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FEATURE STORY

INTRODUCING URBAN GARDENING IN BEIRUT

In March and April, we held a number of info-sessions to introduce permaculture and the upcoming **Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC)** in May.

We chose to hold these sessions in different locations in Beirut, to give participants the chance to discover new friendly spaces they can visit to work outside their home or just relax and meet interesting people.

On the last 2 of these occasions, we seized the opportunity to hold mini hands-on workshops and introduce the concepts of **urban gardening** and **guerrilla gardening**.

GUERRILLA GARDENING - SEED BALLS - - - - -

During one session at the **Nasawiya Café** in Mar Mikhael - Ashrafieh, we engaged old and new friends in making seed balls. Permaculture pioneer **Masanobu Fukuoka** rediscovered this ancient technique around 40 years ago and guerrilla gardeners around the world have adopted it.

Making seed balls consists of mixing seeds, clay and compost or humus with a little water to make small balls. Once these balls dry and harden, they can be used to seed remote areas or vacant lots. The earth ball around the seeds protects them from pests and other harsh conditions. Eventually, the soil mixture dissolves into the earth and the seeds emerge into seedlings. Occasionally, urban guerrilla gardeners prefer to keep an eye on the seed balls they drop around the city, and sometimes water them discreetly.

URBAN GARDENING - BALCONY COMPOST - - - - -

In our last session, we set up a balcony compost system for our generous hosts at the **Sivananda Yoga Center** in Gemmayze - Ashrafieh.

After discussing the best way to start a balcony compost with friends, we finally opted for a system using a laundry basket inside a bucket. This helps improve air flow and also makes the process of turning the compost easier.

Shared by the Editorial team



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LET'S FOCUS

DRYING HERBS: EASIER THAN YOU THINK

Drying herbs is easy and doesn't require any special equipment or skill. Setting up your own drying system is fun and provides you with a healthy way to start drinking herbal teas from your own harvest and avoid the pesticides, artificial ingredients, added flavors and GMOs commonly found in commercial tea brands like Lipton, Twinings and Celestial Seasonings (<http://foodbabe.com/2013/08/21/do-you-know-whats-really-in-your-tea/>)

TESTED AND APPROVED METHODS TO DRY HERBS - - - - -

The drying process is natural. If you leave a bunch of mint on your kitchen counter, it will dry no matter what. Therefore, when it comes to drying herbs, your only task is to make sure your herbs are getting adequate heat and ventilation. There are countless ways to set up a drying system, but here are the 3 main rules you must keep in mind:

- Keep the herbs away from sunlight
- Set your dryer in a well-ventilated space
- Do not store your herbs before they are completely dry

Drying is not magic, so get creative and look for materials around the house you can reuse to create your own dryer. I have dried herbs in various settings and climates from tropical Thailand to cold Canada and sunny Lebanon, with equally good results. Here are my 3 favorite techniques:

The mosquito net method:

This easy setup supplies maximum air and heat to the herbs and will almost always give you good results. It is ideal for delicate parts like flowers. With this method, herbs will dry quite fast, between 1 to 6 days depending on the type of herbs you're drying and the climate.

1. Lay your fresh herbs on a mosquito net or an oven tray. Basically, you can use anything that holds the herbs up while letting air through - be creative. Make sure the herbs don't overlap.
2. Cover the surface that will be exposed to the sun with 1 layer of newspaper. To make sure the wind won't interfere, secure the newspaper with laundry clips, strings or an elastic band.
3. Put your dryer in a sunny area above ground with the help of chairs, or suspend it with ropes. The goal is to have air flowing through.
4. Wait and monitor the process. Make changes as needed, like changing the location of your dryer to a sunnier and windier space.

The bouquet method:

This is the ultimate lazy setup that can be realized in virtually any surrounding. It will work well with just about any herb but it is ideal for herbs that are not very humid, like rosemary and sage.

1. Tie together a bunch of herbs in a small bouquet not wider than 3 fingers.
2. Hang the bouquet upside down in a shaded and well-ventilated area, for example a closet with a fan, or a shaded terrace or balcony. You can also use the clothesline where you usually hang your laundry - just make sure you cover your harvest with newspaper to avoid burning.
3. Wait and monitor the process. Make any changes if needed, like reducing the size of the bunches or adding a fan. With this method, herbs will dry in 3 to 9 days.

