

Local Food and Gardening Watershed Ways

Articles Included in the document are:

Economic advantages of local food
Getting into market gardening
Helping farmers transition to organic
Eating with the seasons
A bounty of local food
August 22 is World Kitchen Garden Day!
Starting a Kitchen Garden
The beauty and practicality of raised-bed gardens
Hardy Fruit Trees
Hardy Fruit Trees
Pruning Fruit Trees
Farming with nature
OVFC Buying Guide Coming; Watch for It!
The dandelions are coming!
Growing healthy organic food at the Corner Garden
Food comes from our ancestors

Making it easy to buy the food your neighbour grows!
Seedy Sunday Celebrates Diversity & Cooperation
Eating locally no hardship, even in March!
Feed the World
Seedy Sunday helps to revive heirloom vegetables
Calling All Locavores!
A world of compost
Our food choices affect the environment
Singing the praises of cabbage...
Charismatic local food advocate coming to the Ottawa Valley
In praise of slowness
Eating locally for a better future
Organic farming deepens its roots
Cultivating respect for the lowly dandelion
Nine things to like about dandelions

Economic advantages of local food

30 Aug 2010 Lynn Jones

One advantage of local food is not talked about much but should be since it has tremendous potential to bring about positive change in communities all over the industrialized world. This is the economic impact of shifting to a more locally-based diet. Since every household in every community spends a significant chunk of money on food, the impact on the local economy of shifting even a portion of the expenditures to local items can be quite large.

To see how this works let's consider that households in Renfrew County spend close to 300 million dollars each year on food. Presently, most of this money leaves the county very rapidly, to pay people outside of the county who have helped to produce it and bring it here. But if more people consumed local food and if, as a result, more food was produced and sold for local consumption here, the effect on the economy of the Ottawa Valley would be tremendous.

One way the positive effect would operate is via something called the "multiplier effect" which refers to the number of times that money changes hands before it leaves a community. The more times the better, since money is in this case is a symbol of value changing hands - the more times this happens the more vibrant and healthy the local economy. An easy way to picture this happening is to imagine that the cash you pass on to the local farmer or grocer is then passed on by him or her to the local hairdresser, who spends some of it at the local car repair shop, and so on. By contrast, when you buy foods from far away, much of the money you hand over immediately leaves the community without passing through the hands of many of your friends and neighbours.

Another way the positive economic effect of a more locally-based food system would show itself is in the creation of new jobs and small businesses. Many more farmers and market gardeners would be needed to produce more food, and there would be lots of need also for processing and local storage businesses. Keep in mind we are not talking here of trying to shift all of the food dollars to local food. That would be neither desirable or feasible, but even a 10% shift could make a very significant impact on our valley economy. Ten percent of food expenditures in Renfrew County would be about 30 million dollars or about the equivalent of 750 jobs.

This prospect of economic stimulus from re-localizing part of the food system is proving to be of great interest to numerous city, county and State governments in the United States. Many interesting reports have been published on the internet in the past year outlining the estimated benefits and suggesting means of moving forward. Some states have even passed resolutions such as this one by the State of Vermont “to increase the direct sale of local farm products by 50% and to increase storage and processing capacity of locally grown farm products by 20% above current levels by 2012”

The United States Department of Agriculture has also been studying the economics of local food systems and has been actively encouraging communities to tap into over a billion dollars of existing funding programs to help start new farmers markets, community kitchens and local food businesses including mobile slaughterhouses and creative local food marketing programs.

So far Canada seems to be missing the boat on this issue, at least at the governmental level. Google searches for “local food systems” combined with “Agriculture Canada” or “Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food” don't turn up anything of note at this time. Fortunately, there are many non-government organizations working very creatively to promote local food and this is great to see.

The fact that there are no federal funding programs to help develop and expand local food systems doesn't need to stop us from moving forward. Here in Renfrew County, the Ontario Trillium Foundation recently funded a collaborative project between the Ottawa River Institute and Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative to promote local foods including increased awareness about the advantages of choosing them. This article is part of this project.

Local municipalities and institutions can help to promote local foods too. Local food procurement policies are one way of doing this and of course there are many others. The County of Renfrew has been very supportive of local agriculture ...

Here are some examples of potential activities to increase local food production from a recent report in the State of New Hampshire:

- Extend both the season for Farmers' Markets and their geographic scope
- Increase the presence of Coops and CSAs
- Develop root crops and their markets
- Create farm-to-regional distributor partnerships
- Create farm-to-institution partnerships (direct or through coops) to hospitals, large employers, schools, etc.
- Create a business incubator to help entrepreneurs create new businesses in agriculture and food manufacturing
- Develop apprenticeship programs to train the next generation of farmers

Getting into market gardening

30 Aug 2010 Lynn Jones

Market gardening is a unique business in that it doesn't take a lot to get started. According to the magazine "Growing for market", all it takes is "a few acres, some basic equipment, a love of growing things, an intellectual curiosity, and a genuine enjoyment of hard work". In many cases, the land does not have to be owned, but may be borrowed or rented.

While it's easy to get started, it's not easy to make a living growing and selling vegetables according to the Canadian Organic Growers. The organization has published an excellent book, "Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers", which outlines a field-tested 11-step process to help new market gardeners progress toward profitability.

Market gardening is more labour intensive than large scale farming but can also be more profitable once a business is well-established. Direct sales to consumers, a key feature of market gardening, typically net the grower 100% of the retail price as opposed to the 10-20% received by commodity producers.

Market gardeners come from all walks of life and include folks from conventional farming backgrounds as well as self-confessed "greenhorns" from urban occupations with no farming experience. There has been a very encouraging trend in recent years for increasing numbers of young people including recent university and college graduates to take up market gardening.

One young couple in the Ottawa Valley who have recently started market gardening are Adam Copeland and Filipa Martens from Matawatchan. They kindly agreed to share their experience with us to provide food for thought for valley residents contemplating a similar move.

What got you started in market gardening? We got started by growing a large garden for our own family with the purpose of being self-reliant in food. Through that process we learned a lot about the value of fresh, local, chemical-free food. We were also looking for a way to make a living in the country.

What are the rewards of being a market gardener? Being a market gardener allows you to be outside almost all the time in the most beautiful setting, surrounded by birds and all nature has to offer. We also enjoy the relationships that evolve with customers through our shared love for fresh organic food. People are always amazed at the great flavour of our fresh veggies.

What are some of the challenges of market gardening? This year, we couldn't get enough fertile soil prepared in time. Time is always a premium with three young children.

Have you any recommendations or advice to others interested in a career in market gardening? This year we attended an excellent market gardening workshop organized by the Canadian Organic Growers called Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers. An internship would be of great value to new market gardeners starting out. Networking with other growers is a great way to share stories and ideas.

Creativity can go a long way in the marketing of produce. For instance, kale grows beautifully in my garden but it isn't a favourite of most people. We expanded to include value-added products such as kale chips and baked pockets with kale as a main ingredient. We also share recipes and send weekly emails to customers with ideas for cooking that what's in season.

What would make your job as a market gardener easier or more successful? Access to a customer base who is willing to pay for chemical-free, hand picked produce that has been grown with minimal fossil fuel inputs.

What is your secret to success? We love rural life out here and we love to eat good food. Market gardening unites these two passions quite well while providing us with some income. I shy away from the word success. Each season is a tremendous learning curve, with battles, victories and defeats.

What's next? Where do you see your gardening/farming going? We are expanding into meat sales. We have chosen rare breed stock, the large black pig and dexter cattle. The animals will also help our need for fertilizer. A large future root cellar will hopefully allow us to expand our sales season of long storage vegetables into the cold months. Our long term plan includes expanding to produce berries and planting fruit and nut trees. We hope to be primary food producers for our small community.

Many excellent resources are available for newcomers to market gardening. Here are a few:

“Bootstrap Market Gardening” by Scott and Suzie Kelland is subtitled “How to Start-up, Market, and Manage a Successful Small Farm Business (beginning with very few resources of your own)”. The book is available for purchase on-line and a copy has recently been added to the ORI sustainable living bookshelf at the Bonnechere Public Library (available to all valley residents through interlibrary loan)

Market Gardening – A Start-up Guide is a 20-page pdf document available for free download from the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service in the United States.

Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers is a “must read” for vegetable growers of all scales – organic or not available from Canadian Organic Growers. COG also offers many other excellent publications, some of them free-of-charge through its website, www.cog.ca

Watershed Ways is a publication of the Ottawa River Institute www.ottawariverinstitute.ca

Helping farmers transition to organic

18 Aug 2010 Lynn Jones

At present, up to 80 per cent of organic food sold in Canada is imported. This represents a significant opportunity for environmentally-sustainable economic development. A shift to greater production of organic food in Canada will provide jobs and reduce fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions related to importing food from far away.

Partly in response to organic supply shortages, in 2008 the United States Congress enacted legislation to provide funds to help farmers transition to organic certification and a payment program for conservation practices related to organic production. Many other countries around the world provide a variety of incentives including financial assistance to farmers adopting organic farming practices.

Despite many obvious advantages to doing so, the federal government in Canada has not yet seen fit to provide financial support for farmers to make the transition to organic agriculture. There are however, a number of non-governmental organizations providing excellent information, networking and educational opportunities to help farmers who want to make the transition.

One such organization is the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO, www.efao.ca) which has been helping farmers make the transition to ecological farming since 1979. “Ecological farming” is a type of organic farming that goes a step beyond finding alternatives to chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilizers to viewing the farm as a living organism. EFAO members share information and experiences through farm tours, kitchen table meetings, farm consulting, advisory services, a quarterly newsletter, workshops and courses.

In January 2009 the EFAO presented a 2-day course, “Introduction to Ecological Agriculture” to a full house of 30 Renfrew County farmers. Participants of this course were introduced to the principles of organic farming. Topics covered included soil biology and fertility, basic field crop rotation and weed control, livestock husbandry, manure management, economics and organic certification. The course was so popular that it may be offered again in the winter of 2011. Contact ORI project co-ordinator Cheryl Keetch at 613-756-3884 or through the ORI website (www.ottawariverinstitute.ca) if you would like to be notified when the course runs again.

Another organization that provides a wealth of information and support to organic, conventional and transitional farmers is Canadian Organic Growers (www.cog.ca). For over 30 years, COG has been working toward a vision for a sustainable, bioregionally-based, organic food system. The organization maintains an organic lending library with over 1500 titles that are accessible to the public. It also offers farm and garden tours and produces a quarterly magazine “The Canadian Organic Grower”. In addition, COG publishes books such as “The Organic Field Crop Handbook”, an excellent resource used in university courses around the world and “The Organic Livestock Handbook”,. These and many other excellent resources (some of them free-of-charge) are available through the COG website.

COG has recently produced a handbook called “Gaining Ground: Making a Successful Transition to Organic Farming”. The book is based on interviews with over 80 of Canada’s organic or transitional farmers across the country. It provides practical advice and connects readers to a national network of organic farmers, “the next best thing to having an organic farmer next door”. Farmer wisdom is supplemented with a wealth of scientific information from around the globe. A copy of this book has been added to the Ottawa River Institute's sustainable living book collection at the Eganville Public Library, and is available via interlibrary loan to Ottawa Valley residents. Copies can also be purchased from COG.

Other places to find information on making the transition to organic include the Organic Agricultural Centre of Canada (www.organiccentre.ca) and most provincial agriculture ministries.

Watershed Ways is a publication of the Ottawa River Institute (www.ottawariverinstitute.ca), a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Upper Ottawa Valley. Information sources for this article included the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Organic Growers, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario.

