

OPPORTUNITIES

A Monthly Newsletter From **Transition Medicine Hat**

Welcome to Transition Medicine Hat!

We promote sustainable living in southeastern Alberta.

Further information, and other resources, can be found on our web site: transitionmedicinehat.ca. Be sure to check out the discussion forum. In particular, we want to know what “sustainability” means to you. Can you send us a photo of a sustainable activity happening in Medicine Hat?

Land Dedication Ceremony Held On August 19

When we talk about sustainable land use, our thoughts must first go to the First Nations People. They lived on the Canadian prairie with a culture that was virtually unchanged for 10,000 years. That demonstrates the ultimate in both sustainability and resilience. We asked Wally Garrioch, a local Metis elder, and Brenda Mercer of the Miywasin Friendship Centre to bring that perspective.

Seventeen supporters listened as Wally gave a thoughtful prayer to support the project. Brenda noted that her organization would like to participate in the demonstration site by growing tobacco for ceremonies.



Transition’s Demonstration Site

Dr. Dale Lintott has made part of his ranch available for us to grow food. Thanks so much for this generous donation!

We anticipate using this site to showcase a variety of new techniques, alternative crops, and educational programs.

What these have in common is increased efficiency in using land, water and capital. We feel that high intensity agriculture can fill specialty niches with profitable operations.

The site was previously cultivated for many years, then replanted to Crested Wheatgrass, an agricultural species. A good well is available to ensure adequate water.

Right now, a small part of the land is being prepared for next year’s crop. We have opportunities for both individuals and small groups to get involved.



POOPALOOZA!

The name says it all: a few wannabe farmers out standing in their field, making compost with you-know-what.

On August 28, Neil and Rochelle Mitchell provided more than ten tons of fresh manure, as well as four big round bales of straw. Their machines were able to spread this in layers that needed only a little work to even out.

The straw, a waste material, will absorb the excess nitrogen from the manure, another waste material. The result is a valuable product: a stable fertilizer for our prairie soil. This process prevents pollution and smell.

After it ages for several months, the manure will be mixed with the existing topsoil, and used in the vegetable beds.



Thanks to Copy Works for doing such a good job of our intro brochure, at a very reasonable price.



DONNA BENGERT
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COPYWORKS
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Ph: 403.504.0011 Fax: 403.504.0041

Cell: 403.866.0714

Email: donnacopyworks@gmail.com

Co-op Mall, 116, 3030 - 13th Ave. Medicine Hat, AB



POLLINATOR PLANTING
Saturday, Sept 19, 1-4 pm

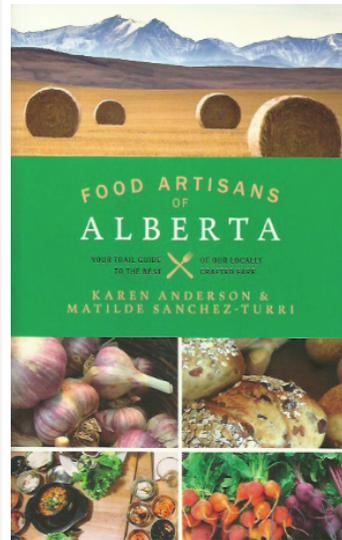
Bees and other pollinating species need flowers for food. Our demonstration site doesn't have a good selection, due to cultivation many years ago.

Let's plant some seed gathered around Medicine Hat, to bring some colour and insect life to the farm.

Please pre-register by phone or e-mail.

WANTED: STEEL GRAIN BIN

If you have a small steel bin that you don't use any more, we could really use it for storage at our demo site. Please call 403-527-2052.



Do you know a great book, website or PDF? Why not write a brief note saying why it is valuable.

Books to Check Out:

Anderson & Sanchez-Turri (2018) Food Artisans of Alberta; Touchwood Editions

Two veteran food journalists have collected their favourite food-related businesses. This goes far beyond restaurant reviews to include the diverse operations that, together, comprise our healthy food network.

Farms and ranches, distributors and brew pubs, if they provide food in an interesting and innovative way, they are likely included.

Over 300 operations are arranged geographically, with over 60 in our southern region alone.

Browse through it when planning an Alberta vacation, to find great food off the beaten path.

Available at Medicine Hat Public Library.

Next Month:

A review of the Transition Towns movement. You can read ahead at: transitionnetwork.org

Transition Medicine Hat can be contacted at: info@transitionmedicinehat.ca or 403-527-2052

Check our website at transitiomedicinehat.ca for more details..

HORSERADISH: foraging and preparing

Saturday, October 3, 1 - 3 pm.

Horseradish plants grow wild in Medicine Hat. In fact, they threaten to become a problem. Help contain this potential invasive species by harvesting the root. Both the environment and your roast beef will be the better for it.

Meet at the Tourist Information Office.

If possible, please bring strong shovels, sharp knives and a cutting board.

