
Organic Land Care *with*

May, 2005

"As soon as we allow ourselves to think of the world as alive, we recognize that a part of us knew this all along. It is like emerging from winter into spring."

Rupert Sheldrake



In this Issue:

Of Love and Joy.....	1
Soil Testing Part III.....	2
Planning Your Food Garden ..	3
Changing Course.....	4
Educational Opportunities.....	5
Native Plants	6
Nematodes	7
SOUL Branches	8

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Please feel free to make copies and share this information.

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Of Love and Joy and Gardening and Learning

Something magical happens the moment we start working in the garden – all stress just seems to dissipate, as if swallowed by the earth.

Tension is replaced by serenity, anger by forgiveness, and sadness by joy.

As a creation the garden is an expression of love. Love for the earth, love for ourselves, love for our families, and love for all those who share our joy as they come to visit our garden. For a few moments each day, or a few hours a week, the garden allows us to love without fear of ridicule, and to give of ourselves with complete abandon.

What is joy but the expression of love? What is a garden but the exuberant manifestation of joy? What is abundance but the creation of life?

But lest we feel all powerful let us not forget that the process of creation is Mother Nature's, and we are but her helpers. Our wages are paid in joy and health, and our job is to support the natural processes that give rise to life, to be stewards of the land and all the creatures upon it that have been entrusted to us.

This is a tall order! What do we really know about stewardship, about working with Mother Nature?

As a member of SOUL you have many opportunities to learn, to share your experiences, and to participate in a community of like-minded gardeners. All SOUL members can participate in all SOUL activities – the organic garden clubs, the professional development groups, and all special events sponsored by SOUL. We are also putting together a very exciting educational program for the fall, there's sure to be something for everyone. Details on page 5.

Above all - enjoy gardening and learning!





Soil Testing (Part III)

The Limited Usefulness of Conventional Soil Tests

By Heide Hermary

Heide Hermary is president of Gaia College Inc. She can be reached at heide.hermary@gaiacollege.ca

Conventional soil management treats soil like a nutrient bank. Each soil has a specific capacity to “hold” nutrients. Since plants withdraw nutrients from the soil these need to be replaced periodically in order to make further plant growth possible. To determine the type and quantity of chemicals to be added to the soil we then test for three factors:

- Soluble nitrogen
- Mineral content
- pH

Testing for Nitrogen

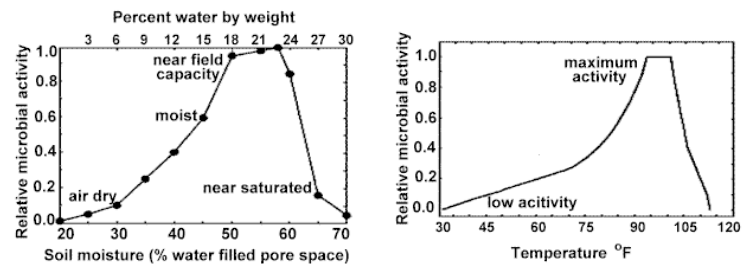
It is certainly possible to test the nitrogen content of soil, but the results are not very **meaningful** in an **organically** managed landscape. Plant growth – and their need for nutrients – is not uniform throughout the year, but increases with temperature. And Mother Nature has the perfect “just-in-time” delivery system: the speed of decomposition of organic matter is temperature dependent. This means that nutrients **become available to plants** just as they need them.

This is very fortunate in the case of nitrates, the preferred form of nitrogen for most

plants, because due to their chemical structure they do not attach themselves to soil particles. In other words, they either get used quickly, or are lost from the soil forever through leaching or volatilization.

So when our nitrogen test in the spring reveals little available nitrogen this only means that nature is working just fine: it’s hanging on to this important element until plants need it. And provided our garden has sufficient **mulch**, **microbes** and **moisture** all will be well!

The following graphs demonstrate clearly how soil microbial activity depends on temperature AND optimal soil moisture conditions.



Source: Conservation tillage Fact Sheet #3-95.
Published by USDA-ARS, USDA-NRCS.

