarzla - Akkar** around **August 29, 2014**, with the **NGO Relief and Reconciliation**. Together we will help more people experience eco-friendly sustainable practices hands-on.

The lovely village of Bkarzla lies around 20 minutes north of Tripoli into the mountains at an altitude of about 300 meters. Over a year ago, the Relief and Reconciliation NGO has opened a **"Peace Center"** in the village that has hosted education programs for Syrian and Lebanese children, and encounters between members of diverse communities in Akkar and other regions.

The land around the center is home to various trees including nuts, grapefruit, lemon, plum, olive, etc. One of the landowner's relatives also grows some summer vegetables (okra, corn) and winter vegetables (onions, greens) on the land. There is usually enough water from tanks on the roof sourced from a municipal network, although sometimes in the summer this runs out and water is bought and pumped up from a water truck. This being said, the land remains largely neglected and could use some love and care.

Relief and Reconciliation has long expressed an interest in turning the outdoor area of the "Peace Center" into an educational permaculture garden. This is why we are calling for this intervention - or **"permablitz"**. A permablitz is an informal gathering, usually for a day, where people work together on a project that involves permaculture and sustainable living.

PERMABLITZ IN BKARZLA - AUGUST 29: PROGRAM-----

Your time labor will go a long way in helping make this land a serene, beautiful place for the different people who gather there. Here are the suggested permaculture activities for the day:

Hugelkultur bed

This is a wonderful way to build up soil in an organic garden bed that provides different "microclimates" for plants and produces a well-aerated soil that retains moisture and only gets better with time as the buried wood and compost breakdown and allow microorganisms to thrive, not unlike a log in the forest.

Earth furniture

We will use old tires and a cob mixture made of mud reinforced with straw to build benches and/or tables on the land.

Suggest an activity! We can make time for another project that you can suggest and/or lead.

Our preference is August 29 as some volunteers/activists will already be in the region for a summer camp with refugee children, but we could also include Saturday and Sunday August 30-31. Email gshaheen23@gmail.com to find out more

Facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/785460598140899/>

Shared by Greg Shaheen



PERMABLITZ CHECKLIST

- Tools: Shovels, pitchfork, hoes, etc.
- Clothes: Comfortable outdoor or working clothes, swimming suit, towel
- For the hugelkultur:
 - Non-toxic wood of various sizes, compost, green material, straw
- For the earth furniture:
 - Tires, trash, earth, hay, linseed/turpentine, tin/wood/plastic sheet (for cover)

For **food** we will provide snacks and head to one of the amazing restaurants on the river in Bkarzla for a big lunch and swim ☺

Questions or suggestions? Email me at gshaheen23@gmail.com or call 71-970770

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UPCOMING EVENTS

NATURAL BUILDING WORKSHOP



SEPTEMBER 20-30, 2014

Deadline for registration: August 20, 2014

Elpidohori, Argos - Greece

Design and build a multi-functional space with natural/recycled elements

To register: seminars@elpidohori.gr

<http://www.elpidohori.gr/index.php/en/drastririotites/170-activities-2014/september-14/285-19-sept-14-en.html>

"ACCESS CONSCIOUSNESS" THE BARS WORKSHOP



AUGUST 23, 2014

6:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Zalka, Saideh St., Mezher Bldg., 1st Floor

Access consciousness workshop to release limitations in life

To register: Eliane 03-218212

<https://www.facebook.com/events/821679891183645/>

EXHIBITION OF ARTISANAL AND DESIGN ELEMENTS



Until SEPTEMBER 10, 2014

11:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Zawal - Mar Mikhael, Armenia St., Geara Bldg.

exhibition of contemporary and traditional artisanal objects and up-cycled design items

https://www.facebook.com/events/331388077025966/?ref=2&ref_dashboard_filter=upcoming

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

PLANTAIN: YOUR BEST FRIEND IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

It would certainly be ironic if one of the world's most beneficial medicinal herbs turned out to be... **a common weed!** At least, it would change the way we think about "weeds".