The low-heat oven method:

This method works well for harder plant parts that contain a lot of water, like roots and fruits. Do not use this method for flowers or leaves, as you will only turn them to ash.

1. Slice the fruits or roots as thin as you can. Aim for less than 5mm thickness for a fast drying.
2. Preheat your oven at minimum heat. The lower the heat, the better the result.
3. Lay your roots/fruits on a pan in the center of the oven, making sure they don't overlap. Do not completely close the oven door to allow moisture to escape and speed up the process.
4. Wait and monitor. Oven-drying is quite fast compared to other methods, but you can burn your batch if you leave it too long in the oven. Roots can be left overnight, while fruits are different in shapes and water content and will require you to peek in the oven every 2 hours or so.

Read about 3 easy herbs and flowers to start drying at home on our website: <http://www.soils-permaculture-lebanon.com/2/post/2014/04/drying-your-own-herbs-easier-than-you-think.html>

Shared by Anabel Gravel Chabot - [Flower Power Herbalism](#)



Hoary basil drying. This setup is similar to the mosquito net method but is directly on the floor instead of a surface that allows air through. The herbs will then be covered with a newspaper and weighed down. This method needs more drying time but requires only newspaper.



The bouquet method in an indoor setting



The mosquito net and bouquet method combined together for a super-efficient upcycled dryer. Yes, this an old wardrobe, an oven tray, some plastic baskets, bungee elastics, ribbon, laundry clips and a regular fan at the bottom. This is my own dryer in Beirut and I love it!

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

BEEKEEPING TO RECLAIM FOOD FREEDOM ON WORLD PERMACULTURE DAY

On **May 4, 2014**, we were glad to celebrate **World Permaculture Day** with a **Beekeeping Workshop** in **Saidoun - Jezzine**.

In accordance with the theme of this year's international permaculture day, "**Reclaiming Food Freedom**", **SOILS Permaculture Association Lebanon** chose beekeeping to underline the importance of natural food like honey. We started off with the surprising premise that bees are the only insects that feed people.

The workshop was organized in collaboration with the **Saidoun Agriculture Cooperative** and the help of local women who were kind enough to provide healthy home-cooked meals and snacks.

It was certainly a beautiful day for beekeeping; sunny with a light breeze and low humidity. **10 participants** from different parts of Lebanon made the trip to the little village of Saidoun to join us and beekeeper **Bassam Khawand** for a full day to discover the fascinating and intricate world of bees. The participants came from widely different backgrounds ranging from urban planning to graphic design, theater, accounting and computer programming.

In the morning, Bassam explained in detail all aspects of life inside the highly structured honeybee community and the interconnectedness between the different classes of bees inside the colony (queen, workers and drones). Afterwards, he proceeded to dissect the parts of the beehive and reveal the secrets of its organization, working his way up to the methods and tools in modern beekeeping. And harvesting honey

After lunch, Bassam gave an overview of the problems that confront bees and beekeepers. Common problems include regular bee diseases and predators, as well as the Varroa mite. Weak bee colonies are more likely to suffer from these problems. More alarmingly, there has been a recent rise in the number of **colony collapse disorder (CCD)** occurrences where worker bees disappear. Monoculture, genetically modified crops, intensive spraying and other industrial practices could all be reasons behind CCD.

Then it was time to put on our beekeeping suits and visit the bees at home. Seeing the different bees and learning to recognize them was an exciting experience thanks to Bassam's expert knowledge and security measures.

Finally, we all had a chance to sample this year's first honey batch. In the winter, beekeepers move their hives to the coast where the weather is warmer. The first flowers of the year are orange and avocado blossoms, which give the honey a clear orange color and a sweet taste. Later in summer, bees produce a darker more earthy-tasting honey. This would be the perfect excuse for us to schedule another bee session this year.

Shared by the Editorial team



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UPCOMING EVENTS

CLOTHING CHARITY DONATION



MAY 16, 2014

Starting 11:00 a.m.