Eating with the seasons

16 Aug 2010 Janet McNeill

For example, I never used to eat beets, and now I'm a big fan! I'm about to try a borscht with beets and cucumbers recipe – and this is one of the things I'm really enjoying about having access to really fresh vegetables (in my case, this summer, from friends' gardens) – it inspires me to try new recipes.

The Internet is a great source for recipes now that so many people are blogging about food. Just type a couple of key ingredients into Google along with the word “recipe,” and you'll get lots of interesting results. I just did this for zucchini and basil, as I have a pile of both sitting on my kitchen counter. The search turned up many recipes, three of which I can't wait to try – Roasted Lemon Basil Zucchini, Creamy Zucchini Basil Soup, and raw Basil Zucchini Wraps (a dehydrator recipe). Another good way to find great seasonal recipes is simply to ask friends and family members for their all-time favourites of whatever season it happens to be.

Once upon a time, I used to plan my meals well in advance, then shop for the necessary ingredients. I'm far less, shall we say, “organized” than I used to be – and what I now recommend is patronizing the local farmers' market and roadside stands and seeing what jumps out at you for sheer freshness appeal – then planning meals around what you bring home. (What could be a more win-win strategy – for both your family's health and that of the local economy – than to buy food from people who grow it in your own area, and thus are totally invested in the health of the local community?)

Seasonal eating is somewhat less easy but equally rewarding in other seasons of the year. For one thing, meal planning is much simpler when there are some key ingredients, the seasonally available ones, around which to plan menus. I make a lot of homemade soups during fall, winter and spring – using carrots, potatoes and tomato preserves.

I find I appreciate foods so much more when they're only around at certain times of the year, rather than available all the time. Leafy green salads are very much more appreciated in spring and summer, if you haven't been eating them all winter. Likewise for asparagus, fresh strawberries, raspberries, peaches, corn and so many other treats of the seasonal availability calendar!

One of the best cookbooks available on seasonal eating is *Simply in Season* by Cathleen Hockman-Wert and Mary Beth Lind. The book can be purchased from the Mennonite Central Committee. A copy has just been added to the Ottawa River Institute sustainable living bookshelf at Eganville Public Library, and is available to valley residents through interlibrary loan. There is also a children's version of the book in print.

Two other excellent books full of inspiration on the subject of seasonal eating and local foods are 'The 100 Mile Diet' by Alisa Smith and J.B. Mackinnon, and 'Animal, Vegetable, Miracle' by Barbara Kingsolver.

A bounty of local food

16 Aug 2010 Lynn Jones

Accessing this bounty is fairly easy at this time of year thanks to the many farmers' markets, pick-your own farms and roadside fruit and vegetable stands sprinkled throughout the valley. Renfrew County has nine farmers' markets located in Arnprior, Barry's Bay, Burnstown, Cobden, Combermere, Killaloe, Matawatchan, Pembroke and Renfrew! In addition, several local grocers stock local foods along with imported produce. Renfrew County is also home to an innovative award-winning, producer and consumer food co-operative, the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative (OVFC) (www.ottawavalleyfood.org) which circulates a wide variety of local goods to hundreds of members through a monthly order cycle. A wonderful CSA farm in the Pembroke-Cobden area, the Rainbow Heritage Garden (www.rainbowheritage.ca), distributes weekly baskets of heirloom organic vegetables and fruits to its members.

A great resource is available free-of-charge to help newcomers to the Valley and/or newcomers to the wonderful world of eating locally find local foods. The "Local Food Buying Guide for the Upper Ottawa Valley" is a beautiful 17-page colour brochure that contains detailed information about the nine county farmers' markets, 34 OVFC producer members, eight pick-your own farms, and close to 50 other local food producers. The guide was produced with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation by the Ottawa River Institute and Ottawa Valley Food Cooperative. Visit the ORI website at www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/local-food to download a copy of the brochure and for a list of locations where copies may still be available.

Local food is fresh, delicious and nutritious. Eating it is good for the local economy, good for the environment, good for our neighbours who grow the food and good for planet earth! How fortunate we are that such an easy and delicious thing to do has so many side benefits!

August 22 is World Kitchen Garden Day!

12 Aug 2010 Lynn Jones

Some of the ways that people around the world will be celebrating World Kitchen Garden Day include hosting pot-lucks, taste-tests and harvest parties. Other ideas for celebrations include single food theme parties (zucchini or tomatoes perhaps?) and vegetable garden walking tours.

The organization behind World Kitchen Garden Day, Kitchen Gardeners International (KGI), is based in the state of Maine and has 20,000 members from over 100 countries. Its mission is "to empower individuals, families, and communities to achieve greater levels of food self-reliance through the promotion of kitchen gardening, home-cooking, and sustainable local food systems".

KGI spearheaded the recent successful campaign to get a kitchen garden planted on the White House grounds in Washington D.C. Partly in response to a petition from KGI signed by over 100,000 people, Michele Obama planted a 1100 square foot organic vegetable garden in March of last year (2009).

An organic kitchen garden was also planted recently on the grounds of Buckingham Palace in London,

England, for the first time since World War 2. It is said that Queen Elizabeth's decision to do this may have been sparked by several meetings she had with Michele Obama last spring. Whether or not this is the case, kitchen gardeners are clearly in good company these days!

The Buckingham Palace garden features rare and endangered vegetables donated by an organic heritage seed library in Great Britain.

Gardeners and sustainable food activists have praised the White House and Buckingham Palace gardens for inspiring people to get back in touch with food, and re-learn valuable skills for food self-reliance, know by our grandparents but largely neglected by current generations.

On August 22nd let's celebrate our kitchen gardens and their contribution to healthy, beautiful, sustainable communities for the future!

Check out the KGI website at kitchengardeners.org for more ideas about how to celebrate, or to join the network.

Watershed Ways is a publication of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Upper Ottawa Valley. For more information please see the ORI website at www.ottawariverinstitute.ca

Starting a Kitchen Garden

30 Jul 2010 Lynn Jones

Mostly though, growing a kitchen garden provides a lot of enjoyment. The gardens themselves can be beautiful to behold and a pleasure to work in. Just ask the thousands of Valley residents who never stopped kitchen gardening! And check out the attached photo from ORI Project Co-ordinator Cheryl Keetch's beautiful kitchen garden in the Wilno Hills.

Two famous new kitchen gardens are the one started last year by Michele O'Bama on the White House Lawn in Washington D.C. and Queen Elizabeth's new garden at Buckingham Palace in London, England. Both of these gardens are organic and the Queen's garden features rare and endangered varieties provided by an organic heritage seed library in England.

The easiest way to start a new kitchen garden is to fill a few barrels or pots with good quality soil amended with compost or organic fertilizer. Place them in a sunny spot near your kitchen and plant them with fast growing salad veggies, herbs and edible flowers. Things like spinach, salad greens radishes, green onions, baby carrots, and turnips all grow quickly from seed. You can also plant frost-hardy vegetables like kale and chard, transplants of which are still available in some nurseries. If you plant your pots early in August, you should be able to harvest some beautiful salads from your garden this fall!

In the meantime, if you wish you can plan a bigger kitchen garden for next year. For visual inspiration, you might try a Google image search on "kitchen garden" which will bring up lots of photos and sketches of beautiful kitchen gardens.

There are several ways to prepare the ground for a new kitchen garden. You can have large raised bed containers made from rot resistant wood (like local white cedar) by a local carpenter and fill them with good quality soil and amendments. Or you can spread agricultural black plastic or a tarp or old carpet over the area you wish to turn into a garden and let it kill the grass and weeds for you by leaving it there for several months.

You can also take the traditional approach and remove the sod by hand or with a tiller, and spade or till the soil underneath. Finally, you can take the easy route and try the “lasagna gardening” technique, in which layers of newspaper, compost, peat moss, rotten leaves and grass clippings are piled up in repeated layers over the new garden area.

I have tried all of these methods. They all work and have their advantages and disadvantages. You can find loads of good information on starting and caring for new kitchen gardens on the internet and at your local library. Here are just a few recommended books to get you started, all of which should be available through interlibrary loan:

The Harrowsmith Northern Gardener by Jennifer Bennett
From Seed to Table by Janette Haase
Four-Season Harvest by Eliot Coleman
Lasagna Gardening by Patricia Lanza
Happy Kitchen Gardening!

The beauty and practicality of raised-bed gardens

26 Jul 2010 Lynn Jones

Vegetable plants in raised bed gardens are often spaced in geometric patterns, much closer together than conventional row gardening. The spacing is such that when the vegetables are fully grown, their leaves just barely touch each other, creating an environment in which moisture is conserved and weed growth suppressed.

Raised beds produce a variety of benefits: they extend the planting season; they reduce the need to use poor native soil; and they can reduce weeds if designed properly. Since the gardener does not walk on the raised beds, the soil is not compacted and the roots have an easier time growing. The close plant spacing and the use of compost generally result in higher yields with raised beds in comparison to conventional row gardening. Waist high raised beds enable people with reduced mobility and flexibility to grow vegetables without having to bend over to tend them.

A special kind of raised beds that I learned about while researching this article is the “keyhole garden”. These are circular waist high raised beds with a path to the centre. The walls are usually made out of stones piled on top of each other. Often the centre has a “chimney” of sorts built with sticks and then lined with feedbags or grasses that allows water and/or compost placed at the centre to flow out into the soil and reach the plants' roots. Keyhole gardens are very big in parts of East Africa where they are helping to make low-income families self-reliant in food. If you want to see some beautiful photos of these gardens, type “keyhole gardens” into Google Image and prepare to be inspired!

When making raised bed containers, construction materials should be chosen carefully. If building with wood, it is a good idea to avoid pressure-treated lumber which can leach toxic chemicals such as arsenic into the soil. Untreated hardwood is better. Debra's containers are made out of local white cedar by

resident craftsman, Tom Eldrige. She is willing to share information about their construction. If you are interested, contact me via the general email address at Ottawa River Institute website (“info” at “ottawariverinstitute.ca”).

When it comes to filling the containers with soil, consult a good reference book at your library or do a bit of internet research to determine the ideal mixture. A Google search on “organic garden soil recipe” will provide lots of information. Debra used a mixture of earth, sand, vermiculite and her own compost and as the attached photos will attest, she has had wonderful results!

Watershed Ways is a publication of the Ottawa River Institute (www.ottawariverinstitute.ca), a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Upper Ottawa Valley. This article was adapted from a Wikipedia article “Raised Bed Gardening” July 2010.

Hardy Fruit Trees

20 Jul 2010 Robbie Anderman

The first criteria one needs to consider when choosing a tree to plant, is whether it is sufficiently hardy to thrive in its intended location, not just survive. A handy reference is the Plant Hardiness Zone map of Agriculture Canada. The Arctic is Zone 0, while Windsor's banana belt is Zone 7a. Renfrew town is about 4b, Pembroke town is Zone 4a, Perth and Ottawa are in Zone 5, and western Renfrew County is Zone 3b or even 3a.

Each site will also be influenced by whether it faces south or north, whether it is exposed to strong winds, is close to a stabilizing large body of water, and whether it is close to a building, is at the bottom or top of a hill. Planting a tree that's not fully hardy to your location is playing the “horticultural lottery”.

Thankfully most nurseries and tree merchants do label their trees with "hardy to Zone X", so intelligent choices can be made before buying a tree. There are also numerous publications by Ag Canada and OMAFRA, plus books by orchardists which describe not only the hardiness zones for many varieties, yet also the other taste, color and size qualities.

It's worth keeping in mind, even while considering the climate changes we're enduring, that there have been "Test Winters" (1904, 1917, 1934 & 1981) which were especially cold, proving which varieties really will survive in an area. We lost several great trees with delicious fruit in 1981, the same year that 30% of all commercial apple trees in Quebec died. Bartlett pears also proved they could not be a guaranteed survivor in the Upper Ottawa Valley.