Other Great Events

World Rivers Day September 27

A global celebration of rivers.

Explore our beautiful South Saskatchewan River with your family. The easiest access is from the first parking lot in Police Point Park. Follow the signs. Picnic tables available. The water is clear and clean, and great for skipping stones!

Medicine Hat Interpretive Program

Berm Walk

Sept. 27 at 2:00 pm

Led by the Nature Centre for World River Day. Contact the Nature Centre for details regarding the meeting place etc.

Medicine Hat Farmers' Market

Saturdays, 9:00 am - 1 pm

Sept 19, Sept 26 & Oct 3

Cypress Centre Field House

A wide range of locally grown vegetables and fruit, as well as preserves, baked goods and crafts

Society of Grasslands Naturalists presents a range of nature-related hikes and programs. Visit the Police Point Park Nature Centre to join or get more information.



Profile On Sustainability:



This summer, Police Point Park hosted a herd of about 170 goats. No, they were not a petting zoo. These four-footed vegetation managers had an important role to play.

These goats were contracted to remove Leafy Spurge, a designated noxious weed that landowners have a legal obligation to control.

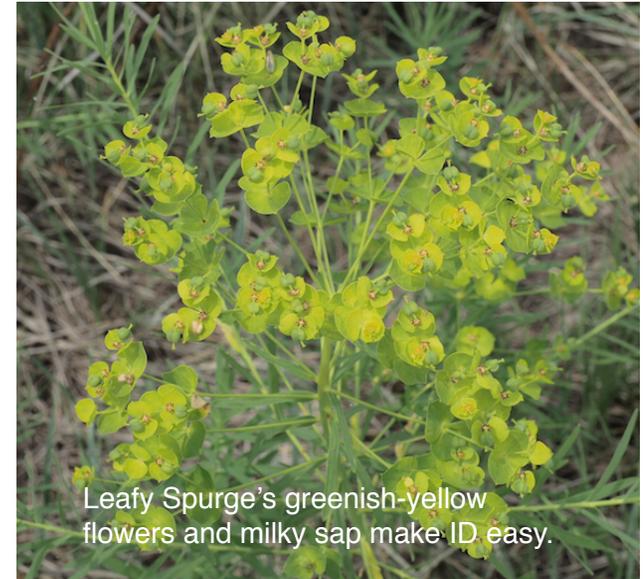
The Problem

Leafy Spurge crowds out more palatable species of plants. It has foul-tasting (to humans) milky sap that discourages grazing, and gives off poisonous chemicals that keep other plants from growing nearby.

It requires a bit more moisture than is generally found in the dry mixedgrass prairie, so around here, it is confined to the river valley. In more humid areas like the foothills and in Saskatchewan, spurge spreads across the grassland. In these areas, beetles that specialize on eating spurge can be released. Although slow to reproduce, these tiny bugs eventually have a good impact.

However, the beetles are not strong swimmers. These beetles have been released in Medicine Hat, too. However, the South Saskatchewan River generally floods before the beetle numbers can build up.

Chemicals strong enough to kill the spurge also kill nearby vegetation, leaving space that the spurge quickly re-colonizes. And no spray crew can find all the plants among the grass and shrubs.



Leafy Spurge's greenish-yellow flowers and milky sap make ID easy.



Dave, the guard dog, keeps coyotes away, while Molly (not pictured) keeps the herd together.

The Solution

Goats naturally prefer rougher vegetation for food. Shrubs and small trees are their specialty. However, they easily develop a taste for leafy spurge.

Herding dogs, under the guidance of a herder, keep the goats browsing in the most impacted areas. Some small shrubs like snowberry will be eaten along the way, but the spurge is significantly reduced.

With roots reaching several metres into the soil, the spurge does not die after a single setback. The plants gradually lose strength with each session. After about three years, the density of weeds will be greatly reduced and the surrounding grasses can start to recover.

The goats' preference for shrubs can be used to restore grassland that is being overtaken by spreading wolf willow, buckbrush or other shrubs. This has the added benefit of reducing the fire hazard.

The City of Lethbridge has used goats to chew a fireguard between their natural coulees and residential areas. Goats are both more effective and more aesthetically pleasing than either mechanical or chemical removal, and do not require an investment in equipment.

Robert Finck, owner of Magrath-based Creekside Goat Company, is still building up his herd to meet demand. However, he sees significant opportunities for value-added products, particularly halal meat for our growing Islamic population that enjoys eating goat.

The Future

Medicine Hat and nearby areas have enough spurge to keep a herd of goats eating all summer. With considerable need for brush control both in the city and nearby ranches, an opportunity for a local herd seems possible.

Perhaps this could be a local "franchise" for Creekside Goats, or perhaps an independent business. Either way, it would mean better vegetation management.

This could also be an economical entry into ranching for young people.

Contact

robertfinck@yahoo.com or check creeksidegoatcompany.com

