

Organic Land Care *with*



**"Nothing is as strong as an idea
whose time has come."**

Organic Land Care with SOUL is published monthly by the Society for Organic Urban Land Care

Our Mission:

"To support our communities in their transition to organic practices".

This newsletter is distributed free of charge to all SOUL members. Please feel free to share this publication.

SOUL

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**Genetically Modified Everything:
From Food to Grass to Trees to...?**

Almost unnoticed by small-scale landscapers and gardeners, and even by those who oppose genetically modified foods, there is a growing issue about GM grasses and especially trees.

The reasons to develop trees with an artificial genetic make-up are numerous, but none of them has anything to do with fostering biodiversity, ecosystem health, and sustainable land use.

This month, in a press release issued by EcoNexus and others, the Convention on Biological Diversity's 8th Conference of the Parties (COP-8) in Curitiba, Brazil, passed a formal declaration recognizing "the threats posed by genetically engineered trees, and urging countries to take a precautionary approach to the technology".

Read the whole article, and much more background information, at the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education web site: www.sare.org

In the educational section of the SOUL website, you can find the following enlightening article on genetically modified grasses wandering off beyond the fence:

http://www.organiclandcare.org/education/GM_gene_crosses_species.pdf

A Recipe for Lonely Apple Trees

**Geoff Johnson is a permaculture activist and educator homesteading in Victoria, BC.
He can be reached at respectyouralders@yahoo.com
Watch for his selection of "plants for human habitat" this summer at the Moss St. Market.**

Once you've established a truly sustainable garden, all you really need to be worried about is being hit by falling fruit while napping amongst the herbs. Tree guilds refer to a careful assembly of beneficial plants clustered around a central (usually food producing) tree. They're a great way to illustrate ecological design principles as they relate to urban-scale gardening, and are a great place for gardeners to start practicing permaculture.

Often, in a misguided attempt to simplify nature, we humans tend towards isolating landscape elements from one another. And then we complain about how high maintenance they are! A typical semi-dwarf apple tree seemingly requires spraying for pests and disease, weeding, watering, fertilisation, and insect habitat to ensure pollination... But only if we neglect to nurture it with a community of multifunctional plants to perform these functions.

An apple centred guild, for example, might be encircled at the drip line by grass-suppressing spring bulbs. Since bulbs generally peak in spring and subside in early summer, they effectively share light, nutrients and soil moisture with the tree while competing with greedy spring grass. While some bulbs, like daffodils, are known to repel browsing deer and burrowing rodents, others, like camas and perennial onions, supplement the

edible harvest. Bulbs are also an ideal choice to plant near the base of the trunk.

Inside this outermost ring, we would typically find a broken circle of mulch-producing plants, with a scattering of insectory and edible herbs taking up the rest of the space. Artichoke, nettles, yarrow, and, especially, comfrey can also compete with grass but, unlike shallow rooted bulbs, they tend to have powerful root systems that can penetrate and eventually de-compact subsoil, bringing deep mineral nutrients to the surface. Some, like lupine and alfalfa, even fix nitrogen. This inner ring can be selectively slashed three or four times per year, producing a deep, rich mulch to shade and feed the living soil. And once balanced, the soil eco-system will prevent any single species (such as apple scab fungus) from getting out of control.

Of course, many of these mulchable plants can also provide food for both people and beneficial insects if we let them flower. Keep in mind that not everything need be cut down for mulch at once. Leave a comfrey for the bees, a yarrow for the pest-predators, an artichoke for the gardener, and maybe even a lupine for aesthetic icing on the ecological cake.



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Organic Land Care Professional?
Certification Exams coming up in May, 2006,
in Victoria and Vancouver.
Contact info@organiclandcare.org for details, and
check the SOUL web site www.organiclandcare.org/certification**