Thankfully, there are many excellent hardy varieties of apple, pear, cherry and plum that have been developed by orchardists in Canada and the northern USA over the past many years. Challenged by adversity, they arose to it and came thru with flying colors of good fruit for most every locale. I have sought out the research of the Prairie orchardists and found many varieties that are very happy in Zone 3a, while taking a chance in the horticultural lottery with a couple from Zone 4.

For pear trees, I suggest planting trees with rootstocks of *Pyrus Ussurienses* (Harbin Pear). These are from a region of Northern China/ Siberia which missed the last Ice Age, thus had a longer time to develop true hardiness. Their genes have been bred into many varieties that are also on the market. They have the benefit as well of being immune to Fire Blight, the scourge of European pears, as well as not attracting many bugs or other diseases.

When planting, keep these principles in mind: Plant your trees far enough apart so they will not touch each other's branches when they are fully mature (yes that little tree will spread to 25 feet wide), plan for good drainage, dig the hole 2 - 2.5 feet deep and wide enough to fit all the roots without bending, put the top soil on the bottom & the sub soil on the top, keep the roots wet until well planted and then water 2 -3 gallons when the hole is half filled and another 2 - 3 gallons when fully planted, then pack the soil well to eliminate all air pockets.

After planting, it's best to water with 5+ gallons 2 -3 times a week minimum for the first growing season. Remember that 90% of the feeder roots are in the top 6 inches of soil. Mulch the "drip line" (outer extent of the branches) well with hay, straw, or rotten old sawdust to help maintain moisture, encourage decomposition right where the feeder roots are, and to help keep the weeds and grass down. Do keep this mulch at least a foot away from the trunk so as not to provide rodents a home with "lunch" too nearby.

With this in mind, do put a plastic or hardware cloth wrap around the tree before winter to discourage rodents and rabbits, and at least as high as the snow drifts in that particular spot. To deter deer, a fence higher and wider than the baby tree is, with three tall stakes will work, though it may need raising as the tree grows. An electric fence will do the necessary work for larger plantings, and even keep away the bears. Obviously we're growing tasty good food.

Well composted manure placed under the mulch before mid-June is the best fertilizer, though foliar feeding before mid-summer, and kelp & ground-up rock mineral soil amendments are also excellent to include under the mulch.

Organic fruit has been called the "Final Frontier of Agriculture", as it is very challenging, especially apples, yet worth it in taste and health safety. It's the way our great-grandparents grew their orchards, though incorporating many new beneficial techniques. www.groworganicapples.com is a great resource to help with this, as is their book "The Apple Grower".

Integrated pest management (IPM) is another growing practice that is popular and helps keep down the application of chemicals, and their costs.

If you are fortunate enough to live on a farm with an old orchard, it is well worth the effort to re-generate it. First cutting all underbrush and shading trees within 50 feet, then cutting out the dead wood, followed by clearing up the middle so you can climb the tree and the sun and air movement can penetrate it. Using lots of good hay as mulch has been proven in studies to be enough good fertilizer and provides enough habitat restoration to bring them back to health and good productivity.

It can take a new tree 5 to 10 years to come into production, depending on whether it is semi-dwarf or standard. A well maintained standard tree can produce good fruit for about 100 years. Hardy fruit trees provide a great return on investment.

Robbie Anderman is a member of the Ottawa River Institute (www.ottawariverinstitute.ca), a non-profit charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

Hardy Fruit Trees

by Robbie Anderman

Fruit trees are generally a long term agricultural investment, so pick your site well, and pick your tree even more carefully.

When I first moved to this area in 1969, there were apple, and some plum, orchards on every farm, even on most abandoned farms. The wide selection of varieties was awesome and all were hardy enough to endure the coldest weather this area could dish out.

Sadly, most of these orchards have succumbed to neglect, overgrowth of the forest, and clearing of the land for other crops. Still, they amply prove that this area can provide good habitat for hardy fruit trees.

The first criteria one needs to consider when choosing a tree to plant, is whether it is sufficiently hardy to thrive in its intended location, not just survive. A handy reference is the Plant Hardiness Zone map of Agriculture Canada. The Arctic is Zone 0, while Windsor's banana belt is Zone 7a. Renfrew town is about 4b, Pembroke town is Zone 4a, Perth and Ottawa are in Zone 5, and western Renfrew County is Zone 3b or even 3a.

Each site will also be influenced by whether it faces south or north, whether it is exposed to strong winds, is close to a stabilizing large body of water, and whether it is close to a building, is at the bottom or top of a hill. Planting a tree that's not fully hardy to your location is playing the "horticultural lottery".

Thankfully most nurseries and tree merchants do label their trees with "hardy to Zone X", so intelligent choices can be made before buying a tree. There are also numerous publications by Ag Canada and OMAFRA, plus books by orchardists which describe not only the hardiness zones for many varieties, yet also the other taste, color and size qualities.

It's worth keeping in mind, even while considering the climate changes we're enduring, that there have been "Test Winters" (1904, 1917, 1934 & 1981) which were especially cold, proving which varieties really will survive in an area. We lost several great trees with delicious fruit in 1981, the same year that 30% of all commercial apple trees in Quebec died. Bartlett pears also proved they could not be a guaranteed survivor in the Upper Ottawa Valley.

Thankfully, there are many excellent hardy varieties of apple, pear, cherry and plum that have been developed by orchardists in Canada and

the northern USA over the past many years. Challenged by adversity, they arose to it and came thru with flying colors of good fruit for most every locale. I have sought out the research of the Prairie orchardists and found many varieties that are very happy in Zone 3a, while taking a chance in the horticultural lottery with a couple from Zone 4.

For pear trees, I suggest planting trees with rootstocks of *Pyrus Ussurienses* (Harbin Pear). These are from a region of Northern China/Siberia which missed the last Ice Age, thus had a longer time to develop true hardiness. Their genes have been bred into many varieties that are also on the market. They have the benefit as well of being immune to Fire Blight, the scourge of European pears, as well as not attracting many bugs or other diseases.

When planting, keep these principles in mind: Plant your trees far enough apart so they will not touch each other's branches when they are fully mature (yes that little tree will spread to 25 feet wide), plan for good drainage, dig the hole 2 - 2.5 feet deep and wide enough to fit all the roots without bending, put the top soil on the bottom & the sub soil on the top, keep the roots wet until well planted and then water 2 -3 gallons when the hole is half filled and another 2 - 3 gallons when fully planted, then pack the soil well to eliminate all air pockets.

After planting, it's best to water with 5+ gallons 2 -3 times a week minimum for the first growing season. Remember that 90% of the feeder roots are in the top 6 inches of soil. Mulch the "drip line" (outer extent of the branches) well with hay, straw, or rotten old sawdust to help maintain moisture, encourage decomposition right where the feeder roots are, and to help keep the weeds and grass down. Do keep this mulch at least a foot away from the trunk so as not to provide rodents a home with "lunch" too nearby.

With this in mind, do put a plastic or hardware cloth wrap around the tree before winter to discourage rodents and rabbits, and at least as high as the snow drifts in that particular spot. To deter deer, a fence higher and wider than the baby tree is, with three tall stakes will work, though it may need raising as the tree grows. An electric fence will do the necessary work for larger plantings, and even keep away the bears. Obviously we're growing tasty good food.

Well composted manure placed under the mulch before mid-June is the best fertilizer, though foliar feeding before mid-summer, and kelp & ground-up rock mineral soil amendments are also excellent to include under the mulch.

Organic fruit has been called the "Final Frontier of Agriculture", as it is very challenging, especially apples, yet worth it in taste and health safety. It's the way our great-grandparents grew their orchards, though incorporating many new beneficial techniques.

www.groworganicapples.com is a great resource to help with this, as is their book "The Apple Grower".

Integrated pest management (IPM) is another growing practice that is popular and helps keep down the application of chemicals, and their costs.

If you are fortunate enough to live on a farm with an old orchard, it is well worth the effort to re-generate it. First cutting all underbrush and shading trees within 50 feet, then cutting out the dead wood, followed by clearing up the middle so you can climb the tree and the sun and air movement can penetrate it. Using lots of good hay as mulch has been proven in studies to be enough good fertilizer and provides enough habitat restoration to bring them back to health and good productivity.

It can take a new tree 5 to 10 years to come into production, depending on whether it is semi-dwarf or standard. A well maintained standard tree can produce good fruit for about 100 years. Hardy fruit trees provide a great return on investment.

Robbie Anderman is a member of the Ottawa River Institute (www.ottawariverinstitute.ca), a non-profit charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

Pruning Fruit Trees

15 Apr 2010 Robbie Anderman

The best Spring pruning season happens before the buds start opening. Pruning can continue later than that, however, the best effects are achieved before then. With such a fast hot spring stimulating early bud growth the past couple years, pruning has to continue on until the flowers are fully open. These opening flowers can be put into a salad.

Sharp good tools are easiest to use: side cutting hand pruners ("secateurs"), rather than anvil pruners which mash the remaining bark, making healing more challenging for the tree. A hand saw which cuts on the pull stroke is necessary, and best with a scabbard that hangs from the same belt that your pruner's holster is attached to. This enables one to climb the tree or a ladder and have the tools ready to hand and safe from dropping. A pole pruner helps for hard to reach branches/twigs. Only when restoring an old orchard would a chain saw be helpful, such is the quality of hand pruning saws available today.

When cutting a branch, it is best to make the first cut at least six inches further out the branch (under cut first, then cut from the top) to take the weight off for the final cut. The final cut is just at the

end of the "collar" where healing "auxins" are present to help with healing. The collar can be identified by the wrinkles in the bark where the branch meets the next larger branch or trunk. A smooth clean cut is best, with any remaining jagged bark being cut off with a sharp knife. Any stumps left protruding beyond the collar will dry up, crack, and welcome in moisture and rot.

Twigs (and branches) need to be cut to a branch that it comes from so the remaining sap flow can easily move further up the tree. Any branch that is cut off beyond a good fork will likely dry up and die. The exception to this is the "heading" cut on the end of a twig or the main "leader". This is taken to a good strong bud further down which is pointing in a direction you want the branch to grow in. This stimulates a thicker branch and the growth of "laterals" and fruit spurs.

The lowest branch is best to be no higher than three feet (one meter) above the ground. Leaving a branch lower than that will result in fruit and branches being in the fungal zone and possibly on the ground, which makes access to the tree challenging and fruit less than healthy.

Scaffold (main) branches are best when pointing outward in three directions in the circle around the tree. They will spread as they grow to meet each other and fill the whole area. Leaving branches in four directions invites this meeting to happen sooner, and the need for more pruning. On a full size apple tree, scaffold branches in the same direction need to be about three feet (one meter) apart. Again this encourages air and light penetration.

The first obvious cuts to consider after the main structure are: Overly tall leaders, crossing or broken limbs, and branches growing back towards the center or with narrow crotches (less than 45 degrees from vertical).

Never remove more than 1/4 to 1/3 of a tree's wood in one year. It's fine to take 2 - 3 years to get the shape you want.

Summer pruning in late July or early August, particularly of watersprouts arising from spring pruning cuts, and when training young trees encourages fruit bud development over vegetative regrowth. It also allows better sunlight penetration to the ripening fruit, resulting in better color and size. Summer cuts are best limited to branches with a diameter of an one inch or less. These can fully harden off before winter.

Trees are long living plants. The care you lavish on them will be given back in good fruit.

