

L.E.T.S. Lebanon



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FEATURE STORY

SOILS ASSOCIATION TAKES OFF WITH "DISCOVER PERMACULTURE" DAY

On **January 4, 2014**, **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** was officially introduced to the permaculture public in Lebanon.

The Association held an open-door day at **Mansion** in Zouqag El Blat (Beirut), under the title "**Discover Permaculture**". The **Jardins Sans Frontières** association, based in Canada, was the partner of the event and was actively involved in the organization and presentations.

More than **100 visitors** dropped by to find out more about the local permaculture scene, meet new people and share the positive energy.

Thanks to the help of *Ghassan Maasri* from Mansion, the cooking skills of *Zeinab Charafeddine* and the combined efforts of a team of volunteers, the event went smoothly and successfully. It was a great occasion to swell the national network of "permaculturists".

The day included presentations on different subjects, as well as networking opportunities, tasting sessions and a movie screening (see GREEN RESOURCES on Page 2).

Read the full details of the program on Page 2.



WHAT IS MANSION?

Mansion is an 800 m² villa from the turn of the 20th century with a garden in the heart of Beirut. In addition to hosting permanent residents, it serves as a unique alternative collective space in Beirut that puts studios, offices and exhibition galleries at the disposal of artists and social activists.

To find out more about Mansion, go to <http://mansion-blatt.blogspot.com/>

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A DAY WITH PERMACULTURE

Introduction to Permaculture by Liza Charbel

Liza is an expert at explaining the philosophy of permaculture, relying on real-life examples from her own experiences that include building a community-based food garden in Senegal with *Joey El Khoury*, with whom she founded *Jardins Sans Frontières* (Canada), and *Sari Hawa*. She has developed several workshops and will be co-teaching the Permaculture Design Course (PDC) in Canada this year.

Rooftop Gardens in Application by Sari Hawa

Lat summer, Sari developed a rooftop garden at his parents' house in Lebanon. He presented the many benefits of this project that include cleaner air and the satisfaction of growing one's own food naturally. His garden requires minimum maintenance and has an impressive yield. Sari actively collaborates to the work of *Jardins Sans Frontières* in Canada and always seeks to accumulate more experience around the world.

Beekeeping for Better Natural Growth Cycles with Bassam Khawand

A few years ago, Bassam moved back to his native village of Saidoun (Jezzine) to devote himself to his true passion: bees. His responsibility as head of the Saidoun Agriculture Cooperative, combined with a vast body of knowledge and accumulated research, make him an advocate of natural growing. He is well-positioned to highlight the importance of bees in such systems - not to mention the health benefits of honey.

Slow Fermentation for Nutrient-Dense Bread with Roger Nasr

Roger is a self-taught artisanal baker who is very conscious about food health issues. Through research and experimentation, he has re-learned the baking process that relies on slow fermentation (sourdough starter) and adapted it to guarantee bread that is healthy, nutritious and tasty. He is an inspiration for others to discover slow food and healthy eating habits.

MEET SOILS PERMACULTURE ASSOCIATION LEBANON

Rita Khawand, founding member of SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon, introduced the association's mission. SOILS is a community-based facilitator for teaching and sharing skills and resources related to sustainable and environment-friendly practices. The association is dedicated to applying Permaculture ethics and principles in design systems to provide food, energy and shelter in both rural and urban communities.

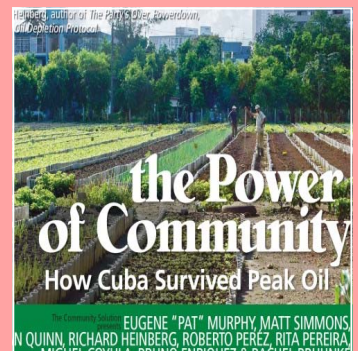
To find out more, visit <https://www.facebook.com/SOILS.PermacultureAssociationLebanon>



Visit SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon on Facebook for the full photo gallery

GREEN RESOURCES

FILM - HOW CUBA SURVIVED PEAK OIL



Cuba's shift from industrial to organic farming and urban gardens. Watch free on:
<http://vimeo.com/8653921>

LIVING ARCHITECTURE CENTER - COURSES



International trainings for building affordable low-impact vernacular houses.
<http://www.livingarchitecturecentre.com/>

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LET'S FOCUS

WORM FARMS FOR URBAN COMPOSTING

WHY FARM WORMS?