PEGABOO store, Zahle Boulevard - Main street

Donate clothes, shoes or any clothing item for the benefit of needy families.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/671120716286713/?suggestsessionid=97e51a0eef9f1de7946c1f6dc9fa1a08>

"PLANT IDENTIFICATION: TOOLS AND CHALLENGES" - WORKSHOP



MAY 16, 17, 18, 2014

Université Saint Joseph, Science and Technology Campus - Mar Roukoz, Mkalles

Registration

Email: magda.boudagher@usj.edu.lb

Tel: 01-421382

"CONTRE NATURE" PHOTO EXHIBITION AND INSTALLATION



MAY 22-AUGUST 22, 2014

6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Beirut Art Center, Jisr El Wati (near Souk El Ahad)

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1420501788212445/>

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

ORGANIC GROWING WORKSHOP IN BEIRUT

This month, a number of permaculture enthusiasts in Beirut are organizing a workshop on **organic growing** and its benefits .

The workshop will be held on **May 24, 2014** at **AltCity** in Hamra - Beirut (see poster below).

REGISTER BEFORE MAY 12 TO WIN A SPECIAL GIFT!

For info: **03-860775 (Paula)** or **70-967866 (Jad)**

The training will be conducted by our friend **Nadim Samen**. Nadim and his sister **Andrea** are the heart and soul of the **Samen Eco Gardens** in Fanar. They grow organic fruits, raise chickens and turkeys, and produce high-quality compost, as well as different products like essential oils..

To find out more, go to www.samenecogardens.com

Grow and Live Organic



In this Workshop you will get the chance to be exposed to the natural way in agriculture, better known as Bio-Organic. We will introduce you to its concept and show you why we think it is good for consumers and the world's welfare!

Trainer:

Mr. Nadim Samen: Expert and Consultant in Organic Farming - owner of Samen Eco Gardens (www.samenecogardens.com)

Date: Sat. 24, May - 10AM till 1:30PM
Place: AltCity - Hamra, Montreal Bldg.
Prices: 30\$ (25\$ with student card)

For Info: 03 860 775 (Paula) or 70 967 866 (Jad)

This Workshop is ideal for people that know less about agriculture and interested in going into small or big agriculture and adopt an organic lifestyle.

You will be planting and taking with you a pure organic plant !



GREEN RESOURCES

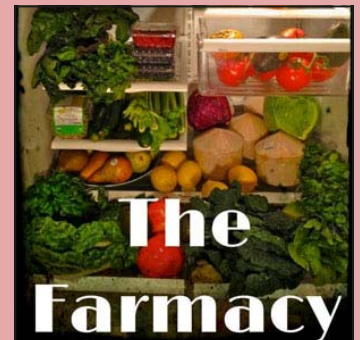
FLOWER POWER HERBALISM - REMEDIES



Beirut-based herb and natural remedies shop

<http://foodtank.com/>

THE FARMACY - WEBSITE



Articles and tips on natural healing and remedies

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

PERMACULTURE ACTIVIST - MAGAZINE



US periodical with articles and a listing of permaculture design courses

<http://www.permacultureactivist.net/>

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SAVE PAPER – Do you really need to print this newsletter?

L.E.T.S. Lebanon

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

CAFÉSHO: SIMPLY HEALTHY HOME COOKING

*If you don't know the **CaféSho** restaurant on Monnot Street in Ashrafieh, you are missing out on a unique experience of taste and community. The owners **Salim** and **Sibylle** have managed to hold up against the ebb and flow of new food trends and "concept" eateries. Since 2006, they propose a chance to slow down and enjoy good food in good company.*

People sometimes forget that the kitchen is the most important room of any house. It deserves the most time and attention because it is where we cook our food - at least, that's the way it should be. In this sense, it also serves as a place to gather over a meal and spend time together. As a child, Salim was doubly lucky to experience this, playing in the kitchen of his grandmother's cantina where government employees congregated every day for a home cooked meal. It is this "family" feel we offer in CaféSho, and our greatest reward is when customers tell us they feel at home when they visit.

True simplicity, the kind you can find only in a real home kitchen, is the core of CaféSho. To recreate a sense of home appears deceptively easy at first, but it requires a great deal of honesty. Any artifice or fake element will immediately be spotted - even on an unconscious level - and will ruin the effect. Over the years, we have made very few - if any - compromises in our "home kitchen restaurant". There is apparently no decor. The meals are always made from freshly selected ingredients, and served straight out of the kitchen, without any unnecessary implements like paper place mats or plastic containers, for instance, we serve mineral water in glass carafes. This also helps us do our part for the environment. We try to reduce waste and recycle as much as possible (we are lucky that some of our wine suppliers collect their empty bottles and reuse them). When we deliver meals, we use biodegradable or recycled packaging, as well as forks, spoons and knives made of a natural corn derivate (!) and can be broken into small pieces afterwards and made into compost.