Farming with nature

03 Dec 2009 Ole Hendrickson

This encouraged us to promote local foods, including by supporting the formation of the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative. We were not, of course, the only ones thinking along these lines. The hundred-mile diet, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, seasonal recipes, etc. are now mainstream concepts. Local food is fresher, creates jobs and economic activity, conserves increasingly scarce energy resources, and generally has a smaller environmental footprint.

Two major concerns are driving the shift to local food. First, as oil prices rise, imported food becomes increasingly expensive and unreliable. Second, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, agriculture is responsible for 20-25% of global carbon dioxide emissions owing to fossil fuel use on farms and conversion of forests to agriculture. For the two other major greenhouse gases – methane and nitrous oxide – agriculture's shares of emissions are 55-60%, and 65-80%, respectively.

Here in Canada, we should never forget how fortunate we are to have a climate and soils favourable for farming. Many poorer countries, particularly in the arid parts of the world, can no longer feed their still-growing populations. For them, local food production can mean irrigated agriculture using expensive and energy-intensive desalinization schemes, massive systems of dams and canals, or unsustainable pumping of groundwater aquifers. It may also require extensive use of fertilizers to supplement nutrient-poor soils, and pesticides to deal with insect outbreaks that so often occur in large tracts of a single crop.

Sustainable food production involves a partnership between humans and nature. Farmers who are good stewards of their land are producers not only of nutritious food, but also ecosystem services such as water purification, control of flooding and soil erosion, carbon storage, provision of wildlife habitat, and landscape beautification. A new report on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity calls urgently for better understanding and recognition of these "free gifts", and better ways to reward landowners for them.

Equally urgent is a better appreciation of the gifts nature provides to farmers. Pollination, nitrogen fixation, soil humus formation, rainfall, groundwater recharge, natural pest and disease control: these services provided by healthy, diverse ecosystems make food production sustainable from an energy and environmental perspective. Spiders, beetles, bees, springtails, mites, mosses, bacteria, fungi and others labour ceaselessly and ask no reward.

Most of these services can be replaced – but at considerable economic and environmental cost, and only as long as supplies of fossil fuel last.

Prominent international scientists recently wrote in *Nature* that humanity has already exceeded safe planetary limits for climate change, biodiversity loss, and nitrogen and phosphorus cycles. Climate change and biodiversity loss are familiar issues. But fewer people are aware that agricultural nitrogen and phosphorus pollution has turned parts of the world's oceans – including the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Mexico – into "dead zones", with no oxygen, no fish, and no other higher life forms. The scientists warned that in Earth's geologic history, previous mass extinction events were associated with high amounts of nutrient runoff from land to oceans and a die-off of life in the oceans.

Food can be produced in large amounts to feed urban populations without using fossil fuels and fertilizers. Past civilizations did this for tens of thousands of years. Plant and animal wastes are composted and returned to the land, plants such as beans and peas with nitrogen fixing bacteria in their roots are used in rotation with other crops to maintain fertility, and fuels to power farm equipment are produced and used on the farm itself. Forests and wetlands are strategically

maintained in the broader landscape to maintain hydrologic cycle.

Sustainable local food production systems will be essential if humans are to have a future on this planet.

Ole Hendrickson is President of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Upper Ottawa Valley. For more information please visit www.ottawariverinstitute.ca.

OVFC Buying Guide Coming; Watch for It!

06 Aug 2009 Janet McNeill

OVFC operates in close collaboration with the Ottawa River Institute, and has received funding (through ORI) from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, as well as from the Eastern Ontario Development Program (Renfrew County Community Futures Development Corporation). OVFC is also the proud recipient of a 2008 Premier's Award for Agri-Food Excellence and Innovation.

Membership in OVFC has been increasing steadily since March 2008, and draws from communities all over the Ottawa Valley. It now boasts a total of 232 members, of which 35 are producer members.

Delivery days take place once per month, usually the 3rd Saturday of the month. Members place an order on the OVFC Web site, producers deliver their products to a central "hub" in Pembroke, and volunteer "route managers" then fan the food out across the County to 6 different pick-up locations (for example, I am the "route manager" for Deep River. Local members pick up their food from my house after I've helped sort it down in Pembroke and have driven it up here).

While OVFC does have two part-time paid staff, the operations of the co-op depend very heavily on a keen corps of volunteers and volunteer Board members.

If you would like more information about the co-op, its producer members, how ordering and delivery work, and how to join, you can visit www.ottawavalleyfood.org

One of the food co-op's current projects is the creation of a local food-buying guide, slated for release very soon.

The purpose of this brand-new guide is to showcase *all* aspects of the local food production and buying scene. So while the Guide does profile OVFC's producer members, it also provides information about all the farmers' markets in the Valley, the pick-your-own farms, a local CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) operation, as well as a large number of other local area producers.

The Buying Guide will be made available to all OVFC consumer and producer members, and at all OVFC-sponsored events and workshops (such as the 'From Seed to Jar' growing/canning event in Pembroke on September 5th) and at any and all events OVFC takes part in. This will include this Fall's 'Rural Ramble,' the weekend of September 26-27th and the 'Taste of the Valley' events planned for Friday, August 21st in Barry's Bay and October 17th in Cobden.

Summer and early Fall are the very best times to celebrate everything to do with growing (and eating!) good food. OVFC's new Buying Guide will be a boon in helping locate the sources of local food of all kinds, from meat to produce, maple syrup to baked goods. Watch for it!

Janet McNeill is a member of both Ottawa River Institute and the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative, of which she is a founding board member. For more information about ORI, go to www.ottawariverinstitute.ca For more information about OVFC, go to www.ottawavalleyfood.org

The dandelions are coming!

15 May 2009 Lynn Jones

What a beautiful time of year! A profusion of leaves and flowers erupting from the ground and from bare branches, providing food for an amazing host of our fellow creatures and a feast of beauty for human eyes.

This year we are really excited about the dandelions coming. Last year I ate buckets and buckets of dandelion leaves (blended in smoothies with other more palatable ingredients) that my daughter Grace picked for me as part of a health regimen i was on. I got to appreciate the very bitter flavour and I believe they had a powerful cleansing effect on my system. We also dried and roasted dandelion roots and I really enjoyed hot beverages made from the ground powder mixed with coffee and on its own.

This year I plan to eat lots more dandelion leaves and branch out into eating flower buds and petals. There are lots of interesting recipes on the internet for using dandelions. The best collection I have found is at Prodigal Gardens (<<http://www.prodigalgardens.info/>>). It includes recipes for Cream of Dandelion soup, Dandelion Blossom Cake, Dandelion Chai and the best instructions I've found for preparing roasted dandelion roots.

There are so many reasons to get excited about the annual arrival of this wonderful, ubiquitous perennial that was brought to North America generations ago by early settlers. Here's a list of the top nine:

1. Children love them for their sunny yellow flowers and even more for the mature seed heads that my daughters calls "Wishing dandelions."
2. You can make dandelion wine from them. I'm told that about one gallon of flowers makes a gallon of wine. One recipe I saw recently called for lemons, limes, oranges, ginger and cloves in addition to dandelion blossoms. Are there any tried and true Ottawa Valley recipes for dandelion wine out there?
3. Dandelions are very nutritious. Many studies show dandelions to be rich in vitamins C, D and B-complex and minerals such as magnesium, iron, copper, phosphorus, zinc, potassium and manganese. Dandelions have the highest Vitamin A content of all greens and according to a USDA food composition bulletin, dandelions rank in the top four green vegetables in overall nutritional value. As mentioned above, there are all kinds of ways to eat them but the most common are sautéed or added raw to a salad.
4. Dandelions have many medicinal properties and a long history of use as medicine. In fact the Latin name for dandelion, "Taraxacum officinal" means "official remedy for disorders". For over a century,

taraxacum officinale was regarded as an official drug in the United States, and the dried root remains listed in the U.S. pharmacopoeia. Its primary pharmacological activities relate to digestion, liver function and diuresis. High in insulin, the plant has demonstrated experimental hypoglycemic activity in several animal studies. Dandelion also appears in the Pharmacopeias of Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union and is one of the top six herbs in the Chinese herbal medicine chest.

5. Dandelions provide food for pollinating insects. The dandelion apparently ranks high among honey-producing plants and dandelions are the main food source for at least 93 different kinds of insects. Because of this, they attract beneficial insects like ladybugs (which are beneficial because they love to eat aphids).

6. They improve the soil where they grow. Dandelions bring up minerals from the hard pan beneath the soil. Their long tap roots go down two to three feet into the ground. When the plants die, they leave behind tunnels that allow air, water and earthworms to penetrate. Decomposing dandelions provide mineral-rich composted matter to the soil.

7. Dandelions can be used to make organic dyes; flowers provide a rich yellow and the entire plant produces a rich magenta.

8. They can be used as a beauty aid. European women have for centuries used dandelion in the form of a strong infusion to invigorate the skin, to help lighten their freckles, and as a refreshing addition to a herbal bath.

9. You can make a tasty coffee-substitute from them. Roasted and ground dandelion root makes a good caffeine-free "backwoods coffee."

Lynn Jones is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering sustainable communities in the Ottawa River watershed. ORI is supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, local donors and volunteers. For more information please visit <http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca>

Growing healthy organic food at the Corner Garden

14 May 2009 Lynn Epps

With the help of staff, pine needles, grass clippings and leaves were gathered up from around the property and delivered to the edge of the garden. A gazebo was built to offer shade to the participants and a shed built to keep the tools out of the weather. A second site was established at one of the building's south-facing walls for wind protection and the brick's warmth. This is home for varieties of tomatoes and herbs.

The Corner Garden, as it has come to be known, is a 100 x 100 ft plot that has been divided into approximately 20 individual plots worked by community members. There are very few rules. Participants are allowed access to the use of tools and supplies and, of course, to the healthy, locally grown produce of their plots. Some share with other members and the community, others need all they grow for their own use. In return, they are required to plant and maintain their garden. No pesticides are allowed, organic practices are supported such as mulching, green manures and heritage seed planting. Resources are available and individuals with such knowledge are on site.

Growing our own food with saved seed using organic methods is being revived across North America as we are reminded of our responsibility to our families, the earth and all its inhabitants. Returning to practices that were so routine a short generation or two ago, is a practice that offers security, community and a feeling of well being. Some might wish to learn the art of growing food from seed to table, or to offer their experience to others. Whatever the reason, all are welcome to participate.

To learn more about the Corner Garden and/or to get involved, call the Marguerite Centre at (613)732-9926, go online to the Web site <<http://www.margueritecentre.com/>> or contact Lynne at (613) 735-2070.

Lynne Epps is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit charitable organization based in the Upper Ottawa Valley. ORI is supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, local donors and volunteers. We welcome new members. ORI's mission is to foster sustainable communities in the Ottawa Valley. For more information, please visit the Web site at <<http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/>>

Food comes from our ancestors

17 Apr 2009 Ole Hendrickson

We eat plants and animals, breaking down carbohydrates and other molecules into carbon dioxide, which also returns to the air.

Most of us learn this in school, even if it sounds more like magic than science. Carbon, hydrogen and oxygen are the main elements in our bodies. Take them away and not much else is left. We come from the sky.

While all plants are made this way, humans cannot eat most plant (or animal) species. Of the roughly 350,000 plant species on this planet, about 70,000 are potentially edible, 5000 are used as food, but only 30 species make up over half the plant food in our diets.

We seldom think about how we came to eat the species that we do. But we are standing on the shoulders of giants. Early humans were superb plant and animal breeders, selecting from among thousands of wild species growing in their environment a few that could be domesticated for human use. Native Americans were particularly clever in domesticating plants, developing potatoes, tomatoes, corn, beans and squash, to name only a few.

