

OPPORTUNITIES

A Newsletter From **Transition Medicine Hat**

Welcome to Spring!

And with the promise of warmer weather on the way comes the tentative hope that COVID restrictions will gradually be easing.

To celebrate, let's plant some early seeds in the cold frame at the Transition Farm. Spinach, lettuce and swiss chard will all do well.

I will be there from 2 - 3 pm DAYLIGHT SAVING on Sunday, March 14. I hope you will be able to join in the fun. Please call 403-527-2052 for directions. Children are welcome, but we aren't able to offer car-pooling at this time.

This early start will show you how to build your own frame if you get motivated.



THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS!

Transition Medicine Hat is pleased to welcome two significant donors that are helping enrich our community.

Blondie's Gift and Garden Center will be donating fruit trees for the demonstration orchard. We look forward to planting a variety of fruits. As they grow, we will host workshops on tree selection, pruning and other related topics. With Blondie's support, we will discover a range of trees and shrubs that will flourish here.

South Country Co-op has contributed hand tools and other hardware supplies to equip the demonstration garden. Every garden needs a range of supplies to get started. The Co-op's support in this area is greatly appreciated!





NO-FAIL VEGGIES

Growing your own food is an easy step toward sustainability. Over the next few months, I hope to give hints to beginners on growing vegetables. A few tips can make it pretty easy. If you don't have a garden yet, we hope you will consider starting one this summer.

But don't start too big! About space twelve feet long and no wider than four feet will fit in most yards, and can give a lot of produce. Now is a good time to plan where it will go. Choose a site with as much sunshine as possible, but which is still protected from ravaging deer and insatiable rabbits.

Mark the site with corner stakes and string. Use a shovel to trim along the string, then remove (and discard) any sod to a depth of 3-4 inches. If you have any boards around, they can be used for a frame, but their purpose will be to prevent damage. We don't recommend raised beds in this dry country.

Turn over the soil and break up any big lumps. Consider picking up some inexpensive compost at the City Landfill, using a couple of plastic garbage bins or similar containers. Even two or three garbage bags will be enough. Spread this over the soil, and dig it again, trying to go a little deeper.

Water it well to help the compost come back to life. It will be ready for planting by the next newsletter, when we will introduce the first plants.

Distance Learning

I have spent much of this winter learning about permaculture and other new-to-me techniques.

Between the public library's curbside service and many on-line webinars, I have had a very educational season. I hope you are able to enjoy some of these programs, too. Please share the link if you have a favourite.

Pollinator Projects
Putting the Buzz in Pasture Management
Webinar

March 31st 10:00am
Learn more about

- The value of pollinators and the benefits of establishing pollinator projects
- Identifying locations for pollinator projects on marginal lands
- Forage species selection, establishment, management & longevity
- Funding options for pollinator projects

With speakers
Grant Lastwka, Forage Specialist &
Luke Wanneck, Agroforestry Project Specialist

Register at
<http://bit.ly/3tkvALE>
For information contact Ph:403-333-6943 or
Sarah.Schumacher@wheatlandcounty.ca



Donated Cold Frame

Local gardener Ben Verner has donated this substantial cold frame to use in the demonstration garden.

The plastic cover traps the solar energy, heating up the soil and protecting the seedlings from frost.

We can get a jump-start on spring, planting seeds as early as March. Spinach, lettuce, swiss chard, peas and carrots can all succeed with this help.

As the weather warms, the plants can be transplanted to other locations, or left in the frame with the lid open.

We will also be trying a less formal style of cold frame, using straw bales for the walls and a clear plastic cover. It should work when the nights are not so cold.