You must have guessed that this simplicity stops behind the kitchen doors where Salim is at the helm. Our menu consists mostly of fusion dishes, with a slight preference for Asian cuisine. Food is a serious thing and there's a lot to consider when creating a new dish for the menu. First, there's the freshness and quality of the ingredients. We do our own grocery shopping at the market or from local farmers and suppliers whenever we can. It isn't always easy to find the right ingredients, but this is how we purchase food for our own home, based on our eating habits. Because cooking is a matter of passion, each dish is carefully elaborated with the right cooking time and method to produce the right flavors. We may not deal in labels like "organic" or "rainforest alliance", but we are very selective about our food. Every meal we serve to our customers is one we'd eat ourselves, both for its taste and its health benefits.

When it comes to home-cooking, it is important to offer good quality for value, and demonstrate that healthy eating is possible and affordable for a larger number of people. Healthy meals aren't just about using fresh and natural ingredients. For starters, CaféSho had non-smoking nights even before the smoking ban in Lebanon. Having a choice of natural fresh juices and infusions is also a good alternative to sodas and other commercial teas. Sibylle recently introduced a number of herbal infusions made with local nettles or hyssop (*zoufa*). Although these are highly unconventional, she is really passionate when it comes to making the health benefits of these herbs known to more people, and CaféSho is the right place to do so.

It seems a bit pointless to talk about food and atmosphere when you could come over instead and taste for yourself. To find out more about CaféSho, check our page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Caf%C3%A9Sho-caf%C3%A9-restaurant/223632047670709>.

Drop in anytime, even if it's to say "Hi". We look forward to meeting you.

Shared by Sibylle and Salim



LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

MAKE YOUR OWN BEESWAX POLISH FOR YOUR WOODEN FURNITURE

Wooden furniture has a real personality, but it requires care and maintenance to preserve its sheen. Commercially available polishes contain chemicals or petroleum derivatives you are better off avoiding. You could always order natural polishes from specialized stores or online, but it's more fun to make your own.

Here's what you need for 15 cl of wax:

- 1 sheet or 20 g of beeswax (you can get it from a beekeeper or beekeeping stores)
- 10 cl of olive oil

First, I broke the beeswax into small chunks and mixed it with the olive oil in an old stainless steel coffee pot used for the Lebanese coffee (*rakwe*). I warmed the mixture on low heat until the beeswax melted and mixed with the oil to form a homogeneous substance with a slight green hue (because of the olive oil).

I then emptied my mixture into a glass jar to cool. Any container with a large opening will do, it is important that you are able to reach the inside of the container with a cloth. If you are planning on storing your wax for later use, choose an airtight container.

Once it cools down completely, your mixture will harden and turn slightly yellow or off-white. This wax is a completely natural substance that has no toxicity whatsoever. You can safely use it to coat any solid wood furniture like desks, chairs, coffee tables, cabinets, as well as dinner tables and surfaces where you put your food.

Dab a little wax on a cotton cloth then apply to your wood surface. You can make the operation easier by slightly warming the wax to melt it a little. Applying the wax requires patience and care, but it is very efficient and economic. The results are quite noticeable on damaged surfaces. For very dry and damaged surfaces, you might need to apply a second coat and wait 6 to 8 days for the wood to absorb the wax completely.

Some recipes on the internet suggest you add a few drops of essential oil to give your wax a nice scent. Go ahead and experiment for yourself.

Shared by Jean-Charles Latouche



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GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


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


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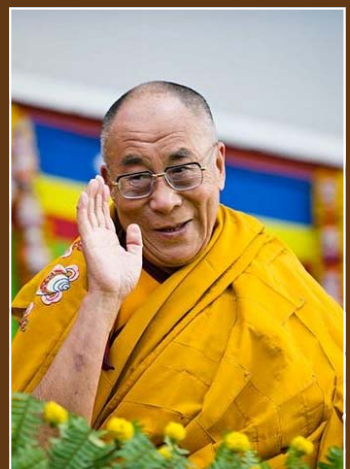
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A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

"It is our collective responsibility to protect and nurture the global family, to support its weaker members and to preserve and tend to the environment in which we all live."



—Dalai Lama

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