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FEATURE STORY

FIRST PERMABLITZ ACTION: REFORESTING IN QAA EL-RIM

I have chosen to make my family's land in **Qaa El-Rim** (Bekaa) a permaculture pilot project. My plans include building an earth home using cob, setting up a rainwater harvesting system, planting perennial food forests and caring for a few farm animals.

First, I am dedicating the chunk of land furthest upslope to a new native tree forest. This will allow nutrient flow by gravity into future areas of food forests, and help harvest water into a pond. To make this happen, I called for the first **permablitz** in Lebanon on February 21 and 22. A permablitz is an informal gathering of people coming to carry out actions related to permaculture - preparing an edible garden, setting up a beehive, starting a compost pile, etc. - over a short period of time. A dozen friends and volunteers from our network joined me to plant around 300 saplings of oaks, cedars, pines, laurels, pistachio trees and several supporting species of small trees and shrubs. The seedlings planted on the first day were watered manually, the rest benefited from a good rain the next days.

Protecting the saplings from goats was a major worry. Building a fence was cost-prohibitive so I opted for individual tree protection for now. Those deterrents are pointless without human control, as hungry goats can easily push them over. Luckily, the local shepherds promised they would stop their herds grazing here to let the saplings grow.

The forest will eventually be a **Zone 5** in permaculture design; a wilderness conservation area free of human intervention. I will be accelerating the process by regenerating soil through mulching and planting succession. I started gathering branches pruned by nearby farmers and I will chip them into small bits to use as mulch to protect the soil from the elements, among other benefits. It is a long process but the results will be well worth the time and effort as they will reduce the amount of work on the long run.

By summer, I will plant an annual garden while starting my earth home. Planting trees and picking up trash are continuous tasks from now on. There will be other permablitz actions on my site for those interested in getting their hands dirty and I'll be happy to volunteer/help design if you have a project of your own. I am really looking forward to working with new friends towards a more sustainable world!

Shared by Fouad Yammine



If you'd like to visit the land and offer help or advice, contact:

yamine.fouad@gmail.com

See you soon!

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LET'S FOCUS

MAKING SOAP AT HOME

RECIPE BY BASSAM KHAWAND

This is a recipe I found online and always use. I find it works well all the time. I have recently tried adding honey from my own beehives to my soap but I still need to find the right dosage.

Ingredients:

- 10 kg of olive oil
- 3.5 liters of water
- *Optional: Honey, laurel oil or other aromatic essential oils (lavender, lemon, rosemary, etc.)
- 1.5 kg of caustic soda (sodium hydroxide)
- 250 gm of table salt

Instructions:

1. Add the water to the caustic soda slowly in a plastic bowl and stir with a wooden spoon
WARNING Caustic soda is highly corrosive and can cause serious burns to the skin and blindness if it comes in contact with the eyes. Always wear gloves and goggles when handling it
2. Let the mixture cool for 4 hours
3. Add the salt while mixing constantly
4. Add the olive oil slowly while mixing and turning constantly for around 45 minutes until the mixture becomes thick and cohesive
***You may add laurel oil to the olive oil with a ratio of 1 to 10 before adding it to the mixture**
5. Pour the mixture in a large mold or smaller ones
6. Let the soap dry for 2 weeks, away from sunlight
7. If you used a large mold, cut out bars of 10 cm x 5 cm or weighing approximately 100 grams



RECIPE BY LIZA CHARBEL

Ingredients:

- 1,000 gm of olive oil (Note: 1 liter of oil = 920 gm)
- 340 gm of water
- 124 gm of caustic soda (sodium hydroxide)
- Laurel leaves

Instructions:

1. Dissolve the caustic soda little by little in the water, stirring slowly with a stainless steel spoon
2. Let the mixture cool to 45°C
WARNING Caustic soda can reach a temperature of 90°C very quickly when mixed with water
3. Warm the oil slowly in another container to reach 45°C
4. When both liquids are at the same temperature, mix them until they have a unified "yoghurt" texture (when you move a spoon across it, it should leave a "trace")
5. Put laurel leaves in the bottom of a mold (cake or cupcake mold) then cover with the mixture
6. Cover the mold with cling film stuck to the paste
7. After 24-48 hours, remove the soap - if you used a large mold, you can cut out small bars
8. Let your soap dry for at least 4 weeks on a grill in a well-ventilated area



Finished soap bars. The ones in the front had coffee added to them, the ones in the back had lavender flowers

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UPCOMING EVENTS

SOUK BISIKLET 3AL SOUK LAUNCH OF BIKE DELIVERIES AT SOUK EL TAYEB



MARCH 8, 2014
8:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Souk El Tayeb, Beirut Souks

Come by bike for a chance to win lunch at Tawlet Souk El Tayeb or free deliveries by Deghri Messengers

https://www.facebook.com/events/272853059550771/?ref=2&ref_dashboard_filter=upcoming#

WHOLE EARTH SUMMIT FREE ONLINE CONFERENCE



MARCH 11-13, 2014
Different timings

Free online event.

