

Living Energy Farm

January-February 2014 Newsletter

Winter Construction Slowdown

Cold and wet weather this winter has slowed down construction at LEF considerably. We're waiting on the mud to thaw and then dry enough to compact the foundation for the main house, but in the meanwhile we've finished the duct work for the solar heating system in the kitchen, and poured the concrete floor for the composting toilet. Watch for announcements about strawbale and stucco work days; we'll be closing in the walls of the kitchen as soon as the weather lets us move materials.

Goats at LEF!

We've just begun to employ a new method for cleaning up our clear cut without fossil fuels: three half-dwarf dairy goats. The two does (females), Sage and Calypso, are both pregnant and Sage is due to kid any day now. We've built a basic outdoor stanchion to milk her, once her kid is old enough to spare some milk. We're looking forward to some fresh milk and a little cheese to spruce up our currently dairy-free diet.



Fencing is probably the biggest challenge in raising goats. Electric fencing is usually recommended for goats, but brush control is necessary to maintain a good charge on a fence, and this would be very difficult for us without gasoline-powered weed wackers. With our many orchards spread throughout the farm, we didn't want to take chances with goats getting out! So we decided to use cattle panels, which are more expensive and troublesome to move. But for our small herd, the expense is not too bad, and the labor is worth it.



Seminole Pumpkin

Common Wealth Seed Growers

Living Energy Farm is proud to announce our newest business venture: direct marketing our seeds to farmers and gardeners! Along with Twin Oaks Seed Farm and All-Farm Organics, we've founded Common Wealth Seed Growers, a seed growers' cooperative that aims to promote a limited number of outstanding varieties. All the varieties we offer are grown by one of the farms in the cooperative, and have been demonstrated to perform exceptionally well in our area.

All of our farms are certified organic, so we know all too well the insect and disease pressures that can make organic production such a challenge in the mid-Atlantic. For example, most organic farmers and gardeners found 2013 a very challenging year to grow cucurbits (cucumbers, melons, and squash) because the downy mildew killed most of our plants. Through our trials at Twin Oaks, we identified a few varieties that stood up especially well to the disease, and we are offering these through the collective. These include Editso 47 Muskmelon, Suyo Long Cucumber, and Seminole Pumpkin.



Super Shepherd Pepper



Suyo Long Cucumber

Through vigorous trials and selection, Common Wealth Seed Growers aims to identify and maintain the best open-pollinated seed stocks for our region, and to offer only these to growers. We want growers to be able to depend on us for varieties that will reliably perform in our region. We sell bulk sizes for farmers as well as packet sizes for gardeners.



Cajun Jewel Okra

Varieties grown at Living Energy Farm and offered through the cooperative include: Cajun Jewel okra, a dwarf-type variety that made its way into nearly every meal we cooked last summer; Super Shepherd Sweet Pepper, which we've grown for three years and love; Abraham Lincoln Tomato, with blight-resistant foliage that produced until frost; and Amish Moon and Stars Watermelon, which produced a delicious, abundant crop that made for some very memorable August work days.



Amish Moon and Stars Watermelon

To learn more about our seeds, visit our website at commonwealthseeds.com. To purchase seeds online, follow the link on our website to our store at Local Harvest.

Upcoming Workshops

Living Energy Farm is happy to sponsor a number of gardening and orcharding workshops this winter and spring. On **March 1st**, Sean Thomas will be giving a seed saving workshop at **Rooting DC**, an all-day gardening forum at Wilson Senior High School in Washington DC. This workshop, along with the event, are free and open to the public. For more information visit www.rootingdc.org.

On **March 8th**, from **1-3PM**, LEF and Southern Exposure Seed Exchange are co-sponsoring a **Garden Planning and Design** workshop to be held at Southern Exposure's new Seed Office, located at 1259 Indian Creek Road, Mineral Virginia 23117. This workshop will be taught by Debbie Piesen and SESE's Ira Wallace, and will help beginner and intermediate gardeners prepare for planting. Learn about season extension, succession planting, and essential garden practices to increase soil fertility. After the workshop, participants can browse the Southern Exposure seed "picking room" and pick up all your spring seeds! Please RSVP livingenergyfarm@gmail.com if you plan to attend this workshop. The cost is \$25, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds.

On **April 5th and 6th**, we will be holding our annual **Fruit Grafting and Propagation All-Day Intensive**. (This is not a two-part workshop, it is one workshop recurring on two dates so we can keep the class size small.) Participants will learn how to prepare fruit tree seeds for planting, how root cuttings, and how to graft. Participants will learn about growing disease resistant fruit and nuts in Virginia without pesticides and fungicides. The focus will be on techniques that can be used at home with a minimum of tools and expense. Each participant will have the opportunity to take home five fruit trees that they graft themselves. This workshop will take place at Living Energy Farm, at 1022 Bibb Store Rd, Louisa VA 23093. The cost of is \$50. To register, please contact Stephanie Hartwick at livingenergyfarm@gmail.com.

Living Energy Farm is a project to build a demonstration farm, community, and education center in Louisa County that uses no fossil fuels. For more information see our website www.livingenergyfarm.org, or contact us at livingenergyfarm@gmail.com. Donations are tax deductible.