Adding additional nitrogen to our soil based entirely on nitrogen test results, without consideration of the quality of mulch and soil microbiology, would cause excessive succulent plant growth and insect (especially aphids, scales etc.) infestations.

The nitrogen soil test was designed for conventionally managed farms and landscapes that have insufficient organic matter to feed the vegetation. It is not particularly useful in organically managed landscapes.

Next time: Testing for minerals



Planning Your Successful Food Garden

By Carolyn Herriot

*Carolyn is owner of the Garden Path Organic Plant Nursery
She can be reached at the gardenpath@shaw.ca*



If you despaired at the cost of produce in the supermarket, careful planning now will enable you to grow fresher, tastier and more nutritious produce at home for a fraction of the price. For around \$25 worth of seeds you could produce \$500 worth of vegetables!

To get the most out of your food garden concentrate on growing several highly productive easy-to-grow crops, vegetables that you and your family enjoy eating the most. Take account of the 'space hoggers', such as potatoes, cabbages, corn and squash and make room for these only if the size of your garden permits. If you rely on the following staples in your garden you could fill your freezer with snap beans, carrots, broccoli, tomatoes, corn, peas, and summer squash.

For vegetables with a long storage life after harvest choose appropriate varieties of winter squash, cabbages, potatoes, onions and garlic. For produce that you can harvest from the garden year round grow beets, edible greens (kale, chard, collards, beet greens, perpetual spinach) and 'cut and come again'

mesclun salad mixes (arugula, mustards, corn salad, lettuces etc.)

For culinary herbs grow perennial herbs such as chives, Greek oregano, fennel, rosemary, sage and thyme or grow rows or pots of basil, from which you can freeze jars of pesto to perk up dishes in winter. Parsley, coriander and arugula are the easiest herbs to grow as they will overwinter and self seed.

Your food garden should receive 11 hours of sunlight or more daily. 7 hours allows plants to grow adequately but 4 hours may only work for cool season crops. If your garden receives less than 11 hours of sunlight you will have to experiment to get the best results from a diversity of food plants.

Plant your rows in a north/south direction which exposes both sides of each row to maximum sunlight, and results in increased yields. Beware not to overshadow sun-loving crops with taller plants. However, plants that prefer cooler growing conditions, such as lettuces and spinach, will benefit from being overshadowed.

The biointensive method of

growing uses block plantings, companion planting and crop rotations to grow the most from the smallest area.

Interplanting rows of fast growing small plants, such as lettuces, radish, spinach and mustards with slower growing crops such as cabbages, garlic, onions and peas helps get the maximum yields from a small food garden. Companion plants that grow well together are: lettuces interplanted with radishes and carrots, corn grown with squash and beans, and tomatoes with onions, parsley and basil.

When planning the layout of your food garden practice the principles of yearly crop rotation to relieve the stress on the soil from nutrient depletion. Heavy feeders, (corn, tomatoes, squash, lettuce and cabbage) take large amounts of nutrients from the soil. These should be followed with nitrogen-fixing plants such as peas, beans and fava beans, or light feeders, which include all the root crops.

Careful planning now will enable you to bypass the produce section and to harvest your own delicious fresh homegrown produce. Bon Appetit!



Changing Course

My experience studying the on-line Organic Land Care program with Gaia College

By Christina Nikolic

*Christina is a landscape designer in Victoria, B.C.
She can be reached at stewardshipnld@yahoo.ca*

This month I passed a milestone in my professional development as a landscape designer. I completed the on-line Organic Land Care course with Gaia College and successfully wrote the SOUL exam to become a Certified Organic Land Care Professional. I would like to share this fabulous, eye-opening experience with you in case you are considering taking this program yourself. It has certainly changed the way I am looking at landscapes!

My background is landscape gardening and architecture, in which I hold a German university degree. I chose to focus my studies on the design of outdoor spaces. Although this is a solid education in the firm European tradition, in my field there was a heavy emphasis on the conventional, engineering, technically oriented approach. This was combined with an artistic claim which, I felt, was removed from the beauty and dynamics of a living system. With few exceptions, I was taught to accept the necessity of control, be it through machinery, or pesticides, or the ever present "cost factor".