If permaculture is to be accepted and practiced widely in Lebanon, it has to (in my mind) be able to work in the cities as well. Making compost from kitchen scraps can be an easy first step for city-dwellers who do not have a garden. For that, they need kitchen scraps and... worms.

Worm farms are an efficient way of reducing waste and producing vermicompost, the castings produced by the worms. When plants in smaller growing areas, such as balconies, are given vermicompost, they become more productive. Vermicompost increases microbial activity in the soil and adds nutrients to it. This makes the plants healthier and able to fight off diseases and harmful insects.

Although I've seen a worm farm in action in the heat of the Dead Sea Valley in Jordan (I'll tell you more about that later) I haven't 'farmed' my own worms yet. To find out the best way of going about it, I've turned to my best friend – the Internet. Hopefully, those who have a worm farm or have experience of worm farming will be able to share their experiences also.

WHICH WORMS TO USE

Worms that live in the earth and worms that live in compost are not one and the same. The major differences seem to be that earthworms generally burrow and are adapted to living in a soil structure, whereas compost worms live in organic matter near the top of a compost pile. Compost worms can eat up to their full weight of organic material per day, and they breed much faster than earthworms. The general consensus seems to be that the Red Wiggler (*Eisenia fetida* or *foetida*) is probably the most efficient and hardy type of compost worms, especially when it comes to heat/cold tolerance.

WORM FARMING BASICS

In order for this not be an epic (and epically boring!) article, I'm only going to focus on the general processes of worm farming and leave the nitty gritty details to the folks at <http://www.sierra-worm-compost.com/> or <http://www.redwormcomposting.com/> and to readers with more hands-on experience, who will hopefully take the discussion forward in upcoming Newsletters or gatherings.

The Worm Bin: Farmed compost worms are kept in a specially designed container with air holes (if it has a lid) and a drainage point (too much liquid may drown the worms or affect humidity and the growth of other organisms). Equally importantly, the drained liquid - worm juice or compost tea - is a fantastic fertilizer in itself (1 part diluted in about 10 parts of water). Worm bins can be a single chamber or a multi-chamber installation. Although it's possible to buy commercially made worm farm structures, it is just as easy to make your own using recycled or locally available materials (plastic, wood, Styrofoam, bricks etc.) You can find more details on building your own worm farm here: <http://earthwiseharmony.com/GARDENS/EH-Home-Made-Worm-Farms-How-to-Build-Your-Own-Worm-Farm.html>. The worm farm at the Permaculture Research Institute site in Jordan is set up in a bathtub, which is kept in a shaded location and covered with a big bedspread. Compost worms don't like light, so if you don't have separate chambers for collecting the worm castings, you can put fresh food scraps in one end and take the cover off the other end. The worms will move to the food and dark to let you scoop out the castings.

Worm bedding: Now you need to lay down a "bedding" of shredded newspapers and leaves (or other dry organic material like grass, hay, coconut husks, etc.), combined with aged compost or aged manure. Some people recommend adding a handful of garden soil, but others prefer using ground up baked eggshells that help the worms' stomachs digest food scraps more effectively. This bedding essentially absorbs excess moisture, improves air flow and lightly covers the food scraps. It is even a source of food for the worms. The bedding should be dampened and kept moist (not too wet). You will need to add fresh bedding every now and then. You need about 15 cm of bedding, although some people suggest up to 30 cm and others no more than 10 cm - it depends on the size of your worm farm and the quantity of worms.