Humans almost forgot where our plant foods came from. When people traveled around the world in search of new lands they brought seeds with them. We make heroes out of our ancestors who were pioneers and explorers. But in terms of our survival, the real heroes stayed put longer, got to know the wild plants in their area, and domesticated and farmed some of them as food crops.

A Russian scientist, Vavilov, helped us remember this by identifying a limited number of "centers of origin" of our food crops. Wild plant relatives still grow in some of these areas.

Canada has only a few native crop plants, such as blueberries. We rely on the sweat and toil of our ancestors from around the world. They feed us. Without their efforts, there would be no agriculture. A relatively small number of people might live on this planet, hunting and gathering wild foods.

The variety of foods available to the present generation of humans represents millennia of careful

selection, breeding and nurturing of plants and animals. Humans have also cleverly used microorganisms for fermented foods and drinks: beer and wine, cheeses, yogurt, sauerkraut, and so forth.

We treat these wonderful gifts from our ancestors carelessly. In the past few decades much of the wealth of food varieties has been lost. Irreplaceable genetic diversity has been sacrificed to high-yield industrial agriculture.

Today, many more people are aware of the dangers of losing crop plant diversity. Organizations such as Seeds of Diversity promote saving and sharing of more than 2400 varieties of heritage fruits and vegetables in Canada.

Genetic diversity within food species provides nutrition, taste, and beauty; and resistance to insect pests and diseases. Losing diversity makes famines and food crises much more likely. Farmers who grow and breed heritage plant and livestock varieties are modern-day heroes, nurturing the gifts of our ancestors.

Ole Hendrickson is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, anon-profit charitable organization based in the Upper Ottawa Valley. ORI gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation and local donors. For more information about ORI please visit the Web site at <<http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/>>

Making it easy to buy the food your neighbour grows!

20 Mar 2009 Lynn Jones

Fortunately for us here in the Ottawa Valley, there is an innovative new way to buy local foods year round. It is called the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative (OVFC) and it just celebrated its first successful year of operations at an AGM in Pembroke on February 14.

The surprising variety of delicious local foods available through the OVFC includes local lamb, pork, beef, all manner of vegetables, herbs, preserves, baked goods, condiments, herbal teas and more. The Co-op has grown rapidly since its startup a year ago. Membership has increased from 25 to 180 and monthly sales have increased from \$1000 to around \$6000.

The OVFC has been nominated for the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence. Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the award recognizes innovators who contribute to the success of Ontario's farming sector. The OVFC has a chance to win a cash prize of \$5000 as one of 55 regional award winners. It also has a shot at the Minister's Award of up to \$50,000 and a Premier's Award of up to \$100,000.

So what is so innovative about the OVFC? The Co-op uses the power of the Internet to make it easy to buy and sell local foods in the Ottawa Valley. Through its Web site, <<http://www.ottawavalleyfood.org/>>, the Co-op brings producers and consumers together, while reducing food miles, stimulating the local economy and enabling us to "buy the food our neighbours grow."

Here's how the OVFC works: Once a month, producers post all the products they have available on the Web site. Customers have one week to peruse the monthly offerings and click on items they want to add to their shopping basket, all from the comfort of their homes. Sophisticated software tallies up the

consumers' orders and sends them to the producers. It also produces labels, invoices, and master lists of products sold.

On delivery day, a week after the ordering period, producers cooperate to get the food to a central location for sorting where individual customer orders are prepared. Orders are then sent back to consumers via several different delivery routes. Many volunteers help make the system work, acting as route managers and helping to sort orders at the central location.

This system is very efficient. Let's say 100 consumers each order ten different items from producers all over the Valley. Buying these items at the farm gate could require one thousand car trips around the valley. Instead, five route managers make one trip each to the central location on delivery day. They bring items from producers with them and take back completed orders to drop-off points where the customers can pick them up. This saves time, energy and fossil fuels.

Efficiency and reduced food-miles are not the only reasons the OVFC makes sense. Co-op members get to connect with local producers and contribute to our local economy. There are social benefits as well: members have fun working for a common cause that we can all relate to - good local food from a healthy environment and strong local economy! And there is one more little secret added benefit: on delivery day there are always lots of samples of wonderfully delicious local treats for volunteers to enjoy when the sorting is done.

The OVFC welcomes new members. Anyone can join! Details are available on the Web site at <http://www.ottawavalleyfood.org>. A one-time membership fee and a small sales commission on each order help pay for expenses of running the Co-op.

Internet buddies are available for anyone who would like to join but doesn't use the Internet. For more information on this call Christina Anderman, the OVFC Co-ordinator, at 613-757-3044.

The Ottawa River Institute is very happy to have played a role in getting the OVFC up and running. Two years ago, ORI helped organize a weekend workshop at the Marguerite Centre in Pembroke where Bob Waldrop of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative (<http://www.oklahomafood.coop/>) taught the nuts and bolts of setting up an Internet-based food co-op. After the workshop an enthusiastic group of volunteers came together to develop the OVFC; support was provided during the organizing phase by Paul Schwartzentruber of the Marguerite Centre and ORI coordinator Cheryl Keetch. The Ottawa River Institute is continuing to collaborate with the OVFC through a 2-year project, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, to promote local foods.

Lynn Jones is a member of both the ORI and the OVFC. For more information about ORI, please visit the Web site at <http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/>

Seedy Sunday Celebrates Diversity & Cooperation

17 Mar 2009 Lynn Jones

The first Seedy Saturday was held in Vancouver in 1989 – and they now take place all across Canada. Seeds of Diversity (formerly Canada's Heritage Seed Program) is the group behind these special events and lists all of them on their Web site. "Seeds of Diversity is a Canadian charitable organization dedicated to the conservation, documentation and use of public-domain non-hybrid plants of Canadian significance.

Our 1400 members from coast to coast are gardeners, farmers, teachers, scientists, agricultural historians, researchers and seed vendors. Together we grow, propagate and distribute over 1900 varieties of vegetables, fruit, grains, flowers and herbs. We are a living gene bank” (from the Seed of Diversity Web site).

The Ottawa Valley’s second annual “Seedy Sunday” – held on Sunday, March 8, 2009 – was a party! Attended by 500 or more keen local residents and visitors, the event was a rousing success. There was food, there were door prizes, there were exhibits of many kinds – there was even music! Not to mention plenty of good old fashioned socializing. The day was punctuated by four very well-attended presentations: “Extending the Beauty of the Perennial Garden into the Fall,” “Growing up Organic,” “Saving Your Own Seeds,” and “Worms Making Black Gold.” Another highlight of the day was a swap table where attendees swapped seeds and other gardening items, or donated items if they didn’t have anything to swap. The swap table is sure to become more popular each year as more people remember to bring their own seeds and gardening items to trade with others.

Of course there were also plenty of seeds to buy! Five seed-saving vendors from within a four-hour drive came to sell their seeds, most of them having just attended Seedy Saturday in Ottawa the day before. There were also seed catalogues made available by additional vendors unable to attend. Seedy events are the best places to meet so many of these experienced seed savers and to learn about the history and growing tips for the seeds being sold.

Sponsored locally by the Ottawa River Institute (ORI) and organized by volunteers, the non-profit event was a real triumph of cooperation. ORI was the sponsor, the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative put on a “100-Mile Lunch” featuring local foods, Fellowes H.S. students in the Hospitality and Tourism program did the lunch prep, other Fellowes students sold their plants and gave greenhouse tours, many non-profit groups provided information, and local Renfrew County-area producers offered silent auction and door prize items. A small army of enthusiastic volunteers contributed their time to help make the day such a huge success.

Sister Miriam McGillis (of Genesis Farm in New Jersey) once said, “Creativity is about the extravagances of variety” – and we all know the old saying about variety being the spice of life.

This Seedy event was about variety, the value of diversity, cooperation, and the incredible commitment and energy of local individuals and organizations increasingly passionate about moving toward more local and sustainable living.

To learn more about the Ottawa River Institute, visit www.ottawariverinstitute.ca

For more information about Seeds of Diversity, visit www.seeds.ca

More information about the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative can be found at www.ottawavalleyfood.org

Janet McNeill is a member of both the Ottawa River Institute and the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative. Please visit the ORI and OVFC Web sites for more information.

Eating locally no hardship, even in March!

01 Mar 2009 Janet McNeill

I see the truth of this quite powerfully in my own life, and particularly so with my eating habits, as I watch them continue to evolve. Since becoming involved with the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative (OVFC) and a member of the Rainbow Heritage Garden Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), I've made a real point of eating both more locally and more "in season." The neat thing is, I'm not finding this "hard" or a "challenge," I'm enjoying it! Since I know a focus on eating more locally is good for local producers and the local economy, and also for environmental and my own health, it sure seems like a win-win-win proposition to me!

Now, I don't want to give the impression that I've suddenly become totally virtuous, or that I manage to eat 100% locally; although I'd like that to be true, it's a bit too early for the halo yet! But, for one example, I've learned to really enjoy some foods that didn't used to be part of my repertoire, e.g. squash and beets, and I'm quite happy about that.

Although I had avoided squash all my adult life, I've now taken to eating a variety of squash types, and in a variety of forms. I've made squash soup and "pumpkin loaf" (using squash), and I've also had a highly delicious meal of locally-made tomato sauce (bought through the OVFC) served over locally-grown spaghetti squash - and it was delicious! I even discovered a pizza recipe that uses spaghetti squash (or zucchini) instead of wheat-based flour products, and although I haven't yet tried my local pesto (again, bought through the OVFC) with spaghetti squash - or my friend Cheryl's delicious spiced pumpkin squares - I know I will!

It's possible that I eat less meat than most Valley residents, but when I do, it's usually local! I do my best to buy eggs from a local supplier as well. As it happens, by the way, I'm not one of those people who "just loves to cook!" I'm more the "Well - I have to eat, so I guess I'll have to cook" type - so readers need not fear that this local food message applies only to super-keener "foodie" types!

Another big and very welcome change for me this winter is that I'm finally making use of the "cold room" in my basement. That's where some of the local squash, carrots, potatoes, pumpkin, beets and garlic have been hanging out.

Another big change is that I stopped buying bananas last fall, and lo and behold, this hasn't proven to be a big deal at all! I'm not saying everyone has to suddenly stop buying them - just that I did, and my world hasn't actually fallen apart. I'm eating lots of apples, and since according to old lore "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," this may not be such a bad thing!

Local food is good for us in a variety of ways, perhaps more ways than we even yet know. I'm happy to be able to pass along the good news that different eating habits can be easier to adopt than one might suppose. If I can become a fan of squash after a 30-year avoidance plan, many things are possible!

Janet McNeill is a member of both the Ottawa River Institute <<http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/>> and the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative <<http://www.ottawavalleyfood.org/>>. Please visit the ORI and OVFC Web sites for more information.

Feed the World

26 Apr 2008 Ole Hendrickson

Governments of rich countries around the world are giving out huge amounts of taxpayer dollars to subsidize the production of automotive fuel from foodstuffs - ethanol from corn and wheat, biodiesel from soybeans and canola. Canada alone announced \$1.5 billion in subsidies in the 2007 federal budget.

This money was supposed to develop a renewable biofuel industry, reduce fossil fuel consumption, and slow the release of carbon dioxide that causes global warming. They used to say "Agriculture feeds the world." Now it's "Agriculture feeds the cars."

Crop-based biofuels actually have very limited potential to offset greenhouse gases. Growing and harvesting grain, converting it to ethanol, and transporting it to the pump all consume lots of fossil fuels. The net return of biomass energy for fossil fuel energy invested is small. Growing corn with nitrogen fertilizers releases additional greenhouse gases. Total greenhouse gas emissions from burning corn-based bioethanol can be greater than from burning gasoline.

