



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

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EDITORIAL

POSITIVE CHANGE BEGINS WITH A SEED (BALL)

One of the many things we learned in the two and a half years since we launched **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** is that people *want* to help bring about positive change. Their hearts are in the right place, and that is a major encouragement.

It can also be a challenge, however. It is one thing to talk to the like-minded and engaged individuals we have met in the course of our adventure. But in a country of broken promises and failed developments due to the mismanagement of funds and human resources, the overwhelming majority of people have grown disillusioned and are hungry for a chance to witness or be part of something concrete before they take the leap of faith.

The good news is that it doesn't take much to convince someone to start working for change, no matter how small. More often than not, the simple act of putting a gardening tool or some soil in their hand is all it takes to push them in the right direction. We have been privileged to see this time and time again, over the course of two **Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) courses** we organized in Saidoun and - on a much smaller level - during compost or seed ball workshops we held in and outside Beirut.

In March, we witnessed this transformation firsthand again at the **Damme Cooperative** in Beirut. We had scheduled an info session for the upcoming PDC in the space. After the session, **Rita Khawand** conducted a seed ball workshop as part of the **Guerrilla Gardening** project our friends from the **Art Hake Initiative** have been preparing for.

The story behind seed balls and the figure most associated with them, *Masanobu Fukuoka*, is in itself an inspiring tale for many. The fact that children on Fukuoka's farm were the most assiduous artisans of these small balls is also significant, and it reveals a glimpse into how we as adults now relate to them.

Making seedballs is a simple enough act that almost anyone can do. And herein lies their attraction. Add to this the fact that grown men and women are actually playing with mud while making them, and you have a recipe for engagement.

Mix clay soil, compost and seeds, add water, shape small clumps into firm mud balls, and voila!

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There is already a sense of satisfaction in looking at neat little seed balls that you have made and let out to dry in the shade. But they tell only half the story.

We made our seed balls at Damme Cooperative on March 12, so there was still a chance they might dry in time to be scattered in parts of the city and catch the season's last rains. If not, then there is ample time until autumn.

Because that is the real excitement of seed balls; seeing which seeds nature will select to grow and nurture in its soil, leaving a mark - no matter how ephemeral - on the city, a testimonial to our passage here that we can watch grow, add a note of beauty to our environment, then make seeds of its own and start a whole new cycle.

And that's just it. Seed balls carry more than just future plants in them; they carry the seeds of a journey of reconnection with nature, a journey towards pursuing and initiating change.

In conclusion, we are reminded of the words of Henry David Thoreau:

"Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

Shared by the Editorial Team



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LET'S FOCUS

SOILS AT THE 1ST MEDITERRANEAN MEETING FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

From February 29 to March 2, 2016 I represented SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon at the first Mediterranean meeting for **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** in **Marseilles** (South France) upon an invitation from [URGENCI](#). The meeting gathered representatives from **12 different countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Croatia, France and Spain)** working on issues related to the direct relationship between farmers and consumers, agro-ecology, food sovereignty, etc., each in their relative context.

I didn't know ahead of time who the participants would be, so I was surprised and very glad to meet people I had heard of or read about, like *Saad Dagher* from the [Arab Agronomist Association](#) (Palestine), or *Ahmed Galal* from the [Nawaya](#) Association in Egypt, and *Jenny Gkiougki*, a permaculture activist from Greece whom I knew from Facebook.

The aim of the meeting was to establish a network of individuals and associations in the Mediterranean involved in CSA, a way for consumers to buy local, seasonal produce from farmers in their community. The idea of the network was conceived by URGENCI during the [MEDCOP21](#), as a practical solution that can contribute to mitigating climate change because it encourages people to source their food directly from farms within a short distance and cut down on CO₂ emissions related to transporting food from long distances, in addition to encouraging more environment-friendly farming practices. This meeting was funded by FAO and organized in collaboration with **Terre et Humanisme**.