Although it is very common, very few people are aware even of the existence of **plantain** (*Plantago major*). I didn't know its English name myself until recently. In Lebanon villagers call it '*lissan al hamal*' (لسان الحمل), which translates as "lamb's tongue". This hardy weed is known to grow in very poor soils on sides of the road. Native Americans called it "White Man's Foot" because they noticed it grew well in places where European settlers had dug up the earth.

Last May during the first **Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC)** course organized by **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon**, our instructor *Klaudia van Gool* took us one afternoon on a plant walk around my village of **Saidoun** (Jezzine caza, South Lebanon). On that walk, we identified no less than 20 edible or medicinal species. But the real star was definitely plantain. The knowledge *Klaudia* shared with us encouraged me to find out more about this amazing "weed" in my spare time.

Once you learn to recognize plantain, you will never miss it. Common plantain has narrow leaves with 3 or 5 distinctive parallel veins and a long narrow stalk with multiple tiny flowers. Each plant can produce up to 20,000 seeds. Once in the ground, the seeds can lay dormant for almost 40 years until the right conditions for germination are met.

Plantain has tons of medicinal benefits. It is a great remedy for mosquito bites and other skin irritations, so it really comes in handy for hikers who suffer from almost any bug bites in summer. The leaves should be crumbled or chewed and applied on the irritated skin to relieve inflammation and swelling. As a beekeeper, I already knew plantain could treat bee stings but I rarely used it since I take all the necessary precautions and I am now immune to bee stings. Still, this could come in handy for friends and visitors when they drop by to get a closer look at my beehives. During our walk, our friend *Joey El Khoury's* leg had swollen and turned red from a bee sting, in half an hour, the plantain had reduced the swelling and redness by half!

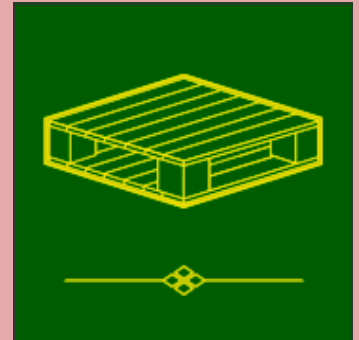
Plantain is excellent for reducing bleeding and joint or muscle pain. In an infusion, it helps renew the intestinal flora and treat gastric troubles including ulcers.

Shared by *Bassam Al Khawand*



GREEN RESOURCES

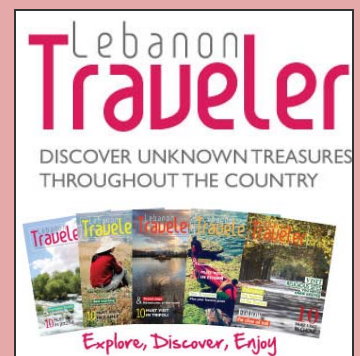
PALLETERIA - FACEBOOK PAGE



Inspiration and ideas for furniture made from recycled wood pallets

<https://www.facebook.com/APalleteria/timeline>

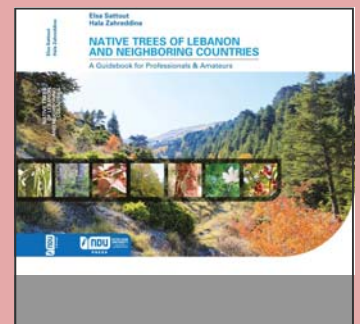
LEBANON TRAVELER - MAGAZINE



Events, news and features about Lebanese natural and historical heritage

<http://www.lebanontraveler.com/en/magazine/Lebanon-Traveler-Home>

NATIVE TREES OF LEBANON AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES - BOOK



Detailed botanical descriptions and conservation statuses of 68 endemic tree species

Available at Antoine Bookstore (Price: \$50)

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

HEALTHY BANANA ICE CREAM IN 2 MINUTES: JUST BANANAS

A few years ago, a work colleague told me about an obscure post on some "new-age" blog that claimed you could make **banana ice cream** using **only bananas!** We both wondered about this and were understandably skeptic. Finally, I got the guts to try it - and it worked!