Registration required to receive conference details

<http://wholeearthsummit.org/>

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CONTEST



DEADLINE:
APRIL 15, 2014

Categories: Environment, Quality of Life, Economic Development

For Lebanese and non-Lebanese applicants

<http://www.associationleba.org/>

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

PERMACULTURE ENCOUNTER: LOW-IMPACT BUILDINGS

In February, we tried to focus our interests and efforts on **natural building and planting**, particularly on environment-friendly buildings and off-grid houses (buildings that rely very little on regular water and electricity networks, or not at all).

We visited 2 sites in North Lebanon where such practices are planned or implemented by friends of ours.

First, *Adib Dada* showed us his 7,000 m² site in **Thoum** (50 km from Beirut) where he installed a weather station and completed a biodiversity study of the area, counting 3 species of oak trees, several laurel and pistachio trees, orchids and a variety of herbs like sage and thyme. He plans to preserve the forest and limit building to an 80 m² weekend house made of natural stone from the site with an inside layer of cork for insulation, and relying on natural ventilation. The water strategy of the project is to be independent from the municipal water without the use of groundwater, therefore he will make use of his land's slope to gather rainwater and collect it in an open reservoir that will create a micro-climate and improve the biodiversity of the site and the area. He also plans to harness solar energy to rely less on the national grid.

The next stop was some 20 km further inland to **Assia**. There, *Dany Chalhoub's* friend Frank had started building an off-grid house based on an original idea. Dany adopted the project and continued working on the house, using the abundant stones in the area, as well as reclaimed materials. The house is insulated and will have floor heating installed eventually. Sewage is filtered and broken down through a 3-level septic tank. For now, Dany uses solar power for all his needs, as well as a wind turbine he devised and built with friends. He is currently working on improving his water collection system and rehabilitating the land by planting trees and regenerating soils.

The most important lessons we learned from these visits can be summarized as such:

-Going off-grid and building naturally require a long and careful study of the location, the building and the land designs, the choice of materials and the way to install them. It is equally important to remain realistic and accept to make compromises when necessary.

-True sustainability and self-sufficiency require a certain degree of self-reliance and the ability to understand the materials and processes in energy-efficient systems so as to rely less on experts that may not be available or see eye-to-eye with a permaculture vision.

Shared by the Editorial team



TAKE ACTION: PERMABLITZ IN ASSIA

A large part of permaculture involves working together on projects and learning from each other's experiences to build a community.

Dany Chalhoub is constantly working on his land over weekends and would welcome the help of any friends not afraid of physical work or getting their hands dirty.

To find out more, contact Dany: chalhoubdany@gmail.com or +961-3-763696

GREEN RESOURCES

FOODTANK - WEBSITE



Solutions and environmentally sustainable ways of alleviating hunger, obesity and poverty

<http://foodtank.com/>

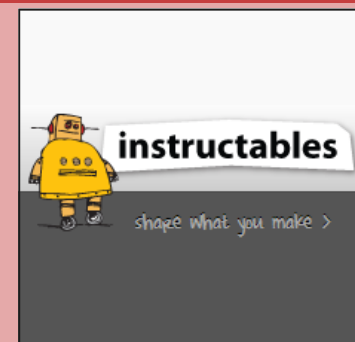
NATURAL HEALTH WARRIORS - WEBSITE



Natural health news and recipes using natural remedies

<http://naturalhealthwarriors.com/230-2/>

INSTRUCTABLES - WEBSITE



Instructions for thousands of Do-It-Yourself projects

<http://www.instructables.com/>

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

I MADE COMPOST ON MY BALCONY - AND SO CAN YOU!

One man in the small German village where I grew up survived stomach cancer after a life-saving operation. However, he had to rely on life-support systems after that and could not leave his home for more than a day or so. This made him an even stauncher environmentalist than he already was, and his property became his universe. He installed solar panels, grey water collection systems and a turbine that we could see all the way from the southern approach of the village to harvest the Western Atlantic winds.

I was fascinated by this eccentric man and enjoyed chatting with him and discovering the new things he'd come up with. I remember a fertilizer he made out of dried grape pits and pulp (the village is surrounded by vineyards). I also remember him using human hair from nearby hairdressers, which he said was excellent for his compost.