Little wonder that for the longest time my landscape designs were, in fact, pretty planting plans. I kept wondering that there must be more to it - but what, where, how? Finally, upon coming to Victoria in 2003, I found an answer: Organic Land Care. I joined SOUL and signed up for the on-line course. And I was in for a paradigm shift, or two!

Imagine my amazement about the soil food web and its importance! Who'd have thought what effects synthetic fertilizers have on microbes? Just look at how water behaves in the soil, and how everything depends on it! What a revelation to do an irrigation schedule! Or an organic lawn management strategy! Pruning: sense and non-sense...; plant companions and insect populations...; the responsibility of the designer...! What a change in focus from plant health to landscape health; from controlling to observing and co-operating with nature; from splitting up gardens into seemingly unrelated domains of physics and chemistry to regarding them as interconnected, ever changing

ecosystems.

The course provided a vast amount of information - some of it directly contradicting what I had assumed for years to be true. Yes, it was a challenge. It demanded dedication and commitment, and an investment of time and money too. Yet I found it extremely rewarding.

Now I feel much more in tune with natural processes. Raised confidence levels help me get this message across to my clients. I can justify Organic Land Care as an exciting mix of pre-industrial agricultural wisdom, and cutting edge current research. And SOUL certification gives me credibility and a competitive advantage in the industry.

I am most grateful to the supportive, competent instructors at Gaia College: Heide and Michael Hermary. I also appreciate the non-competitive atmosphere, and the spirit of sharing among my fellow students. Beyond knowledge, I have found "SOULmates" and lasting friendships - the greatest value of all.



Fabulous Educational Opportunities in Organic Land Care



Starting Fall, 2005

We all have so much to learn about organic gardening. After decades of relying on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides most of us don't have first hand knowledge of ecologically sound landscape practices. Garden center shelves are filled with products that confuse us with their terminology – how are we to know what's advertising hype and what's actually good?

Don't despair – here are several fabulous programs to help you gain a thorough understanding of organic gardening. They'll be intense, and they'll be fun.

Certificate in Ecological Landscape Design

Coming Fall, 2005 in Burnaby and Victoria

A 2-semester, part-time access program offered through Gaia College and the Burnaby School Board

For a detailed brochure, or to reserve a space, please call Christina Nikolic in Victoria at (250) 382-4450, the Burnaby School Board at (604) 664-8888, or e-mail Heide Hermary at Gaia College at heide.hermary@gaiacollege.ca

Ecologically sound landscape design is the beginning of healthy, vibrant ornamental landscapes. Be prepared for an eye-opening experience that will challenge and transform some commonly held landscaping beliefs, and will leave you empowered with a new understanding for the ecosystem

that is a garden. Not only will you learn design principles, drafting, and plant selection; but we will go beyond the aesthetic aspects to give you a deeper understanding of how plants, soil, water, hardscape, are all interconnected and influence each other. Field trips, labs, and student presentations make this course very practical and useful

This course would be of interest to:

- Those considering a career in landscape design
- Those currently operating a landscaping business who would like to offer their clients more professional design services
- Homeowners who would like to design their own gardens in a professional manner

The Master Organic Gardener Program

Coming Fall, 2005 in Burnaby and on Vancouver Island

A 2-semester, part-time access program offered through Gaia College in association with SOUL

For a detailed brochure, or to reserve a space, please call Dayle Cosway in Victoria at (250) 880-0706, or e-mail Heide Hermary at Gaia College at heide.hermary@gaiacollege.ca

This program is offered in support of the Master Organic Gardener Certification that will be offered by SOUL effective 2006.

The purpose of Certified Master Organic Gardener Program is to create a

group of informed gardener who can provide support to the public in their transition to organic gardening practices. This is seen to be an essential component of a multi-level public education effort in support of municipal pesticide bylaws and other national and regional environmental issues. Certified Master Organic Gardeners will be able to assist the community with organic gardening projects in practical, hands-on situations. They will also be able to educate the public in organic gardening practices through mentorship programs, workshops and talks.