Here's how it works: Cut ripe bananas (they should be soft but not brown) into small disks or pieces and freeze them in an airtight container for at least 24 hours. Then put the frozen bits into a food processor until you have a white creamy mixture. Voila! Instant ice cream!

***What I learned from early mistakes:**

- Blend only small quantities at a time to make sure you get a homogenous creamy result.
- Do not blend for too long, use the food processor for short bursts of 5-10 seconds maximum
- This dessert is best when fresh, do not refreeze leftovers (the bananas ferment and go sour)

You can enjoy this ice cream with walnuts, strawberries, dark chocolate bits or a few minced mint leaves. It is actually very sweet but you can always add a spoon of honey or syrup on top.

The best thing about this is that I can make it from the bananas that grow in my backyard. And I never have to worry about buying too many bananas; instead of watching them go bad (or getting sick from eating too many to prevent this), I just freeze them for a hot summer day.

Shared by Alexis Baghdadi



From frozen banana bits to ice cream.

Note: The blender in this photo worked ok but I usually get much better results with the long blades of a food processor

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SUMMER HARVEST: PRESERVE RED HOT CHILE PEPPERS TO ENJOY ALL YEAR

This time of year (July-August) marks the harvest season of red hot chili (or chile, or chilli) peppers in Lebanon. Red hot chili peppers (I learned they are actually **tabasco peppers** - *Capsicum frutescens* - and quite common in Lebanon), are some of the food plants that grow well in my small garden in Ashrafieh - Beirut. With simple preparations, I can preserve them to last the whole year as pickles or dry pepper.

I learned how to preserve Tabasco peppers from **Barbara Abdeni Massaad's book, *Mouneh***, and different other online sources. If you don't have your own pepper plants, this might encourage you to start growing them in your garden or on your balcony. Here is a good online guide I found for growing peppers: <http://s14.zetaboards.com/TGTA/topic/6732251/1/>

PICKLED PEPPERS

What you'll need (adjust quantities as necessary):

- Red peppers
- 300 gm sea salt (coarse or ground)
- 2 liters of water
- 1 liter of vinegar
- 1 pan + jars

Wash your red peppers in water on the same day you pick them and remove any leaves or long stems, then allow them to dry on a newspaper or towel indoors.

Bring the sea salt and water to a boil. Allow the salt water to cool to room temperature then add the vinegar; you now have a basic pickling solution you can use for a variety of vegetables.

Place your peppers inside a sterilized jar (try to fill it to the top, shaking the jar and pressing the peppers down gently). Add the pickling solution so as to cover the peppers entirely (the peppers will float to the top, so you can cover them with a slice of lemon to keep them down).

Close your jar tightly then place it in a pan with water. Bring the water to a boil then remove the jar and place it upside down to cool. This will prevent air bubbles from forming inside. When your jar has cooled down, place it in an upright position in a cool dark place away from sunlight. You should wait at least 1 week for your peppers to pickle before opening the jar. You can keep the jar in a cool dry place or refrigerate it for extended periods. Your pickled peppers should last 1 year or more if you used well-sterilized jars and store them carefully.

Tip: You can store excess pickling solution in a sterilized jar in a cool dark place for future pickles

Shared by Alexis Baghdadi



READ MORE

Check out the full article on our website to find out how to preserve red hot chili peppers as dry peppers or powder:

<http://www.soils-permaculture-lebanon.com/tipsrecipesdiy/preserve-red-hot-chile-peppers-all-year-driedpickled>

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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



Sympetrum fonscolombei dragonfly in Beit Chabab (Mount Lebanon)
Photo by Wael Yamine

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GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED

Do you enjoy reading this newsletter?


Send us your feedback and suggestions, share your news, photos, tips or thoughts, or find out more.


Email us at: contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com


Editor in chief: Alexis Baghdadi

L.E.T.S. Lebanon is published by

SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon

 www.soils-permaculture-lebanon.com

 SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon

 +961-71-617988

A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

“Just living is not enough... one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.”



–Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875)

The Butterfly

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