Last February, the garbage was piling up in Beirut's streets and I had toyed with the idea of having a compost on my balcony for some time, so I decided to jump into action. I bought a 17.5 litre bucket with lid at the dollar store around the corner, gathered some cardboard, egg cartons, newspaper, a small stash of organic waste and a bag of soil from a construction site across the street which my grocer helped me acquire.

On February 13, I drilled holes in the bucket (bottom and below the rim) and filled it with three layers: shredded egg cartons and newspaper, organic waste and 2 scoops of soil. I knew the soil would be quite dead but I purposefully chose it since most Beirutis would have access to this kind of soil only. Then I closed the lid and waited...

The compost quickly attracted flies and small insects and began to smell very earthy – a nice smell, actually. I kept adding organic waste such as (organic) egg shells, orange rinds (not too many to avoid having a highly acidic compost), vegetables and fruit peels, and a few bits of leftover or rotten food. I left out tea bags (they usually are bleached with chloride) and banana peels (they are usually heavily fertilised). Oh, and hair! The girls in the house empty their brushes over the compost and the guys add bits of cut-off fringe.

After 3 weeks, the compost was three quarters full and appeared really healthy. I always add a bit of soil when the layer of organic stuff gets 3-4 cm thick. My permaculture network friend *Alexis Baghdadi* gave me some "live" microorganism-rich compost from the pile in his garden, which upgraded our compost from 2 to 4 stars, I reckon.

I'm planning to start a second compost in March, this time with worms (I will be borrowing books about this from another friend, *Wolfgang Altenburg*) to compare results.

Composting on my balcony turned out to be an easy thing to do and the amount of waste it reduced in a 4-person household was considerable.

If you feel inspired, *yalla* go ahead! This helpful link from my friend *Rita Khawand* helped me get started: <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/how-to-make-your-own-indoor-co-138645>

Shared by *Nathalie Rosa Blucher*



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AN OLD-TIME TIP TO REFRESH YOUR DRY MARKOUK BREAD

I love eating the thin traditional Lebanese *markouk* bread but since there's usually only me in my house in Saidoun, I often end up with dry loaves that break when folded and can't be rolled into sandwiches. My mother recently revealed an old-time secret to bring dry loaves back to a perfect condition. It's really quite easy, here's what you have to do:

- Fold the dried loaves individually in rectangles or as much as they can be folded
- Insert between each 2-3 loaves some green leaves such as lettuce, chicory, cabbage, etc.
- You can also add some loaves that are not dry
- Put everything in a plastic bag and wrap it tightly
- Wait a couple of hours to witness the results. The loaves will absorb the humidity from the green leaves and become fresh again.

Enjoy your *markouk* bread fresh all month!

Shared by *Rita Khawand*



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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

SOILS PERMACULTURE ASSOCIATION LEBANON RECEIVES NABAD AWARD

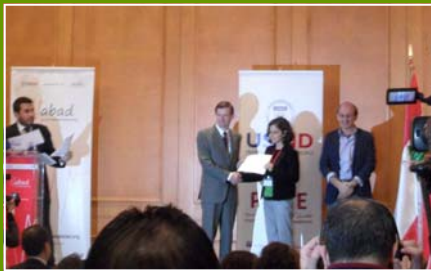
On **February 27, 2014**, **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** was among the 15 new start-ups honored at the award ceremony organized by the "nabad" social entrepreneurship incubator.

The ceremony was held at the Hilton Metropolitan Hotel in Sin El-Fil (Metn) and gathered the 15 winners of the 2013 "nabad" competition in the presence of potential investors, press representatives and the **U.S. Ambassador David Hale**. The event allowed us to meet new friends and partners for our future activities, workshops and interventions.

The challenge for all 15 start-ups was coming with a creative way to showcase their work and products/services. Since the hotel wouldn't let us bring a forest garden - much less a dry toilet - inside its hall, we went with a recycled crafts theme. Our poster was entirely handmade and hand-written on recuperated cardboard (yes, it reminded us of school projects). We made our business cards from old fabric scraps and sewed them into lavender bags with our info individually stamped on them instead of printed. Those were a hit with visitors, and so were our "re-birds" (made from fabric or metal scraps).

"nabad" was established in 2013 by the Lebanese NGO **Arcenciel** in collaboration with the consulting firm **Beyond Reform and Development (BRD)**, with support from the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**.

Shared by the Editorial team



Find out more about "nabad":

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

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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.


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A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

"The shorter the chain between raw food and fork, the fresher it is and the more transparent the system is."

"You, as a food buyer, have the distinct privilege of proactively participating in shaping the world your children will inherit."



—Joel Salatin

Everything I Want To Do Is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front

Holy Cows and Hog Heaven: The Food Buyer's Guide to Farm Friendly Food

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