This program is open to all gardeners, whether they wish to become certified or not.

The program follows in the footsteps of the highly successful volunteer master gardener programs associated with many university extension offices in the United States. The SOUL Certified Master Organic Gardener Program also provides for the upgrading of conventional master gardeners who wish to become certified by SOUL.

On-line Programs:

SOUL members receive substantial discounts to the following programs offered by Gaia College. More information at www.gaiacollege.ca

- Self guided study of the on-line text
- Certificate in Organic Landscape Management
- Certificate in Organic Turf Management

To find an organic land care professional in your area please visit the SOUL web site at www.organiclandcare.org





Gardening with Native Plants

Fawns with Curls

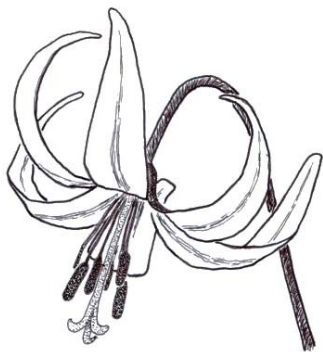
By Laurie Hardy

Laurie Hardy is a Horticulture Instructor and Certified Organic Land Care Professional living in Victoria, B.C. She can be reached at hardyl@camosun.bc.ca

A truck slid backwards into the woodlands area of my front yard about three years ago and crushed the life out of a beautiful Oceanspray and sliced up the sword ferns and nearby moss covered rocks. Needless to say I was rather put out by the whole affair. However, it was on Saanich's road allowance and so no-one was about to attend to the damage. With a little gentle care and time the area has repaired itself.

Enter Mother Nature. The semi-shaded area is now filled with nodding white fawn lilies that appear each spring around the restored ferns, lush moss and spreading branches of a laburnum.

There have always been lilies (*Erythronium oregonum*) on our street and now I am delighted that they have found a natural



Picture: Christina Nikolic



Photo: Christina Nikolic

habitat in my front yard. Native from SW British Columbia to Oregon this little white flower with golden central markings and anthers nods above mottled green leaves. It stands only about 6-8 inches and appears content in the light sandy, well draining but moist soil. It is a woodlands, low elevation flower so enjoys the company of sword ferns (*Polystichum munitum*); Coltsfoot (*Petasites palmatus*); Foamflower (*Tiarella trifoliata*), Wild Ginger (*Asarum caudatum*) and False Lily-of-the-valley (*Maianthemum dilatatum*). I read recently that its bulbs have been suspected of poisoning poultry.

For a little variety *Erythronium revolutum*, the Pink fawn lily could be introduced to bloom with its sister.

A word of caution. If you want native plants, go to an accredited nursery collector and never deplete nature by taking from the wild. Try to duplicate a natural habitat, as growing native plants in with ornamentals can be a challenge. Hybrids often want water on a regular basis whereas the natives once established typically require little water. I got lucky with my area, thanks now, to a rogue truck. I probably would not have 'fawns with curls' otherwise.



Nematodes

Nature's Remedy for Soil Dwelling Pests

By Maria Keating – The Bug Lady

Maria can be reached at mariakeating@telus.net



The key to understanding organic pest management is that nature always provides an answer. We just need to ask what she would do to control an infestation of undesirable insects.

The ecosystem in your garden is not comprised of the multitudes of flora and fauna that would be found in an untouched forest. Your garden probably started out with manufactured topsoil, mulch, trees, shrubs, sod, and nursery grown plants. As time goes on, this ecosystem starts to evolve. Deer, squirrels, skunks, birds, frogs and insects are attracted to new habitat and new food sources.



Weevil Damage
Picture: Maria Keating

The soil environment too provides homes and livelihood for many insects. Most of these are harmless or beneficial, but some like to eat plants, and when their populations increase to the point that they create visible

damage we consider them to be pests. These include the larval stages of European Chafer, Black Vine Weevil, Crane Fly, Sod Web Worm, Carrot Rust Fly, Cabbage Maggot, Cutworm and Fleas to name a few.

But these insects are not without their own enemies! For instance, insect parasitic nematodes perform a very important function in the control of insect populations.