The Vegetable Gardeners Container Bible

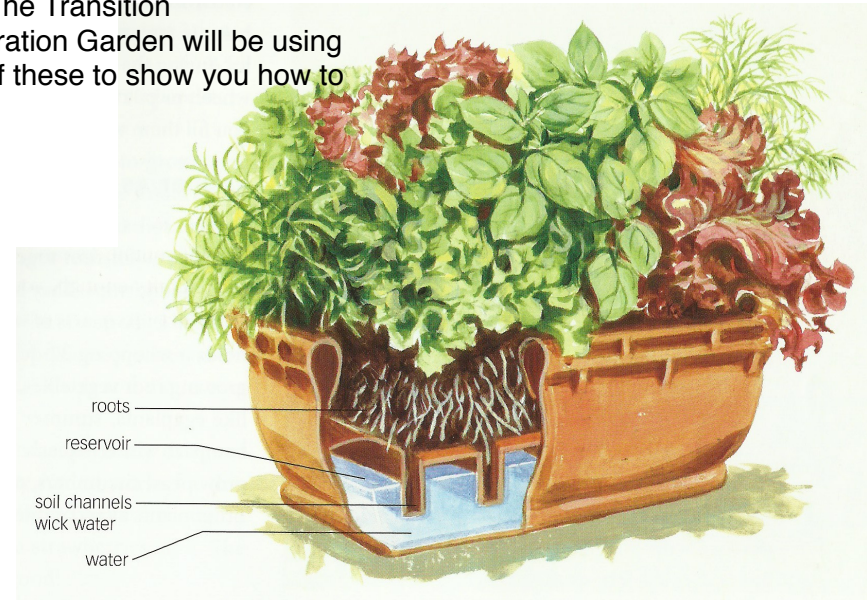
by Edward Smith

NF 635 SMI

Any lack of gardening space has long been met with pots, tubs and other containers. All work to some extent, but generally suffer from drying out very quickly.

Smith takes containers to a whole new level, with simple plans to make them self-watering. You can easily turn a storage tub into an effective, if somewhat homely, mini-veggie bed. Other planters, both larger and smaller, also turn into productive beds needing only weekly watering.

You can make your excess concrete landscaping or balcony into a tasty garden. The Transition Demonstration Garden will be using several of these to show you how to do it.



Wind Turbine Summary

In his book Drawdown, Paul Hawken identified 80 existing technologies that can reduce the level of greenhouse gases. Taken together, they could completely offset our current emissions.

Number 2 on Hawken's list is Wind Turbines. Not only do these wind towers reduce the need for fossil-fueled power, they have become the cheapest source of new power capacity. And with virtually no maintenance required, the cost of electricity need never increase.

As a retired engineer and committed environmentalist, John Slater has taken a strong interest in documenting the growing number of wind turbines in our area.

More than a dozen projects are at some stage of approval, with several large installations now producing power. Overall, John has tabulated plans for 880 turbines with a potential output of 2500 megawatts.

That sounds impressive, but what does it really mean? Well, for comparison, the City of Medicine Hat Electric Generation

Department has a total capacity of 255 megawatts, but the full amount is rarely used. So, if and when the proposed towers are on-line, they will produce enough power for all of southern Alberta, including part of Calgary.

One would hope that this significant contribution to Alberta's electricity grid would lead to reduced carbon emissions. However, there is no direct link. Excess power can be exported, or it may be absorbed by a growing population. Some major corporations are using the wind turbines to earn carbon credits that can be used to support other, less clean operations.

So far, the operating conditions of these facilities have not been widely discussed. Small, proactive actions can make the towers truly a positive environmental benefit. For example, bat mortality can be greatly reduced by stopping the turbines for a few evenings in both spring and fall, when bats are migrating.

With careful management, wind turbines can be a powerful tool.



PROFILE:

Issue #3, March 2021



For more info and some terrific photos of their programs, visit their website at: <http://www.neubauerfarms.ca/>

Neubauer Farms, owned and operated by Mark and Nichole Neubauer, is a mixed farming operation located just west of Medicine Hat. They grow cereals, oilseeds and forage, and raise beef cattle.

This traditional mixed farm diversified significantly by adding a community supported agriculture (CSA) component.

When customers began coming to the farm, their questions showed a need and an opportunity for more formal education programs. A grant from Alberta agriculture allowed the Neubauers to offer a program called Growing Minds. Hundreds of eager youngsters in many school classes had a chance to see how their food grows. A visit to this farm bridges the urban-rural divide with understanding and fun!

This action brings young people into the rural area where they are sorely needed. We hope that some of them decide to use the Neubauers as role models and mentors.





Community Supported Agriculture

Neubauer Farm was the first operation in this area to offer a “community supported agriculture” sales plan. Customers pay a flat amount in the spring, then receive a basket of varied produce each week over the summer.

The sample basket on the left looks delicious! Obviously, the customers receive excellent vegetables at a reasonable price.

Just as important, the Neubauers have a guaranteed market for what they grow. They don’t have to spend valuable sunny days trying to sell their produce.

This type of operation allows farmers to spread the risk among urban residents. If, for some reason, a total crop failure occurs, there are no refunds. The customers and the farmers share the misfortune. However, with modern irrigation, this sort of problem is pretty much a thing of the past.

CSAs, as they are commonly known, are popular. The Neubauers sell their shares well in advance of summer.

Just between you and me, . . .

Mark and Nichole are too modest to talk about this sort of thing, but here’s what I have observed:

Through hard work, imagination and a sense of adventure, they have gradually broadened the scope of their operation. In a sense, they have enriched their farm’s ecology with more participants, products and especially relationships. The grains, the livestock

and the vegetables each bring suppliers and customers to the farm. Add the school children, and the weekly visits from the CSA supporters, and you have a dynamic location. The farm’s active participation in public events like the province’s Open Farm Day brings even more people. Like a natural ecosystem, this diversity brings sustainability and resilience. We need more farms, and farmers, like these.