But grain farmers love the biofuel bonanza. If prices slump in food markets, they can sell to energy markets. And energy prices are headed to the stratosphere. After many lean decades, farmers are actually making a profit.

For developing countries, biofuels are a catastrophe. Famine was once a rural phenomenon, tied to natural disasters such as droughts and floods. But now poor families in cities can no longer afford to feed themselves. Riots are destabilizing governments from Bangladesh to Haiti.

Regional food shortages are nothing new. There's always been enough food as long as there was some way to spread it around.

But starvation is now becoming globalized.

The United Nations World Food Programme buys and distributes food in response to regional shortages. Canada is a generous donor. But the money we give doesn't go nearly as far as it used to. United Nations officials are warning of a crisis and asking for more.

Do we tell them that our cars need grain more than poor people? Do we tell them, "Sorry, our need to pretend we're doing something about climate change is more important than your survival"?

Biofuel subsidies link food and energy prices by funnelling grain into transportation fuel markets. As the price of a barrel of oil goes up, so does the price of a barrel of bioethanol. Arguably, this is the main driver for the rapid current rise in food prices. But it is by no means the only one.

As family incomes grow in countries like China, people want more meat in their diets. Cattle and hog feeding operations consume huge amounts of grain that could feed people directly.

We may love those hamburgers and bacon, but their price is also now tied to the price of a barrel of oil. With feed costs skyrocketing, the prospect for smaller hog and cattle producers is grim. Even large producers are feeling the pinch.

Avoiding global starvation and destabilization of poorer countries will require policy changes. Canada's federal and provincial governments should rethink crop-based biofuel subsidies. Wood-based bioenergy is a much better investment, particularly during the current slump in the housing market.

As individual consumers, we can drive less, walk more, buy local foods, eat grass-fed rather than grain-fed beef, and generally reduce the percentage of meat in our diets. You can improve your health while helping feed the world.

Watershed Ways is a regular publication of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and local donors. For more information about ORI, call 613-333-5534 or visit <<http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca>>

Seedy Sunday helps to revive heirloom vegetables

17 Feb 2008 Lynn Jones

The umbrella organization for these seed exchanges is called Seeds of Diversity Canada (SODC) www.seeds.ca. It is one of several seed-saving networks that have sprung up around the world in recent decades to save heirloom varieties of food plants from extinction.

According to SODC, a century ago, millions of seed-saving gardeners and farmers kept our plant varieties alive. They maintained thousands of "heritage" or "heirloom" varieties as a normal part of traditional agricultural practice. But in modern times, people stopped saving their own seeds, leaving the job up to seed companies.

As a result, plant genetic diversity is rapidly disappearing. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that since the beginning of the 20th century, about 75% of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops has been lost worldwide. For example, of more than 7,000 apple varieties in use in the 1800's, about 90% have been lost. Similarly, more than 90% of the cabbage, field corn and pea varieties and 80% of tomato varieties no longer exist.

Plant genetic diversity is an extremely valuable resource. It makes living systems adaptable. It allows wild and domesticated species to withstand threats like diseases, climate changes, pests, and other unpredictable conditions. With enough variation in a group, there will always be some individuals that are naturally suited to survive and can thrive under any changing situation. According to SODC, diversity in plants thus gives us a "treasure chest" of options for raising the healthiest and most productive crops no matter what changes happen in our food system.

Helping to conserve what's left of agricultural plant diversity, SODC's 1400 members collect, grow, and share thousands of varieties of open-pollinated heirloom vegetables, fruits, grains, herbs, and flowers. "Open Pollinated" is a horticultural term meaning that the plant will produce seeds naturally which will in turn, when planted, reliably reproduce the same plant as the parent.

SODC also maintains a large database on over 19,000 heritage plants of Canada including descriptions, historical information, cultivation details and gardener's comments. This database contains information on almost 5,000 varieties of tomatoes!

Tomatoes it seems are even more popular with heirloom seed savers than they are with ordinary gardeners. Tomato seeds feature prominently in the on-line catalogs of many heirloom seed companies, one of which has 237 varieties of tomato seed for sale this year in many different shapes, sizes, colours and flavor variations.

Saving seeds used to be one of those skills passed down from parents and grandparents to their children and grandchildren. Since that is no longer the case, Seedy Sunday in Pembroke will include a presentation on "Saving Your Own Seeds" by Cheri from Seeds of Creation, an heirloom seed vendor from Combermere. Other presentations will include "Organic Gardening and Community Supported Agriculture" by Steve Martyn of the Algonquin Tea company, The Urban Seed Orchard by Marshall Buchanan of Moonlight Crofters Organic Farm, and Re-localizing the Food System and the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative by Cheryl Keetch of the Ottawa River Institute

Seed vendors are coming to Pembroke for Seedy Sunday from Ottawa, West Quebec, Kingston and Combermere; they will include Seeds of Creation, Gretas Organic Gardens, Seed Sanctuary (Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent), Heritage Seed and Produce, Eternal Seeds, and La Ferme de Boullion.

Seedy Sunday in Pembroke is sponsored by the Ottawa River Institute. There is no charge for admission. Everyone is welcome to attend this event which offers workshops, seed vendors, local musicians, an exchange table, door prizes and refreshments. Proceeds from the day will go to Seeds of Diversity Canada. For more information, please call Claire Lepine at 613-628-1836 or Pat Tamosetis at 613-625-2277

Calling All Locavores!

10 Feb 2008 Janet McNeill

The Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative (OVFC) is part of this shift - a global movement to re-localize diets and get back to eating more like our grandparents did. There are many compelling reasons to "eat local," not least of which is the fact that current diets rely heavily on fossil fuels that are about to start getting less abundant and much more expensive. Other reasons include benefits to the local economy and food producers, the vastly smaller "ecological footprint" of local diets, and of course culinary advantages -- local foods are unique rather than uniform, they are fresh and they taste great!

Besides spawning food cooperatives such as the OVFC, the worldwide local food movement has contributed to the resurgence of farmers, markets and the burgeoning "Community Supported Agriculture" approach wherein folks buy "shares" in a farm or market garden ahead of the growing season. The local food movement can also claim partial responsibility for the increasing popularity of home and community vegetable gardens.

Interest in the concept of local eating has soared in recent years, thanks to media attention such as the June 2006 story in Time Magazine, "The Lure of the 100 Mile Diet" and a number of recent best-selling books such as Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, by Barbara Kingsolver, Coming Home to Eat, by Gary Paul Nabham and the Hundred Mile Diet by Alisa Smith and J.B. McKinnon.

Part of the impetus behind the formation of the Ottawa Valley Food Co-operative was the visit to the Ottawa Valley one year ago by a dynamic local food advocate from Oklahoma City named Bob Waldrop. Bob is the president of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative (OFC), an innovative meeting place for producers and consumers of local food in the Oklahoma area that has grown rapidly since its inception in 2002.

After an inspiring weekend with Waldrop at the Marguerite Centre in Pembroke, the local steering committee for a Renfrew County version of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative practically formed itself. It turned out there were lots of other folks in the area who were interested in helping move the project forward. Funding from the Ontario Cooperative Association and support from the Ottawa River Institute helped propel the group toward incorporation, which was granted on December 19th, 2007.

So what's in store for anyone who joins the OVFC?

For a small lifetime membership fee, members will be able to buy and sell local foods using an innovative Internet-based system. Each producer will have their own unique Web-pages as part of the overall OVFC Web site and they will be encouraged and assisted to tell folks all about their farm and the foods they have for sale. Customers will be able to peruse OVFC Web pages that will profile a wide array of wonderful local foods and related products including beef, pork, all manner of vegetables, fruits, teas, maple syrup, herbs, preserves, honey and much more. Once a month, or perhaps more often during summer months, there will be an order processing and delivery day where products are collected and redistributed throughout the Ottawa Valley, possibly in collaboration with local farmers' markets. There will also be opportunities to sample local delicacies and share local recipes and techniques for food preservation.

One caveat may be in order.... joining the OVFC just might turn you into a "locavore."

According to the Wikipedia:

- a **locavore** is someone who eats food grown or produced locally
- the New Oxford American Dictionary chose **locavore** as its word of the year 2007
- the local foods movement is gaining momentum as people discover that the best-tasting and most sustainable choices are foods that are fresh, seasonal, and grown close to home!

To find out more about the OVFC, call Reuben Stone at 613-281-2734 or Janet McNeill at 613-584-2101 or come to the meeting on February 17th!

Lynn Jones is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley. For more information about ORI, call 613-333-5534 or visit <http://www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/>

A world of compost

23 Jun 2007

Municipal governments here in the upper Ottawa Valley operate a state-of-the-art central composting facility. The contents of our green carts (mainly kitchen and yard wastes) are collected, turned into rich black compost, and sold to local gardeners.

Would that municipal governments everywhere followed this practice. Most large Canadian municipalities simply dump organic wastes with metals, plastic, construction debris, etc. Instead of being transformed into life-giving compost, wastes form a rotting mass that contaminates groundwater by leaching toxic chemicals and heavy metals, and accelerates global warming by releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Nature makes compost, everywhere, all the time.

For every species of green plant, bird, mammal, amphibian or reptile, there are dozens of species of miniature soil animals, fungi, and bacteria. And when animals defecate, or shed skin, fur, antlers, and so forth; or when plants drop their leaves and branches; the world's miniature maintenance workers are standing by, ready to tidy up.

Step off the pavement, and there is a complex living world under your feet. You probably have never even heard of nematodes, collembola (also known as springtails), oribatid mites, or enchytraeid worms. Yet thousands of species of these creatures are underfoot anywhere you go, busily munching away on bits of fallen leaves, flowers, grass clippings, bark - and each other.

Some soil animals engage in something similar to central composting. Ants are the best example. They gather food scraps and use them in fungus gardens, where they tend and harvest fungi to feed the ant colony. Earthworms pull leaves down into their burrows, where, instead of drying out on the soil surface, they become moist and nutritious, filled with fungi and bacteria.

Soil animals get most of their nutritional needs from microorganisms - fungi and bacteria - contained in the organic wastes that they consume. The microbes feed directly on the decaying wastes, and soil animals feed on the microbes. Animals also act as food processors, reducing wastes into smaller and smaller particles, exposing new surfaces for microbial attack.

They also help distribute soil microbes to new locations. As a soil mite walks about, its tiny footprints leave behind tracks of fungal spores, ready to germinate and grow if they are lucky enough to land on a suitable location.

Fungi themselves are highly diverse and specialized. Consider a pine needle: After several years on the tree it turns yellow and is ready to be shed. Airborne spores of yeasts and other "sugar fungi" colonize the needle while it is still attached. They grow and soak up readily available sugars, starches, and other carbohydrates. When the needle hits the ground, other types of soil fungi invade its center, which is relatively moist, and decay it from the inside out.

When only the least tasty parts of the needle are left, basidiomycete fungi take over. These large, mushroom-forming fungi have strands, or "hyphae", that extend throughout the soil. Through their hyphae they move energy and nutrients from richer locations into the needle remnants and complete the decay process. When they are done most of the pine needle has been converted into carbon dioxide. Small remaining amounts of organic matter make soil fertile by retaining moisture and soil nutrients.

Few scientists study soil organisms. Groups such as nematodes contain large numbers of species that scientists have never even named. We know very little about why there are so many different species, and what they do.

While our knowledge of soil organisms is embarrassingly limited, their importance cannot be overstated. Human life utterly depends on their waste management and soil fertilization services.

Our food choices affect the environment

31 Mar 2007

For a sustainable future, buy local food as much as possible. Support food co-ops, farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture. Eat organic food whenever possible - not only to reduce your exposure to residual hormones, antibiotics and pesticides but because organic methods are better for the larger ecosystems that support all life.