On the first day we visited the organic farm of *Jerome Laplane* in Roquevaire. Jerome grows legumes and keeps chickens on 6 hectares, delivering over 100 weekly baskets to pre-subscribed consumers through an **AMAP (a group of consumers who enter a contract with a farmer)**, which constitute around 60% of his sales. Jerome also sells on markets and on his farm, but the AMAP system carries more advantages, since subscribers pay in advance. Procuring weekly baskets to the same customers means he has to diversify his production, growing around 60-70 different species and up to 12 different varieties, which is a complex process. His son started his own AMAP some years ago, targeted at younger people - mostly university students. The baskets are kept small and affordable, and help young people eat healthy. What struck me most about Jerome was his enthusiasm to share his knowledge with anyone and everyone. He hosts interns and helps young farmers with advice and guidance. We had lunch from his farm fresh produce, then tasted his experimental ice cream made from... beets!

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Jerome showing us around in his farm



Direct sales at the farm

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Afterwards we drove for a few minutes to visit the garden of a young couple who had started gardening 2 years ago with the help of Jerome, on a land offered by the mayor. They manage 1 hectare of annual legumes and deliver around 60 weekly baskets. In the evening we went back to Marseilles and gathered at the Equitable Cafe where an actual AMAP weekly basket collection was about to take place. We witnessed one subscriber setting the tables and helping the farmer bring in his boxes.

I had heard of AMAP when living in France back in 2008 but I had never understood before this meeting how it actually works. AMAP (Association pour le Maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne) is a direct relationship between a group of consumers and a nearby farmer, who enter a contract - usually for two growing seasons (6 months each) - after they agree on the type and variety of the crops, the price of the basket, the collection point, etc., and assign the coordination to a volunteer committee (renewed each season). The consumers pay for weekly food baskets for a whole season in advance and accept whatever crops they receive in the basket. This allows the farmer a decent and secure income, and if a crop fails due to unexpected weather conditions he won't carry the loss burden by himself, as consumers share with him the risk and accept smaller baskets - this works especially well when there's a clear and honest communication from the farmer. In return, farmers abide by environment-friendly agricultural practices (most of them are certified organic) and share information about their work. Consumers are invited to participate in the work of the farm from time to time, and they help on collection days (which doesn't entitle them to a discount).

On the second and third day, we were able to exchange and know more about the different forms of CSA in each of the participating countries. The representative from Spain for example is an employee - not a volunteer - hired by a group of consumers who decided they would like to have a paid coordinator do the job, so they pay an extra monthly subscription that funds his salary. In Palestine, Saad (an agriculture engineer and trainer on agro-ecology) is involved in a recent group of consumers who pre-pay their baskets. He volunteers to visit the farmer if there's a problem with production to assess the situation. If the damage is due to reasons out of the farmer's control, the cost of the loss will be divided between him and the consumers. If the damage is due to the farmer's neglect, he will bear the consequences alone. This sounds fair to the farmer and consumer. In Lebanon, there are different forms of direct relationships between farmers and consumers, namely the famous **Souk El Tayeb** farmers' market, and a few small farms that deliver weekly baskets. However, the only contract-based system I know of is the Healthy Basket, though I'm not sure it is still functioning. Anyway, the point is not to copy a foreign system, but to come up with our own locally relevant system. We concluded the encounter by outlining common priorities that we'll work on for the coming phase.

One of the things that I appreciated about this encounter is how the application of "local partnerships" was done on the different levels of the organization. For example all participants were lodged in the houses of AMAP members, and meals were offered by different local ethical groups or restaurants. Myself and *Insaf* from Tunisia, were generously hosted by *Annette*, a retired doctor and member of an AMAP, who also participated with us in the meetings and activities. Annette delighted us with her stories especially her involvement in the marketing of fair trade coffee sourced from the "rebel" state of Chiapas in Mexico, but that's the subject of another article!

Shared by *Rita Khawand*



AMAP delivery



Saad explaining about CSA in Palestine



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UPCOMING EVENTS

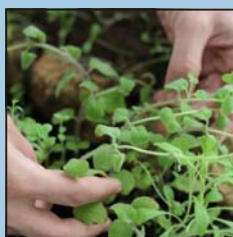
"LA NUIT DES MUSÉES" MUSEUM NIGHT



APRIL 8, 2016
5:00 p.m. - midnight
Different museums
Free entrance to museums across Lebanon.