Worm food: Compost worms will eat fruit and vegetable scraps, tea leaves, coffee grounds, almost finished traditional compost, small amounts of paper/cardboard and aged manure, as well as bread (technically they eat the bacteria that form on these food stuffs). Foods to avoid include meat, dairy, fats, onions, garlic and citrus, although some farmers suggest a small amount of citrus is okay. An initial stock of 1,000 worms doesn't need a lot of food (about 1-2 good handfuls a week) and you shouldn't add food until the worms are about to finish the previous batch. The food should be placed in different sections of the container each time (or spread evenly if it is a small container) and lightly covered with bedding (about 2 cm). The smaller the pieces of food, the easier it is for the worms. New bins take up to 2 months to really get going and then the worms will be able to handle greater quantities of food.

There is different (and sometimes contradictory!) information online. Worm farming is, I think, trial and error depending on conditions around you. Sharing what works and what doesn't can help novices like myself. I'm unsure of the legalities of importing worms into Lebanon, so I hope some farmers or permaculturists out there can breed their compost worms to set up more worm farm communities.



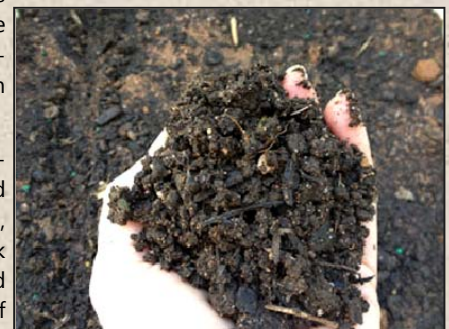
Commercially available worm farm on a balcony
(Source: saucyonion.blogspot.com)



Red Wigglers
(Source: <http://www.priorityzonedbn.co.za/eco-building/worm-farm/>)



Worm bedding
(Source: faulknersranch.blogspot.com)



The end product: worm castings
(Source: outbacklarder.blogspot.com)

Shared by Jodie Healey

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LET'S FOCUS

REDISCOVERING THE FLORA OF SAIDOUN: ONE PERSON'S BOTANICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE SEASONS

As part of my academic assignments in 2008, I had to gather sufficient evidence to allow my native village of Saidoun (Jezzine caza) to be classified as a nature reserve. I spent the whole year identifying all animal and plant species in and around my village. It was both a useful and enjoyable experience, combining scientific research with long hikes. It also made me realize how much this little village's fauna and flora were important, and the diversity of its species and ecosystems.

I was able to identify 415 species of plants, using local and European botanical references. Soil diversity (essentially limestone, but also quartz and sandstone) and altitude variation (from 520 m to 830 m) directly influence the identity and distribution of species across the territory.

TREE DIVERSITY

Saidoun has different types of trees. The Palestine oak (*Quercus calliprinos*) makes up most of the forest cover, followed by the Turkish pine (*Pinus brutia*). Other local species include the carob tree, hawthorn, Palestine pistachio, strawberry tree and others.

Rare species in the area include:

- The Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) known for its spectacular pink flowers in April
- The *Styrax officinalis* with its silvery leafing and white honey flowers
- The bear's plum (*Prunus ursina*) that produces bitter but edible fruits
- The bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) known for its aromatic leaves
- The *Olea europae*, ancestor of the domestic olive tree.

Interestingly, 7 prickly juniper trees (*Juniperus oxycedrus*) grow in Saidoun. These trees are normally found at altitudes of 900 m in sandstone, but here they grow at 640 m in siliceous (quartz) soil between oak trees. This shows that Saidoun has a truly unique climate and ecology. Since rediscovering these trees, we worked on raising awareness among farmers and lumberjacks in the region to preserve this species.

In addition Saidoun holds a small forest of around 90 cedar trees (*Cedrus libani*) that were actually planted by one of the villagers some 30 years ago.

HERBS AND BUSHES

Limestone terrains east of the village are home to thorny bushes with spectacular and fragrant yellow flowers blooming in April-May. They include the Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*) and aspalathos shrub (*Calicotome villosa*). This land is also ideal for the three most common herbs in the area. Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) grows tender leaves in April, which are used to prepare one of the specialties of the village, a dill and lentil salad. Oregano (*Origanum syriacum*) flowers and leaves are eaten raw in salads or dried in the famous man'ouche. Sage (*Salvia triloba*) leaves are distilled or infused to soothe stomach aches, or burned to keep mosquitoes away.