Cows, pigs and chickens that are allowed to range freely, fed on natural pasture as much of the year as possible, and raised without hormones and antibiotics are better for you and for the environment.

Animals grown in large feedlots and factory farms produce more waste than the local environment can handle. This fouls the air and water.

A new report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization says that the livestock sector is stressing many ecosystems and contributing to global environmental problems. Greenhouse gas emissions from livestock and their wastes, and from conversion of tropical forests into pastures, are an important factor in climate change. Livestock operations are also a major source of water pollution.

The UN report refers to the "provider gets - polluter pays" principle. Farmers and ranchers who are good environmental stewards deserve compensation for the ecosystem services they provide - such as maintaining water quantity and quality for downstream users, and storing carbon in a well-managed landscape of pastures, woodlands and wetlands. Those who pollute should pay.

When livestock operations are dotted around the landscape, animal manure represents a valuable fertilizer resource. When livestock is concentrated in factory farms, manure becomes waste.

Today in North America, cheap grain subsidized by US taxpayers is shipped from miles around to centralized animal production facilities. Hog factory farms can have 100,000 animals confined indoors, living on slats through which their wastes drop into huge sewage cesspools.

After slaughter, these mass-produced animals are shipped all over the continent. Shipping wastes fossil fuels and contributes to climate change. Artificially low grain prices - maintained through political lobbying by powerful corporations - are at the root of this unsustainable system.

Organizations such as the Husbandry Institute encourage consumers to exercise their buying power on behalf of a better environment. If you buy meat, ask:

- What can you tell me about where this meat comes from?
- Was it raised without antibiotics and added hormones?
- Was it free range and pasture-fed from birth?

The same considerations apply to eggs and dairy products.

A "cheap food" system stresses families, rural communities, and the environment. It traps farmers into using bigger equipment, more fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides and pesticides, genetically-modified seeds, buying out their neighbours' lands, draining wetlands, and employing foreign workers under unacceptable conditions.

The international Waterkeeper Alliance has launched a "Pure Farms, Pure Waters" campaign. It operates on a dual principle. Laws protecting water, air and workers should be strengthened and strictly enforced. And, farmers and concerned citizens should work together for environmentally and socially conscious food production, as an alternative to factory farming.

The Ottawa River Institute is promoting locally grown foods, farmers' markets, and food coops. Local food is not just a summer affair. We are rediscovering ways to store vegetables and fruits during our long Canadian winters, and experimenting with heritage varieties that keep better.

Promoting a diverse mixture of animals, vegetable, fruit and nut crops grown locally provides healthier diets and more sustainable economies. The UN report notes that government policies to reduce consumer demands on the livestock sector would "ease environmental pressure and costs."

As they say, you are what you eat. This applies to nations as well as individuals.

Singing the praises of cabbage...

10 Feb 2007 Lynn Jones

Fortunately there's cabbage!

Cabbage is very nutritious, being full of important nutrients like Vitamin C and many other beneficial vitamins, minerals and chemical compounds. It is available year round and can be stored for months on end without the use of electricity if a cool, dark place such as a traditional root cellar is available. There is no need to transport it long distances since it grows well in temperate climates around the world. It is available in many different varieties.

The humble cabbage is delicious and much more versatile than most people realize. The possibilities for complementing and dressing shredded raw cabbage are endless. My current favourite is shredded cabbage, with diced celery, minced garlic, mayo, chopped dill pickles, salt and pepper.

Dressed with sesame oil, garlic, ginger, a little sugar and vinegar (with or without sprouts) cabbage becomes an Asian treat. Or try olive oil, lime juice, chopped jalapeno, maple syrup and cumin seeds for a Mexican flavour. If you're short of time, keep it really simple and just use any prepared dressing that you like. We witnessed a minor miracle last night in our house when I served finely chopped green cabbage dressed simply with bottled ranch dressing to our kids and they emphatically declared that it was good!

Cabbage lends itself well to fermentation, the ancient food preservation method that relies on naturally-present bacteria to partially break down and preserve food without spoiling it. Humans facilitate the process by providing salty brine, cool temperatures and a low-oxygen environment. The best-known products of this age-old preservation method are sauerkraut and Korean kimchee. I especially love

kimchee and have successfully made it in a gallon jar on my kitchen counter using Nappa cabbage, jalapeno pepper, garlic, ginger, honey, cider vinegar, salt and paprika.

Detailed instructions for making sauerkraut and kimchee are available on the internet and in books such as *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Ellix Katz (also see the website by the same name). Katz emphasizes the healthful aspects of fermented vegetables, pointing out that their consumption helps to foster "micro" biodiversity in the human digestive system which, like any other ecosystem, functions most effectively when populated by diverse species of organisms.

Historical and botanical evidence indicates that cabbage has been cultivated for more than 4,000 years and used extensively as a medicinal herb as well as for food. Cato the Elder of Rome (circ 200BCE) is said to have praised cabbage as the "first of all vegetables" and declared that because of cabbage, ancient Romans existed without doctors for six centuries.

Cabbage in the form of poultices and compresses is still a highly-valued folk remedy for inflammation, skin problems, migraine headaches and many other maladies. A recent discussion in the *British Medical Journal* notes the long-standing use of cabbage poultices for acute inflammation. Proven medicinal benefits of eating raw cabbage include anti-cancer, anti-ulcer and immune-boosting properties.

An anonymous cabbage aficionado in cyberspace has sagely declared February 17th to be World Cabbage Day, "A day of international culinary delight and desire...A day in which the pleasure and simplicity of the cabbage is celebrated." On this day we are urged by the mystery webmaster to "Celebrate! Eat cabbages and be merry." I see no reason not to follow this advice!

We are in good company as we celebrate and enjoy the humble cabbage. Well-known Scottish-Canadian poet Robert W. Service, most famous for his poem "*The Cremation of Sam McGee*", deeply appreciated the virtues cabbage (as well as those of simplicity and humility) in his poem, "*A Cabbage Patch*". *Here is the closing stanza:*

*And so I mock at fame,
With books unread;
No monument I claim
When I am dead;
Contented as I see
My cottage thatch
That my last goal should be
--A cabbage patch.*

Lynn Jones is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit charitable organization supported by volunteers, local donors and a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. There is no charge for membership in the Ottawa River Institute. We welcome new members who share our vision. Join on-line at www.ottawariverinstitute.ca/join-us

Charismatic local food advocate coming to the Ottawa Valley

04 Feb 2007 Lynn Jones

One of the most charismatic proponents of eating simply and locally is Robert Waldrop, a 4th generation food producer and founder of the Oklahoma Food Coop, an organization that connects local producers

and consumers in the state of Oklahoma. In three short years, the coop has grown from 60 members to almost 1,000 and served as a model for similar coops in Nebraska and Texas.

There are many good reasons to increase our consumption of locally produced foods but two of the best according to Waldrop are to support our farmers and to make our community stronger. He says "By targeting as much of our grocery dollar as possible towards locally-grown, sustainably-produced food, we are "voting" for more prosperity, security, and a higher quality of life in our community. Our grandparents knew the importance of supporting the local business community, and that includes the farmers. The wave of the future is direct local relationships between rural producers and urban consumers."

In addition to running the Oklahoma Food Coop, Waldrop promotes simple, local, in-season food and recipes in his blog "Getting Good Eats". He also writes and distributes an internet newsletter and website called "Better Times Almanac", a wealth of useful information about simple, sustainable, and frugal living, which he began compiling in 1997.

Unlike his parents, grand-parents and great-grandparents, Robert Waldrop does not live on a farm. He is an urban dweller, who lives in Oklahoma City where he works as music director for a large church. In order to continue the family tradition of food production in an urban setting, he has ventured into the relatively new field of permaculture- a type of gardening/farming that features attractive, low-maintenance, mixed plantings of useful plants, many of them native perennials. In his urban yard in Oklahoma City he grows 120 varieties of edible or useful plants, two-thirds of which are perennials.

Energy conservation is also a field in which Waldrop has considerable experience, having recently completed an extensive energy-efficiency upgrade on his 75-year old bungalow. The upgrade included "super" insulation and the conversion of a south-facing utility room, to a "sunspace heater" (see previous Watershed Ways columns for more on super insulation and sunspace heaters). The house is so efficient now that no fuel consumption is necessary to maintain it at comfortable living temperature, even when the temperature dips to -14 degrees Celsius!

Robert Waldrop will be at the Marguerite Centre in Pembroke, Ontario for the weekend of February 16-18, 2007 sharing his knowledge, experience and enthusiasm about local foods. Topics will include increasing your household food security, stretching food dollars, food storage, easy gardening, keeping some of your 'rainy day' savings in food, preparing food from basics and using more local and in-season food. Robert will also discuss community supported agriculture and explain how to start a local food supply chain from the ground up as he did with the Oklahoma Food Coop.

This weekend workshop is a wonderful opportunity and is open to everyone! The Marguerite Center provides excellent hospitality and an unbeatable workshop price that includes accommodation and meals. More information is available on the Marguerite Center website at www.margueritecentre.com.

"Don't let the perfect become the enemy of the good", says Robert. "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are. If you can't go all the way into sustainability right away, do small, easy things at first and as you get better at those, adopt bigger and more challenging goals."

This sage advice can be applied to all our efforts to become more sustainable, including our efforts to eat simply and locally. Robert's workshop will undoubtedly provide many tips and concrete steps as well as inspiration to help us on this journey.

Hope to see you at the workshop!

Lynn Jones is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley, currently supported by a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, local donors and volunteers.

In praise of slowness

25 Jul 2005 Lynn Jones

The “Slow Food” movement aims to change all this, by getting us to enjoy everyday pleasures related to food such as sharing leisurely meals of local food with friends, visiting farms and farmers’ markets in our area, and learning about our local food history.

Slow Food is an international organization that began in Italy a little over 15 years ago. Today, Slow Food is active in 50 countries and has a worldwide membership of over 80,000. The organization has as its symbol a lovely, little snail, representing the virtues of slowness, prudence, moderation, and adaptability as antidotes to the fast life including fast food.

As explained on the Slow Food website, the movement’s founding father Carlo Petrini, recognized in 1986 that the industrialization of food was standardizing taste and leading to the loss of thousands of food varieties and flavors. He rallied his friends and began to speak out at every available opportunity and soon the movement was born.

Here are some excerpts from the Slow Food Manifesto, approved by delegates from 20 countries in 1989:

We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: Fast Life, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods. Our defense should begin at the table with Slow Food. Let us rediscover the flavors and savors of regional cooking ...

My family recently had the opportunity to visit Italy and experience first-hand the joys of Slow Food... Dinner in Italy never begins before 8 p.m., usually lasts a couple of hours, and consists of multiple, leisurely courses that often feature local, in-season foods.

Our most memorable meal was prepared and served to us by our hosts Olinto and Alessandra in a small village in the mountainous area of northwestern Tuscany called the Garfagnana. The meal consisted of local foods prepared in traditional ways, barley and vegetable soup with fresh herbs, roasted rabbit, polenta made from corn grown on terraces just outside the village, wild mushrooms gathered from the surrounding chestnut forests, local tomatoes, “sheep” cheese, and wine made by Olinto from local grapes. The same foods have been consumed in that village for generations.

Slow Food’s affiliated sister organization, the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity (SFFB), is doing important work to preserve “extraordinary” food products that are threatened by industrial standardization. According to the SFFB website 75% of European food product diversity has been lost since 1900 (the percentage is higher in North America), and worldwide, 30,000 vegetable varieties have become extinct in the last century, with one more lost every six hours.

