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## FEATURE STORY

### CELEBRATING PERMACULTURE DAY AND THE YEAR OF SOILS IN SAIDOUN - MAY 3

What a day! What a day!

We were truly blessed to celebrate **International Permaculture Day** and the **International Year of Soils** in **Saidoun** this year with all of our friends who could be with us, especially *Amani Dagher, Fadi Kansa, and Ghassan Salman*.

We spent a hectic month putting everything together with the collaboration of the Saidoun municipality but it was worth it to see many of our favorite people from the village and all over Lebanon present together for the occasion, and also meet new friends.

The day was full of fun and activities, but it was also about soils, their benefits and their teachings. The day was filled with demonstrations and workshops.

#### • PERMACULTURE with Daniel Halsey

Daniel is a permaculture instructor, designer and author from Minnesota, USA. We had the pleasure of meeting him in April on his volunteer trip during which he taught at the **American University of Beirut (AUB)** and the **Université Saint-Esprit Kaslik (USEK)** within the Farmer-to-Farmer program. We were lucky enough to host him in Saidoun on his last weekend before he flew back home. On International Permaculture Day, he gave a short introduction to permaculture design and how to draw a base map for one's garden. Daniel was also available to answer questions and chat to curious visitors before and after the workshop.

#### • PLANTS FOR SOIL AND PEOPLE HEALTH with Anabel Gravel Chabot

Our herbalist friend Anabel (Flower Power Herbalism) drew the attention of villagers to her stall who were curious to know more about her raw herbal creams and balms and taste the nettle infusion (nettle is a nutritive herb often only considered as a noxious weed). In the afternoon she took the whole group of Beirut visitors on a 50 min-herb walk in Saidoun, to take a closer look at the medicinal plants that are mainly growing wildly, and which we rarely notice (like plantain, wild oats, and sage). A couple of people didn't hesitate to make a plantain spit poultice on site and apply it on stings or itchy spots.

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• **COMPOST with T.E.R.R.E. Liban**

We had met Antoine Abou Moussa from T.E.R.R.E. Liban last year in a forum about solid waste, and we were happy to collaborate with him on this event. Antoine demonstrated to attendees how to make aerobic compost on the balcony or rooftop, using a big bin with holes drilled in. The bin serves as a tumbler which we can turn on an axis on a stand or simply roll on the ground, in order to aerate the organic waste and speed the composting process. We kept the bin used for demonstration in order to try it ourselves since until now we've been only composting in the garden. Antoine took advantage of the demonstration to raise awareness among the attendees about the solid waste management dilemma in Lebanon and briefly mention alternatives to the current proposed plan by the government. A couple of years ago, Antoine - an environmental consultant - had worked with T.E.R.R.E. Liban on a project called SOS (Save Our Soils) in which he tested several composting methods and ran an awareness campaign about the importance of recycling organic waste.

• **VERMICOMPOST with Sara Moledor**

Sara made sure everybody passing by her table got acquainted with earthworms and understood their importance in recycling organic waste and building up the soil, even those who cannot tolerate to look at them (after all there's a first time for everything). Sara is an environmentalist from the US, who completed her Master's degree in vermicomposting at the AUB and worked on setting up experimental systems there (now becoming a local hub for vermicomposting). We had agreed with Sara to give a go at collecting local worms from our garden to display at the event, and luckily we managed to find quite a few under a piece of cardboard used to mulch the path between garden beds, as well as next to Bassam's chicken coop. Sara conducted a short workshop/demonstration on how to make a simple vermicomposting system using a plastic crate, shredded paper, and fabric bedding. Our friend Amani was there to help with the translation from English to Arabic. At the end Sara distributed bilingual sheets with a summary on vermicomposting.

• **SOIL INSECTS with Wael Yammine**

Wael shared with the visitors his passion for insects and had at his table live insects that he'd captured the day before in Saidoun. Wael talked about soil arthropods and how certain species of insects and their abundance can reveal the history of cultivation on a piece of land and the quality of its soil. He also conducted a brief workshop for adults and children in which he demonstrated how to test the soil using simple methods, and how to inspect insects living in it, in addition to some insects monitoring methods. Wael is studying agricultural engineering at the Lebanese University. His dream is to become a professional entomologist and to publish a book about Lebanon's insects - a universe not much explored yet.