FODDER PLANTS

The village's central zones have deep and fertile soils that annual plants like clover, grasses and flowers prefer. These represent most of Saidoun's flora. They include notably the purple clover (*Trifolium purpureum*), blue anemone (*Anemone cyanea*), cornflower (*Centaurea cyanooides*) and the edible *Tetragonolobus palaestinus*. The crown flower (*Artemisia squamata*) and Jaffa scabious (*Cephalaria joppensis*) provide total ground cover from April to September.

FLOWERS OF INTEREST

Some flowers have very attractive forms or colors. Sometimes a single such flower grows among other abundant species. This is the case for example of the wild hyacinth (*Hyacinthus orientalis*), which is native to the mountains of Lebanon and Syria, and is the ancestor of the cultivated European type. Its blue color is unique and it grows in very few groupings between rocks from May to October. Orchids such as *Orchis punctulata galilea* and *Cephalanthera longifolia* grow to an impressive size (up to 50 cm) and feature patterned petals. *Orchis sancta* has petals in the shape of a "witch's hat". Bulbous plants like the Tassel hyacinth (*Muscari comosum*) and the Sword-lily (*Gladiolus segetum*) grow abundantly in May and come in bright colors.

A visit to the fields of Saidoun in May is sure to reveal many different flowers growing in close proximity to each other. Even someone with no interest or training in botany will be attracted by their abundance, their diversity and colors, and will try to identify them. It is a pleasure to do this, and a gateway to understanding the natural world around us.

Shared by Tony Khawand



Juniperus oxycedrus



Orchis punctulata galilea



Hyacinthus orientalis



Gladiolus segetum



Orchis punctulata galilea

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

ONE YEAR WITH ALL-NATURAL SHAMPOOS

In a few weeks, I'll be celebrating my one-year-without-shampoo anniversary! The experiment went well, and I won't be using commercial shampoos again anytime soon.

Why? Because the only term I understand on a shampoo's ingredients' list is "aqua". I am no chemist or doctor, but I think this is weird. Why do we need so many chemicals to have clean heads? I don't know. Past humans might've had lower hygiene standards than ours, and it's definitely fine to be clean and smell good, but I don't believe that pouring toxic stuff on our scalps helps us get cleaner. There are many other ways of doing that.

My experimentation took me through different phases. After a lifetime of traditional shampoo showers, my head didn't understand what was happening and reacted in ways people would classify as "dirty". I had oily hair, dry hair, dandruff, etc. From what I read, those were the natural reactions of a shampoo-addicted head.

There are many **alternatives to shampoos**. Some are as simple as lemon juice, or cucumber-lemon juice. Others get more complicated, with avocados, coconut oil and essential oils. All of them work in different circumstances and with different hair types, that's why experimentation is necessary for some time. No shampoo at all is also an option; just water! It works just as well! I tried about 10 different shampoo recipes during the past months, and I found those three were the best and simplest:

- A. 1 cucumber + 1 lemon, juiced (or blended) and strained.** (Use more cucumber for dry hair, more lemon for oily hair)
- B. 2 tbsp of baking soda + a little bit of water** (to get a pasty consistency).
- C. 2 tbsp of apple cider vinegar + a few drops of a good-smelling essential oil** (unless you like the smell of apple cider vinegar - Ask my friends what they thought about my apple cider vinegar scent).

*You can try recipe B, followed by recipe C in one session (soda cleans the hair, vinegar conditions it).

You won't have any foam on your head using these recipes, but they work very well!

As Hippocrates said: "Let thy food be thy medicine and thy medicine be thy food." The more I experiment, the more I realize the same ingredients that make good food also make good health products.

Shared by *Sari Hawa*



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TASTY RECIPES WITH STALE BREAD: PANZANELLA, PAN CON TOMATE

Good bread tastes and smells best when it is fresh. Well-made bread from natural ingredients can last 4-5 days, sometimes a week. But when bread goes stale (not rotten), you can still enjoy it with some simple creative tricks.