<https://www.facebook.com/nuitdesmusees2016>

"MY LITTLE GREEN PARADISE" GARDENING WORKSHOP



APRIL 9, 2016
4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Beirut Art Center, Jisr El Wati
Workshop for children to plant their own miniature garden.

For registration: bookshop@beirutartcenter.org or +961 (0)1 397018

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1538347423128333/>

"DISCOVER MONOT-HUVELIN" CAR-FREE DAY



APRIL 10, 2016
10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Monot Street, Beirut
Music, cycling, zumba, performances and food fair.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/611143815710228/>

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

SOILS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETES PHASE 1 OF ITS WASTE SORTING PROJECT IN JEZZINE

In January, **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** started a 3-month pilot project for **solid waste management** in **9 villages** of the **Jezzine** region, targeting **250 households**. The villages chosen for the pilot, in collaboration with the Union of Municipalities of Jezzine, were Homsiyeh, Haitoura, Qaytoule, Maknouniye, Hidab/Qattin, Saidoun, Snaya, Boslaya and Rimat.

We successfully implemented solid waste sorting in each of these villages to reduce the disposal of waste in landfills or - worse - its burning. It also aimed at raising awareness about recycling, upcycling and composting. This pilot was conducted within the framework of the **"Improved Networks, Training and Jobs" (INTAJ) program**, implemented by **Mercy Corps** with funding from the **UK's Department for International Development (DFID)**.

I am proud to say that we reached our objective, and yes, most of the residents (around 70% of the houses) from the 9 villages are actually sorting in their houses and separating recyclables from non-recyclables. In addition, almost 50% of the households are separating organic waste from their garbage and composting it in their backyard or feeding the food scraps to their chickens. In 2 months we were able to keep 3 tons of recyclables out of dumping sites.

In order to achieve these satisfying results, a lot of work went into the preparation, implementation and activities undertaken during these 3 months.

I- PREPARATION PHASE

Meeting with stakeholders: The Union of Municipalities of Jezzine agreed to collaborate as much as needed for the success of the project. We then contacted each municipality president to give them details concerning the project, get their approval to enter the villages during the awareness visits and ask for their support. Their responses were very positive and encouraging. Priests in the villages also agreed to announce the campaign during mass.

Equipment, team and location: The temporary sorting center is located in Saidoun and is equipped with a baler and a scale. The project also created new job opportunities for residents, including a field coordinator, 8 animators (6 of whom were housewives) to conduct awareness visits for the sorting campaign, 1 truck driver to collect the sorted waste from houses, and 3 workers in the sorting center.

Training for animators: The animators took part in a 3-day training period to prepare for the awareness visits: *Paul Abi Rached*, President of **T.E.R.R.E. Liban**, discussed the issue of the waste in Lebanon and explained the importance of sorting; members of the *Nidaa Al Ard* association in Arabsalim demonstrated secondary sorting activities and shared their experience in spreading awareness; finally *Rita Khawand* from SOILS taught the animators how to make compost from kitchen scraps and its importance in amending soils and reducing waste.

II- AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The awareness campaign was the focal point in the success of this project. Our strategy consisted of a) reaching every household, in particular housewives, as they play a key role in the management of their household waste, and b) implementing an efficient and simple sorting system that residents find easy to implement. After local priests announced the campaign in their church, we put up posters in the villages, sent SMS notifications to residents and created a Facebook page **فكر قبل ما تكب جزين** to keep people informed about activities. Then, animators went in groups of 2 to conduct individual visits to each house in the 9 villages for 3 weeks. The purpose of these visits was to explain to people how sorting has to be done:

- 1. Organic waste** is separated in the kitchen to be composted in the garden or fed (food scraps) to chickens
- 2. All types of recyclable waste** are put in one 50 liter bin lined with a plastic fabric bag. This includes: cardboard, clean paper, plastic, plastic bags, glass, metal/cans, electronics.
- 3. Refusable waste (what's left)** is thrown in the municipal bins.

We gave residents flyers illustrating the sorting and composting process, and a reusable bag for the recyclables to facilitate collection. In general, people were positive, cooperative and pleased that sorting will be implemented in their villages.