Nematodes are soil dwelling microscopic wormlike creatures, which enter the insect larva through its breathing holes. Once inside and feeding, the nematode releases a natural bacterium that kills its host within a few days. The nematode lays its eggs inside the insect larva, and soon up to 10 000 baby nematodes emerge from this host, building up the soil's natural enemies and providing protection to your yard for many generations to come.

Many different species of nematodes are available commercially. Not every nematode is effective on every insect, so it is important to properly identify the insect you wish to manage, and to apply the correct species of



Parasitic nematodes entering vine weevil larva

Picture: Colorado State University

nematode at just the right time: when the insect larvae are still very young. For help in identification or to purchase specific nematodes please visit <http://www.thebuglady.ca/>

Applying nematodes is very simple:

- Be sure the soil is thoroughly moist to a depth of at least 6"
- Apply nematodes early in the morning or early evening when the temperatures are not too extreme and sun exposure is limited
- With your watering can, apply the solution directly onto the base of plants, within the drip-line, or directly onto the affected turf.
- Thoroughly irrigate the entire area, and continue to keep the soil moist to enable the nematodes to seek out their hosts.





What's new? What's coming up?

SOUL GARDEN CLUB SPECIAL EVENT

Celebrate Summer Solstice in purple with a potluck feast in the Happy Valley Lavender Fields.

Date: June 21st, 2005

Time: 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Place: Happy Valley Lavender and Herb Farm, 3505 Happy Valley Road, Langford.

Lynda Dowling has graciously invited members of the SOUL Garden Club to celebrate Summer Solstice in her magical lavender fields at Happy Valley Lavender Farm. Lynda will give us a talk and demonstration of all the exciting new lavender cultivars she is growing. Wear something purple and bring a potluck dish or dessert to share for the feast. Reserve by calling Carolyn or Jolene at (250) 881-1555

SOUL's ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Let's give each other a pat on the shoulder and celebrate another year of success! Come and hear how we did, what we are up to, and how you can get involved with SOUL.

Date: Saturday July 9th, 2005

Time: 6:00 pm till approximately 9:00 pm

Place: Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, 505 Quayle Road, Saanich

The meeting will be held right after the Organic Islands Festival!

ORGANIC ISLANDS FESTIVAL

Celebrate, discover and meet the people on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands whose products and services are making our islands' lifestyle more enjoyable and sustainable.

Date: Saturday and Sunday, July 9th and 10th, 2005

Time: 10:00 am to 6:00 pm

Place: Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, 505 Quayle Road, Saanich

Come and wander through five acres of inspirational gardens, sample organic produce, wine, and cheese, attend a workshop, to a speaker, purchase locally made hemp fashions, treat yourself to a massage in the Zen gardens and find out why organic tastes better and actually is healthier for you and the environment. This Saanich SunFest event is full of fun, food, and fair trade for the whole family!

NEW SOUL BRANCHES ARE HERE!

This spring, not only was the **Victoria** Branch officially registered, but SOUL also saw two brand new branches forming: One in **Courtenay on Vancouver Island**, and one for the **Greater Vancouver area**. As SOUL continues to grow beyond its Victoria origins, we are excited to see regional and far away members take initiative.

Branch contact information:

Courtenay: Delia von Schilling, delia@oerresearch.com

Vancouver: Michelle O'Reilly, michelle@streamorganics.com

Victoria (Organic Garden Club): Carolyn Herriot, thegardenpath@shaw.ca

Victoria (Professional Development Group): Michael Cowan, edibella@islandnet.com

For more information on how to start a SOUL branch in your area, please contact Dayle Cosway, dcosway@telus.net.

For board, committee, local garden club and professional development meetings please visit the SOUL website at www.organiclandcare.org

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

After studying the fine print of Organic Land Care for many months, three Victoria SOUL members and landscape professionals successfully took the SOUL examination on April 10, 2005. Glen Campbell, Michael Cowan and Christina Nikolic are now SOUL Certified Organic Land Care Professionals!



To find an organic land care professional in your area please visit the SOUL web site at www.organiclandcare.org