These recipes have been around forever, but we have slowly forgotten them. The low price and easy availability of store-bought bread has taught us to throw away old bread without remorse.

Older generations knew not to waste bread. When Lebanese "pita" bread grew old, it used to harden - not rot. Our grandparents used it in the **fattoush** salad (without even toasting or frying it). Some made pudding from old loaves with milk and sugar or honey.

Here are 2 simple recipes for stale bread loaves I hope you enjoy as much as I do. You will never throw bread away again.

Panzanella salad (Italy):

This Italian recipe is especially popular in summer, but can be enjoyed at any time. Soak your stale bread in water then squeeze it dry and crumble it in a plate. Add diced tomatoes, onions and olive oil. You can use aromatic oil such as hot chili oil, rosemary oil, thyme oil, etc. if you like. Diced red and yellow peppers also go well with this salad and add crunchiness to it. You can enhance the flavor by using basil. Some people also like to add a minced garlic clove (but not too much, so as not to hide the other flavors).

Pan con tomate (bread with tomatoes) appetizers (Spain):

This is a simple and tasty recipe. All you need is a loaf of stale bread, a tomato and olive oil. Start by toasting bread slices to make them golden and crunchy. Then cut a tomato in half and rub it on the toasted bread. Add olive oil while the bread is still warm and voila! You're done! You can also cut a garlic clove and rub it on the bread.

Shared by *Roger Nasr (Roger the Baker)*



Panzanella



Pan con tomate

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

A TASTE OF FRESH PASTA: SLOW FOOD WITH GOOD FRIENDS

Simply put, Slow Food is the opposite of Fast Food and everything it stands for. So basically Slow Food means taking the time to sit down with good friends or family, relax and enjoy fresh, healthy food made with natural ingredients.

This December, our friend Dina Yazbeck invited us to hold our monthly permaculture encounter at her Fresh Pasta restaurant in Ras Beirut. Dina is a slow food adept who is very conscientious about the ingredients she uses in cooking for herself and her friends and family. She only uses whole wheat or semi-whole wheat flour for her pasta. She makes her own sauces with ingredients that are in season.

As usual, the encounter was a chance to meet new people and grow the permaculture network in Lebanon and across borders. It was also the occasion to enjoy a pot-luck dinner where Dina's homemade pasta was the main course.

Dina has been specializing in fresh pasta for over 20 years. She still runs one of the only businesses that offer fresh pasta on demand. Her customers and their children now order tagliatelle and penne to refrigerate at home or enjoy hot in the intimate family atmosphere of her restaurant.

Forget about 7-minute boiling. Making fresh pasta takes about one hour from mixing eggs and flour to directly cooking them in boiling water. But the wait is well worth it. The taste of fresh pasta doesn't compare to store-bought dry packs. Fresh pasta means you can add more eggs and less water to get more flavor out of your meal.

Unlike dry pasta, fresh pasta barely needs any elaborate seasoning or flavor enhancements; the taste is much richer in itself. Dina recommends a simple recipe to enjoy fresh pasta: simply mix hot fresh pasta in olive oil and minced garlic.

Visit Dina's restaurant in Ras Beirut (turn right at the end of Sadate street, facing the Bees-line cosmetic shop) to sample her pasta, or order by calling her on 961-3-265265.

Shared by Alexis Baghdadi and Dina Yazbeck



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UPCOMING EVENTS

LOGO DESIGN COMPETITION - SOILS PERMACULTURE ASSOCIATION LEBANON

CALLING DESIGNERS AND ARTISTS
COMPETE AND WIN*
SOILS - The first Permaculture
Association in Lebanon
Needs a LOGO
*Cash prize and more
Find out more on the event page:
SOILS logo competition

DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING DESIGNS: JANUARY 15, 2014

For more info, contact alexis.baghdadi@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/events/230931297089534/>

A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

"In nature's economy, the currency is not money - it is life."



—Vandanya Shiva

Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace

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