SFFB’s “Arc of Taste” catalogs hundreds of special varieties of food plants, breeds of animals and animal products such as local cheeses, from all over the world. To date there are four Canadian entries in the Arc of Taste catalog: the Canadienne Cow, Herring Spawn on Kelp, the Montreal Melon, and Red Fife Wheat. Descriptions include fascinating information about the history and special qualities of each item. Nominations for new items are invited via the website.

A “working arm” of the Arc of Taste, the Presidia, aims to save the foods included in the Arc of Taste catalog by promoting “artisan” products, establishing production standards and in other ways supporting producers to guarantee a viable future for traditional foods.

Are there traditional foods in need of promotion and preservation where you live? The Slow Food folks challenge us to find a food that is celebrated as being originally from or best grown/produced in our part of the country. Please let me know what you come up with so that we can profile special foods of the Ottawa Valley in a future column.

Lynn Jones is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley supported by volunteers, local donors and a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Eating locally for a better future

06 Aug 2004 Lynn Jones

For most North Americans, most of the year, the answer is "pretty far". According to the Worldwatch Institute, an independent research organization based in Washington D.C. food consumed in the U.S. typically travels between 1,500 and 2,500 miles from farm to plate. Food on our Canadian dinner tables travels a similar distance.

This way of eating provides a dizzying array of choices but consumes staggering amounts of fuel in the process. In fact, it has been estimated (by David Pimentel of Cornell University) that at least 10 calories of fuel are used producing and transporting the food we eat for every one calorie of metabolic energy the food contains.

Such a system is obviously unsustainable. Our ways of eating will eventually return to those of our grandparents as the world runs out of cheap oil.

But don't wait till then! Eating locally is a great thing to do, and late summer is just about the best time to give it a whirl. At this time of year, there is a veritable cornucopia of food available here in the Ottawa Valley.

One of the best places to get local foods at this time of year is a farmers' market. Here in Renfrew County, there are weekly markets in Renfrew, Pembroke, Cobden, Barry's Bay, and Combermere. At these local markets you will find everything from beef, pork, chicken, and eggs to fish, fruit, vegetables, preserves, baked goods and herbs.

While you're enjoying the incredible bounty of local food, consider the many benefits of eating locally, which include the following

Local food is fresher than food that comes from afar. Often it was picked the same day you buy it or just the day before, making it fresher, more flavourful and more nutritious.

When we buy local food (or any locally-produced good for that matter), we are supporting the local economy. There is a "multiplier effect", when we buy locally -our dollars get passed around several

times, and this stimulates the economy a lot more than giving our money to a corporation based far from where we live.

Eating locally puts us more in touch with the world around us. It's nice to know and be able to talk to the folks who produce our food. It's also nice to see the changing seasons reflected on our dinner plates.

Needless to say, **eating locally is far better for the planet.** Burning fossil fuel to transport food long distances produces tremendous quantities of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. It also produces lots of toxic air pollutants. Both of these undesirable outcomes are minimized when we eat locally.

Local foods generally use less packaging, thereby reducing the quantity of items sent to the recycling depot or landfill site.

Eating locally saves resources like fossil fuel and packaging materials so they can be used for other things. The Earth's finite and soon-to-be dwindling supply of oil would be better used to produce wind turbines and solar panels that we will need for power when the oil runs out.

So have a feast of local foods this weekend, or better still this week or this month. Your taste buds, local producers, your community, and Mother Earth will all be grateful.

Bon appétit!

Lynn Jones is a founding member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

Organic farming deepens its roots

25 Apr 2004

The doctors found compelling evidence relating cancer to pesticide use in studies of farmers, homeowners, and horticulture workers - three main user groups. They found links between pesticides and diseases of the nervous system, such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. They cited a Montreal study showing that 40% of children have a genetic makeup that slows their breakdown of pesticides and makes them particularly vulnerable to leukemia.

For most Canadians, NHL means the Stanley Cup playoffs. For doctors it refers to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. This cancer of the lymph system affects nearly 3% of Canadians and is increasing at 1-1.5% per year.

The Ontario study noted that NHL has declined in countries where the herbicide 2,4-D has been banned for over ten years. Dr. Margaret Sanborn of McMaster University, one of its authors, urged the Ontario government to follow Quebec by banning lawn herbicides and other "cosmetic pesticides", rather than letting each municipality debate this issue.

The herbicide industry quickly replied that 2,4-D is safe when used as directed. Donald Page, executive director of the Industry Task Force II on 2,4-D Research, says that if the Quebec government goes ahead with its ban, industry will sue under NAFTA Chapter 11. This could force the Canadian government to pay large settlements to U.S. herbicide manufacturers.

The Ontario study rejects the notion that some pesticides are inherently safer than others. It calls for an across-the-board reduction in human exposure, arguing that different pesticides have different health effects that show up over different time periods.

The main federal regulator is not buying this argument. The Pest Management Regulatory Agency is part of Health Canada. Nearly 500 employees decide what pesticides can be approved for what purposes. The Agency is responding to industry pressure with a major new program to speed approval of "reduced-risk" and "minor-use" pesticides.

Unfortunately the agency is less responsive to public concerns. In 2003 the Auditor General's office criticized the Agency's "slow progress on re-evaluating older, widely used pesticides against today's higher health and environmental standards." It said that the Agency "has incomplete information on user compliance, pesticide use, and the impacts of pesticides on human health and the environment."

So, does the future hold more pesticides, more regulators, and more lawsuits? Or is there another way?

Earth Day 2004 was also marked by a special issue of Nature, the world's top science journal. It asked, "Organic: Is it the future of farming?" It noted that global sales of organic produce have risen 20% per year for five years in a row.

Core techniques of organic farming, such as use of cover crops to build soil organic matter, are being widely adopted. Even non-organic techniques such as no-till farming now treat soil as a living system maintained by beneficial organisms, not as a dead substrate into which chemicals are injected. No-till is reducing fossil fuel use in plowing, improving soil structure and fertility, and minimizing erosion.

While no-till farming employs fertilizers and pesticides, their use can be reduced by integrated weed and pest management systems.

Should we go fully organic? If consumers want fruits and vegetables that are pesticide-free, ways will be found to grow them. Apple growers in Canada have replaced pesticide sprays for apple codling moth with bio-control methods involving pheromones (insect sex attractants) and release of sterile males. Many other such innovations exist.

Could organic farming feed the world? Not, according to the editors of Nature, if more people want to eat cheap meat: this requires lots of nitrogen-fertilized grain.

Organic supporters say we should eat less meat and more vegetables, and embrace an organic future.

Ole Hendrickson is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

Cultivating respect for the lowly dandelion

24 Apr 2004 Lynn Jones

This leaves many folks in a quandary. It's time to start looking after the lawn again. No one wants to be the one house on the block with a dandelion-infested lawn. What to do. . .

While we muddle through the transition to lower-maintenance plantings, and alternative methods for maintaining healthy areas of grass without pesticides, let's start looking at dandelions in a different light.

A little research reveals that dandelions are indeed worthy of our respect.

To start with, did you know that dandelions improve the soil where they grow? Dandelions bring up minerals from the hard pan beneath the soil. Their long tap roots go down two to three feet into the ground. When the plants die, they leave behind tunnels that allow air, water and earthworms to penetrate. Decomposing dandelions provide mineral-rich composted matter to the soil.

Dandelions also provide food for pollinating insects. The dandelion apparently ranks high among honey-producing plants and dandelions are the main food source for at least 93 different kinds of insects. Because of this, they attract beneficial insects like ladybugs (which are beneficial because they love to eat aphids).

Dandelions are delicious and nutritious. Many studies show dandelions to be rich in vitamins C, D and B-complex and minerals such as magnesium, iron, copper, phosphorus, zinc, potassium and manganese. They have the highest Vitamin A content of all greens and according to a USDA food composition bulletin, dandelions rank in the top four green vegetables in overall nutritional value. The greens are said to be best when young, before the flower buds appear on the plant. There are all kinds of ways to eat them but the most common are sautéed or added raw to a salad. There is a wealth of information on harvesting and cooking dandelions at the Goosefoot Acres website (www.edibleweeds.com) including ways of making the older, more bitter greens quite palatable.

Dandelions have many medicinal properties and a long history of use as medicine. In fact the Latin name for dandelion, "Taraxacum officinal" means "official remedy for disorders". For over a century, taraxacum officinale was regarded as an official drug in the United States, and the dried root remains listed in the U.S. pharmacopoeia. Its primary pharmacological activities relate to digestion, liver function and diuresis. Dandelion also appears in the pharmacopoeias of Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union and is one of the top six herbs in the Chinese herbal medicine chest.

Dandelions are also used to make wine, organic dyes and a tasty coffee substitute. The list goes on but I'll stop here. I think that's more than enough to make the case that dandelions should be treated with respect rather than attempts at extermination.

Lynn Jones is a member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit, charitable organization based in the Ottawa Valley.

Nine things to like about dandelions

21 Apr 2002 Lynn Jones

1. Children love them for their sunny yellow flowers and even more for the mature seed heads that my daughter Grace calls "Wishing dandelions"
2. You can make dandelion wine from them. I'm told that about one gallon of flowers makes a gallon of wine. One recipe I saw recently called for lemons, limes, oranges, ginger and cloves in addition to dandelion blossoms. Are there any tried and true Ottawa Valley recipes for dandelion wine out there?
3. You can eat them. In fact they are very nutritious and some say delicious also. Many studies show

dandelions to be rich in vitamins C, D and B-complex and minerals such as magnesium, iron, copper, phosphorus, zinc, potassium and manganese. Dandelions have the highest Vitamin A content of all greens and according to a USDA food composition bulletin, dandelions rank in the top four green vegetables in overall nutritional value. The greens are said to be best when young, before the flower buds appear on the plant. There are all kinds of ways to eat them but the most common are sautéed or added raw to a salad. I have to confess I've not yet tried them yet, but I plan to soon. There is a wealth of information on harvesting and cooking dandelions at the Goosefoot Acres website (www.edibleweeds.com) including ways of making the older, more bitter greens quite palatable.

4. Dandelions have many medicinal properties and a long history of use as medicine. In fact the Latin name for dandelion, "Taraxacum officinal" means "official remedy for disorders". For over a century, taraxacum officinale was regarded as an official drug in the United States, and the dried root remains listed in the U.S. pharmacopoeia. Its primary pharmacological activities relate to digestion, liver function and diuresis. High in insulin, the plant has demonstrated experimental hypoglycemic activity in several animal studies. Dandelion also appears in the Pharmacopoeias of Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union and is one of the top six herbs in the Chinese herbal medicine chest.

5. Dandelions provide food for pollinating insects. The dandelion apparently ranks high among honey-producing plants and dandelions are the main food source for at least 93 different kinds of insects. Because of this, they attract beneficial insects like ladybugs (which are beneficial because they love to eat aphids).

6. They improve the soil where they grow. Dandelions bring up minerals from the hard pan beneath the soil. Their long tap roots go down two to three feet into the ground. When the plants die, they leave behind tunnels that allow air, water and earthworms to penetrate. Decomposing dandelions provide mineral-rich composted matter to the soil.

7. Dandelions can be used to make organic dyes; flowers provide a rich yellow and the entire plant produces a rich magenta.

8. They can be used as a beauty aid. European women have for centuries used dandelion in the form of a strong infusion to invigorate the skin, to help lighten their freckles, and as a refreshing addition to a herbal bath.

9. You can make a tasty coffee-substitute from them. Roasted and ground dandelion root makes a good caffeine-free "backwoods coffee".

Lynn Jones is a founding member of the Ottawa River Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering sustainable communities in the Ottawa River watershed.

Sources for the information in this article include the following: Goosefoot Acres (www.edibleweeds.com)