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فكر قبل ما تكب

المواد القابلة للتدوير

إرشادات

1. تفكّ المواد بالوق وضعها مع الزجاج في كيس منفصل للحطب الكسر
2. نظّف بهاء سائكن الأوعية وأكياس النايون المنسّجة بالطعام أو الأوسال
3. فرغ القناني من السوائل قبل رميها
4. اغزر لفظ الورق والكرتون النظيف
5. نسطح علب الكرتون قبل رميها
6. نغمر زيت القلي في قناني بلاستيك

بلاستيك

- قناني مياه مشروبات غازية.
- ساشيق تنظيف شامبو
- علب البين واللبن
- غاربات زيت نباتي
- الأكواب والصحون والأوعية الجاهزة
- قنين أبيض

نايلون

- أكياس
- نايلون شفّاف للتغليف
- أكياس القسيس والشوكولا
- علب العصير والحليب (تيتراباك)
- أغلفة الأدوية

نحاس وحديد

- عوات المشروبات الغازية
- معطبات
- افران ألومنيوم (سائكا)

ورق وكرتون

- جرائد وصحلات
- افران ودفاتر
- علب كرتون

زجاج

- قناني من كل الأنواع
- مراجلين

الكترونيات

- بطاريات
- أجهزة الكترونية وكهربائية
- لصات من كل الأنواع

يتم جمع النفايات القابلة للتدوير من أمام المنازل كل يوم ابتداءً من تاريخ: _____

Facebook page: فكر قبل ما تكب - جزين

للمزيد عن المعلومات الاتصال بجمعية "زواي" - صيدون (ماندا أو واتساب) على الرقم: 03-108676

SOILS Lebanon
Permaculture Association



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III- COLLECTION AND SECONDARY SORTING OF RECYCLABLES

Collection is an important element in the sorting project; otherwise people will refuse to sort or stop doing so. Therefore, we started collecting recyclables directly a week after conducting the awareness visits. The collection still takes place once a week, whereby a local truck picks up the bag of recyclables from each house and replaces it with another one.

At the end of the collection day, the driver drops the bags at the temporary sorting center in Saidoun for a secondary sorting. Part-time volunteers work 2-3 days per week to segregate waste into types, as required by the recycling factories in order to sell them later:

Plastic materials into 4 categories; Plastic bags into 2 groups (transparent and colored); Metal; Soda cans (Aluminum); Cardboard and Paper; Glass jars and bottles into 2 groups transparent and colored); Electronic waste; Batteries; Lamps; and Wrapping plastic or aluminum (chips bags, chocolate wrapping papers, tetra packs).

Afterwards, cardboard, plastic water bottles and plastic bags are compressed with the baler to minimize their volume and gain space in storage before they are shipped away.

IV- ADDITIONAL AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Reinforcing composting workshops: Since the concerned villages are all small (20-60 households) almost all residents have backyards and can dispose of their organic waste easily and turn the nutrients back to the soil. For this purpose, local animators conducted several visits to some houses and showed residents how to compost their kitchen scraps.

Awareness activities for children: On Saturday March 19, 2016, we organized a day of activities in Saidoun for more than 30 children from the 9 villages. The activities included a visit to the sorting center where the children learned about primary and secondary sorting; composting in the garden; and upcycling materials to make arts and crafts projects (paper baskets, metal birds, plastic piggy banks).

V - ADDED VALUES WORKSHOPS

In the course of the pilot, we organized 4 workshops where participants had the chance to learn about recycling different types of waste materials to increase the value of the outcome and explore its financial viability.

Vermicomposting workshop: This workshop was conducted by a local consultant *Nada Ghanem* who presented her graduation project about the economic benefits of adopting small-scale vermicomposting models in rural communities. We selected 3 participants from 3 different villages to experiment with these systems and installed a small vermicomposting station at each house. After a month, we held follow-up visits to the 3 houses and we are happy to say that the trials were successful.

Recycled crafts workshops: Women who participated in these trainings had the chance to learn new skills using different waste materials.

Crochet from plastic bags: 2 sessions were conducted with the trainers *Trond Einar* and *Robert Khoury* from Dignity Project. Participants learned the steps of doing crochet with soft plastic bags and produced beautiful designs.