And of course a day at the village is never complete without Bassam Khawand's honey and the homemade specialties of local women, from *mana'ish*, to *mouneh* items, *debs* (carob molasses) cookies, and a vegetarian lunch by *Em Rabih* featuring Saidoun's specialty: Lentil Tabbouleh (check the recipe in the March issue of L.E.T.S. Lebanon). There was also a corner for children to make crafts from recycled material and draw with the soil, animated by our friend and local artist, *Amar Omri*.

We finished the day with a walk around Saidoun, checking a thyme field and some beehives along the way.

*Shared by the Editorial Team*





## LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

### A PROMISING START FOR LEBANON'S FIRST ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP PROGRAM

This April, I pooled together the resources of the **Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (LMTA [www.lebanontrail.org](http://www.lebanontrail.org))** and my environmental consultancy firm (**EcoConsulting [www.ecoconsulting.net](http://www.ecoconsulting.net)**) to initiate a new environmental education program for children that I designed. Together with the help of our teams and friends (Firas Assi, Sara Jaber, Lamya Karkour and Jamal Srouji), as well as the **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon**, we completed the pilot for a 5-day environmental awareness program for children: **The Environmental Championship Program**.

The pilot of this program was held from **April 9 to 13** at the hostel of the **Saint Anthony of Quzhayya (Mar Mtanios Kozahaya) monastery** in the **Qadisha valley** (North Lebanon), and the last days and wrap-up session took place in Casa Batroun. We brought together **12 children** aged between 10 and 12 years old, coming from different ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds for this joint environmental and sustainable living experience.

Each day of the program was dedicated to an environmental theme. The curriculum was based on the experiential learning approach with hands-on educational, fun, and creative activities designed to teach the children how everything in our ecosystem is linked, and how our actions have an impact on nature - and ultimately on our own lives.

We believe that once children have a clear understanding of our environment's resources, the state of our planet and our own life cycle within it, they will be more inclined to work for the betterment of the environment. Although some schools have incorporated environmental modules in their curriculum, they do not take an integrated approach to understanding our ecosystem. Environmental topics are taught separately or limited to some activities when they should in fact be part of our way of life.

#### • DAY 1: NATURE AND OUR ECOSYSTEM

We enjoyed a day on part of the Lebanon Mountain Trail in the Qadisha valley, with a short hike to observe and appreciate nature. The day included the Web of Life game to visualize how everything in nature is interconnected and linked to us, as well as movies about nature conservation (*The Man Who Planted Trees*, Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*).

#### • DAY 2: WATER

We joined up the LMT hikers for a short stretch around a water spring. LMT guide *Christian Akhrass* talked to us about fresh water as a vital resource and the effects of visible and invisible pollution, and LMT guide *Joseph Lteif* explained to the kids the importance of responsible and sustainable bird hunting. The children took part in different activities and visualizations to increase their awareness when it comes to this vital element and how we can preserve it.

#### • DAY 3: LITTERING AND WASTE

We buffed up our knowledge of the 3 R's and also hosted *Rita Khawand* and *Alexis Baghdadi* from SOILS for a fun and creative recycled crafts workshop.

#### • DAY 4: ENERGY, NATURAL RESOURCES AND OUR HOMES

We visited my retro-fitted home in Batroun, which we have tried to make as eco-friendly as possible. This gave us the chance to talk about energy conservation and eco-friendly materials. After a nice lunch by the sea, we walked around the town and observed how much littering is affecting our streets, then we visited a landfill to visualize the enormous quantity of waste that we generate; the children were very shocked to see the mountains of garbage...

#### • DAY 5: SEA AND FOOD

We met the fishermen of Batroun and talked about marine life and why some fish, sea stars, and sea urchins have pretty much disappeared from our sea. We also visited a farmer and discussed how extensive work, time, efforts, and water it takes to grow potatoes and vegetables. The children picked vegetables from the farmer's garden, we bought some fish from the local fish shop, then we cooked lunch all together under the supervision of our cook Tamar Hadechian. After a final wrap-up, we graduated the first batch of Environmental Champions from the program!

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Over the next 5-7 months, each child who took part in the program has the task to implement an eco-project in his/her school or community, with the help of a mentor with the hope of influencing others around them and becoming stewards of our planet.

**There will be 2 to 3 more editions of the program this year (2 in summer, and potentially 1 in the fall/winter)**

**If you would like to help out or enroll your child, please contact me: [maya@ecoconsulting.net](mailto:maya@ecoconsulting.net)**

*Shared by Maya Karkour*



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## TRY THIS NATURAL BUG REPELLENT - THAT ACTUALLY WORKS!