Recycled paper crafts: This workshop included 4 sessions given by *Badriye Osta* who was very generous in sharing techniques and information with participants. The women learned how to make artisanal paper, recycled notebooks, jewels and other articles with paper beads and furniture from used cardboard.

Paper basket workshop: This training was given by *Rita Aoun*, a woman from Haitoura who has a small crafts business. She taught participants basket-weaving using newspapers.

VI - SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

Although we reached the end of the pilot project, the sorting and collection operations are maintained in the 9 villages. Over the next 3 months, the Union of Municipalities of Jezzine agreed to pay for the main running costs of the operation, since the revenue from selling recyclables is not enough to cover expenses. In the near future, we hope to be able to extend the awareness campaign and operate a bigger sorting center to cover more villages.

Shared by Amani Dagher



LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

MY EXPERIENCE BUILDING WITH STRAW BALES

My interest in **straw bale construction** developed as part of my research in eco-construction, and my desire to acquire new skills in the hope that I may someday build my own autonomous house with my own hands.

Initially, I had enrolled in the Earthship academy, whose constructions are typically half-buried (except for the south-facing facade) and built with walls of rammed earth inside old tires. I then took part in 2 construction projects using this technique in France and Germany.

So that I now find myself immersed in straw bale construction and its different application techniques: **framing techniques** where straw bales are used as infill instead of plaster or insulation inside strong frame walls made of timber, or **cell under tension techniques** where straw bales inside a smaller timber frame are what actually give the walls their strength.

Straw was originally used in **Nebraska** by early pioneers who built their houses using the raw materials available to them on site. This technique still persists, and consists of laying straw bales in staggered rows that will bear the weight of the roof structure. The roof will compress the bales who will achieve a natural balance and create strong walls. So strong that these houses have stood the test of time and are still around today.

I have just completed a 3-week participatory workshop in the **Montreuil** neighborhood near **Paris**, specifically near the site of the old "**peach trees wall**". In an earlier period, this region produced several million units of peaches despite the cold climate. The trees grew surrounded by white plaster-covered walls that protected them from the wind while storing heat thanks to their ability to reflect sunshine and their high thermal inertia. The railroad network spreading from the south of France brought that micro-climate to an end and reduced this area to fallow lands.

Several associations have set out to revive this area. On one plot, *Diana Tempia* has initiated a project for a central **two-storey passive house** where she and her father plan to live. On the far end of the plot, two similar buildings have been built, and on the remaining side, Diana plans to transform an old structure into an organic bakery where she will produce bread in a clay oven located outside. She will also install two studios on the first floor and an associative space on the ground floor.

The whole project was launched in **October 2015** with work beginning on the foundations, timber structures and roofs. Completing this phase took 4 months, and included the cladding of certain walls with wood, installing wood fiber panels on others, and using Fermacell (gypsum and recycled paper fiber) partitions. For ceilings, cellulose was blown into vapor barriers made of plastic sheets that prevent the infiltration of air and moisture.

Water inlets and electrical conduits were already placed in the foundations and walls. I intervened as a volunteer at this stage for the insertion of straw between the frames. *Eric Handrich* (the former president of the French network for straw construction) was our trainer and foreman, along with his assistants *Hugo* and *Camille*.

We worked on bales of 36 x 46 x 100 cm, weighing 15 kg, which we laid vertically and recut using a crocodile circular saw to avoid having **thermal bridges** along the wood frames (wood, concrete and steel tend to let the cold in if they are not isolated). Structural resistance, fiber length and the humidity levels of bales are crucial issues to ensure a healthy and sustainable construction.

To avoid thermal bridges again, we laid cork panels on window and door frames, as well as on some wood studs. We had to measure each bay and height, to create buffers along the height of each bale, resize them, then use different techniques for doing them up again and putting them back on.

We used a **persuader** (a large wooden mallet), which is an essential tool to position the bales in the structure. Then **straw fitters** (preferably made of plastic) to facilitate the penetration of bales and their fibers between the mounting frames. Finally, we laid the strips, which may be made of metal or plastic, and are screwed together from one end of the straw wall to the other and at different heights, in order to flatten the wall.

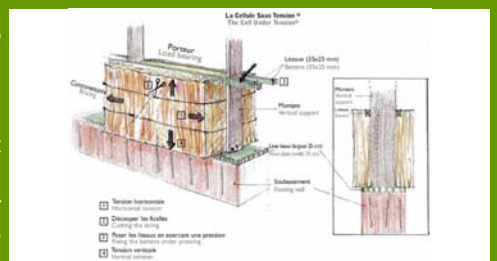
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Nebraska style straw bale building



Load-bearing walls (Barbara Jones technique)



Cell under tension technique



Wooden frame at the Montreuil site



LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

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Then, we apply the **slurry** (a mixture of earth and water) which will constitute the first layer - also called the body layer. It is also the thickest and is made of clay soil, sand and small straw pieces. It must penetrate into the straw fibers and will act as the bonding layer for the next layer. After it dries for a period of **6 months to 1 year** (enough time for the walls to settle and for cracks to be discovered), the finishing plaster will be applied and will cover everything.

Ideally, this coat will be applied starting mid-May, depending on the weather and temperature. I hope to be part of this new experience with the same team of volunteers who participated in the first phase.

Straw is a soft material that is also ecological and requires no processing. It has excellent qualities of insulation and breathability while it is able to regulate humidity levels between the interior and exterior. However, it has a weak biomass in its raw state, and therefore requires the application of earth plasters, lime, or gypsum, in order to increase its thermal inertia (its ability to store solar heat and release it at night). Like other traditional houses made of timber, bamboo, stone, earth, or combinations of those, straw bale houses arose from our ancestors' habits of using locally available materials to build their homes at lower cost, depending on the region they inhabited.

Shared by Philippe Rabaix



Straw, cork and vapor barrier on the ceiling



Laying the strips (interior)



Laying the strips (exterior)

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MEET THE GARDENER'S FRIEND - THE EUROPEAN ROBIN

The **European robin** (*Erithacus rubecula*), known as *Abou El Henn* - أبو الحناء, in Arabic is a small-sized migratory bird of beautiful aspect that visits Lebanon every year during winter.

It weighs in at around 20 grams and its length does not exceed 14 cm. It has a brown upper part and whitish belly, with an orange face and breast lined with grey, and a black bill and legs. The female lays about 5-6 eggs that hatch within two weeks.

The robin has a very sweet voice. It usually feeds on insects, spiders, worms and, during the winter period, wild berries, cereals and fruit. It prefers to stay in places where shrubs are abundant such as public parks or agricultural areas, usually close to a water source, where it spends most of its time and goes looking for food among the vegetation.

This little bird is not afraid of humans. In Europe, gardeners consider it a friend as it accompanies them from morning to sundown, keeping an eye on any gardening activity so it may feed on larvae, worms and insects that might come out of the soil as a result of digging.

The European robin is not a game bird, and hunting it is punishable by law.

Shared by Fouad Itani

An Arabic version of this article was published on January 30, 2016, in Sayd Magazine's website: <http://www.sayd-magazine.com/?p=3164>



See more photos of robins and other birds on **Birds of Lebanon and the Middle East** <https://www.facebook.com/birdsoflebanon/?fref=photo>

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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



Michel Sawan's Photography

Wild orchids in Kfar Habou, North Lebanon
Photo by Michel Sawan

Michel Sawan's Photography <https://www.facebook.com/Michel-Sawans-Photography-683327678390908/>

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GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


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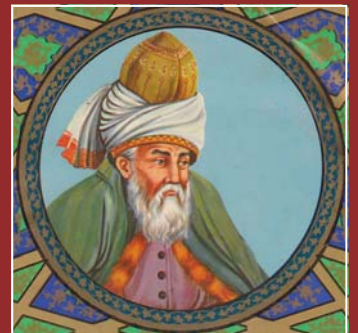
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A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**"Can you find another market like this?
Where with your one rose
you can buy hundreds of
rose gardens:**



**Where
for one seed
you get a whole wilder-
ness?"**

**–Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207-1273)
The Seed Market**

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