Something was eating up the rose bush on our balcony. There were hundreds of tiny green insects clustered around the leaves and stems (later, a friend told me they were called rose aphids - *Macrosiphum rosae*). Because this was a balcony, there were no ladybugs or beneficial insects to control the aphid population. Still, I didn't want to use any chemicals so I looked up recipes for natural repellents. Here's the one we tried - and it worked really well!

### INGREDIENTS

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1 chopped garlic head | 1 pinch of cayenne (or red chilli) pepper                     |
| 1 cinnamon stick      | 1 pinch of natural soap (traditional olive soap, for example) |
| 1 tsp olive oil       | water (enough to fill a small bottle or sprayer)              |
| 1 pinch of oregano    |   |

### INSTRUCTIONS

Add the garlic, pepper, and oregano to the water bring the mixture to a boil. Steep and allow to cool, then add the olive oil and soap. Strain the mixture and pour it in a sprayer. Shake well then spray the affected leaves generously, especially after the rain. Keep the remaining mixture out of the sunlight and spray again if necessary throughout the week.

*Shared by Mirella Salame (Let's Plant Some Hope)*



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## LET'S FOCUS

### PLANT SUNFLOWERS FOR HEALTHIER AIR

When we look at everything around us that pollutes or threatens our environment, we realize that we need as many positive initiatives as possible. Anything we do, no matter how small, is a step in the right direction. This was the reasoning that led my brother Mohammad and me to create the **O2Engine**.

We needed something that could be fun, simple and engaging enough to become a trend, but also educational and, most importantly useful. So, after long hours of brainstorming and discussion, we finally came up with what we believed was a winning concept:

If we could **create more oxygen, naturally, and while having fun**, we would contribute to improving the air we breathe, and raise awareness about air quality.

The natural way to create oxygen, of course, is **growing plants**. We chose to encourage planting **sunflowers** because they are among the easiest plants to recognize and their seeds are very easy to find. They are relatively easy to grow, whether in your garden or in your home or office. So you get a plant that looks good - and also provides you with tasty seeds you can eat (and regrow).

But most importantly, sunflowers are among the top oxygen-producing plants (sprouts), which makes them "O<sub>2</sub> engines".

To get people engaged, we designed and created the O2Engine website <http://o2engine.com> where people can log in and post photos of the sunflowers they planted in their garden, school, home, or office. Users enter the location of their plants on a map and update their description every week or every 2 weeks. Based on the number of leaves on their plants, **an integrated engine calculates the amount of oxygen each plant produces, and the total oxygen produced by all registered plants**.

This is a fun and free tool for people of any age to use, and it allows them to measure their direct impact on the environment.

For now, we are working on getting more people on board. In the near future, we hope to collaborate with NGOs and educational institutions to help increase awareness further and encourage more initiatives of this kind.

The team behind the website consists of myself and my brother. We are asking our friends and fans for their feedback on the website, and we are open to any ideas that would help increase its value. Based on some suggestions, we plan on adding a page containing scientific info on sunflowers.

If you have any ideas or comments to share, please email me: [hisham@o2engine.com](mailto:hisham@o2engine.com)

Shared by Hisham Natour



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### SECOND HAND SHOP LAUNCH



**STARTING MAY 16, 2015**  
**2:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.**

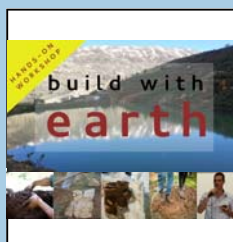
Daily buying and selling of second hand items.  
Live music at 8:00 p.m.

**Back Door pub, Mar Mikhael, Beirut**

For details: 03-871589

<https://www.facebook.com/events/707076129398546/>

### "BUILD WITH EARTH" COBB BUILDING WORKSHOP



**JUNE 13-21, 2015**

2-week workshop about building a natural earth home with architect Nikolay Marinov. \$250 per person

**Dar Mir community, Qaa Er Rim - Bekaa**

<https://www.facebook.com/events/410609999118217/>

### "INTRODUCTION TO BEEKEEPING" WORKSHOP



**JUNE 14, 2015**  
**10:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.**

Theoretical and practical full-day course on the importance of bees and natural beekeeping.

**Saidoun, Jezzine (South Lebanon)**

<https://www.facebook.com/events/371715736356349/>

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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)



*My grandma and her sister reminiscing near the traditional stone house of their childhood, Zgharta, North Lebanon*

Photo by Michel Sawan Dunoyer

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Michel-Sawans-Photography>

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## A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**“Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help. Gardening is an instrument of grace.”**



**–May Sarton (Eleanore Marie Sarton) - 1912-1995  
Grace**

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