



# The Good Life Center Newsletter

Spring 2017  
Issue #6

## OUR MISSION

*To uphold the legacy of Helen & Scott Nearing through preservation of the Historic Forest Farm Homestead & educational programs that teach skills in sustainable living, social justice, organic gardening & the non-exploitation of animals.*

Greetings!

Welcome to gardening season! This issue contains a detailed and highly informative "how to" article on organic composting by former GLC Resident Steward, Sam Adels, whose passion for gardening is contagious. We introduce you to the 2017 Resident Stewards Jeanie Kirk and Alex Page, and offer you this season's calendar of Monday Night Meetings, which features many thought provoking speakers. As always, we welcome your feedback and comments.

Happy Spring from the Good Life Center Team!

## 2017 RESIDENT STEWARDS JEANIE KIRK & ALEX PAGE



*Currently hailing from Portland, Oregon, Jeanie and Alex are thrilled to spend the summer with the Nearing community caring for Forest Farm and continuing the Nearings' legacy. They are curious, compassionate listeners, eager to learn and devoted to supporting sustainability. Jeanie and Alex were married on Cape Cod in 2016. At the ceremony they*

*made a pact to maintain an adventurous, spontaneous spirit. The coast of Maine calls!*

She embodies the ethos and desire to "do good" – a complex, ever-changing view of the world. Jeanie is an avid, life-long student of progressive movements. She has a master's degree from Columbia University and currently works as a consultant for environmental and social justice organizations in Louisiana - the front line of sea level rise in the continental United States. Jeanie loves the ocean, really big trees, yoga, hiking, skiing, cooking, reading, swimming, and fresh flowers from Alex.

**Alex Page** was born in Santa Cruz, California and feels most at ease by the ocean. Alex studied English at Pitzer College and pursued his love of travel on a Fulbright fellowship in Korea. Upon returning he moved to San Francisco to work for environmental non-profits and subsequently attended the University of Oregon, where he earned a master's degree in sustainable transportation planning. Alex grew up on a "2.5 acre urban jungle oasis" but did not truly appreciate his mother's green thumb until he began his own backyard organic garden. Still a novice, he is ready to test his skills on a larger, higher stakes garden. Alex loves biking, hiking, skiing, cooking, baking, gardening, and a cold glass of chocolate milk.

**Jeanie Kirk**, from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, is a writer, editor, curator, feminist, and environmentalist.



# GETTING THE MOST WITH COMPOST

- Sam Adels

Photos by Claire Briguglio

## *The soil is alive!*

Gardening curbs the human ego. The gardener depends on so many variables outside of one's control. Gardening often feels like a real team effort, with nature in control and the human hand, no matter how green it's thumb, learning to play by nature's rules, the first of which concerns soil, for it provides the building blocks and home for plants. Since healthy plants rely on healthy soil, a healthy organic garden starts with good compost. Compost builds up the soil with all of the necessary requirements for plants to pump out those luscious cucumbers, zucchini, and all of our favorite vegetables. Compost is made up of soil and organic matter in various stages of decomposition: insects, microscopic organisms, worms, and nutrients vital to plant growth. The production of compost behooves the home gardener.

***According to Helen and Scott, "A good general rule for compost is: utilize any and all available organic materials."***

All your garden really needs besides water is good compost. Forget all the crap that Home Depot tries to sell you. Good compost makes good gardens. The bountiful addition of compost between growing periods builds soil fertility. As your garden turns the nutrients in the soil into the stuff you want to eat, compost returns those nutrients to the soil for the next go round. Over time, it is important to build the soil with compost, to make sure it does not become depleted.

Building their soil with compost allowed the Nearings to turn marginal land into prime organic gardens that they relied on for food. They always put into the soil more than they took out. According to Helen and Scott, "A good general rule for compost is: utilize any and all available organic materials."

If it grew, then it can decompose to make compost. Chief sources of compostable material that the Nearings used included: grass clippings, garden waste (weeds, leaves, etc), seaweed, and kitchen scraps. All of these items grew, extracting important plant nutrients. Composting them, rather than throwing them into the garbage, returns nutrients to the soil.

Making compost requires little effort, because nature's wonderful combination of bacteria, insects, worms, air, sunlight, etc. do most of the work. It just takes a little bit of time. Depending on certain variables such as temperature, compost can go from raw plant material to rich soil in a matter of weeks. Usually it takes longer. To maintain a healthy decomposition, compost needs to heat up internally to about 150 degrees!



*Good compost smells sweet and has no repulsive odors one would associate with decomposing dead things.*

A farm or homestead will usually have several large compost piles decomposing at any given time, to ensure a constant supply. The Nearings usually had about 12, 6 foot square compost piles going simultaneously. Some were new and needed to decompose, some were less active but not fully decomposed, and some were full of rich, black compost ready to be turned into a garden row. When one pile is spent, it is taken down and a new pile begins.



*The compost pile at left is being added to, the middle pile is cooking, and the far right pile is complete with rich black compost for use in the garden.*

The Nearings used simply stacked wooden poles, one on top of the other, in the fashion of a log cabin, to construct



their compost piles. We hold true to this form today. The logs go down on the ground, where the sod has been churned in. Two logs are placed perpendicularly on top. Smaller sticks lay laterally across this square base to allow for aeration, as decomposition requires oxygen. A bundle of tall 1/2 " diameter sticks are driven into the ground to stand up straight and provide vertical aeration.

Next, we add "four or five inches of coarse material: weeds, grass, hay, straw, cornstalks – the coarser the material the better, because it allows air and moisture drainage at the bottom of the pile."

Over this goes a 1" layer of topsoil or compost. This material will contain the insect and bacterial life that plays so important a role in breaking down the cellulose in the pile. Then we lay 3-4 inches of seaweed collected from the beach, followed by another inch of soil.

Seaweed is great for gardens and helps immensely in growing those prized vegetables! It contains loads of nutrients, stimulates soil bacteria, and increases soil structure, aeration, and moisture retention. Not bad, seaweed!

The next layer includes sawdust, which we get for free from a local woodworker in Blue Hill. Garden and kitchen waste complete the pile. We constantly add to the pile as material becomes available and decomposition, nature's miracle, begins. If the pile gets too big, simply stop adding to it. Cover it with grass or straw and let it cook. Comfrey, which many consider a weed, makes up a significant addition to our compost piles. The Nearings grew lots of it. Comfrey enriches and speeds up decomposition. As it grows, it's deep roots suck up all of the available nutrients from as far down as ten feet beneath the ground! This makes it rich in nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus - prime raw nutrients your garden plants want.

Remove the cover from a pile to check if it is ready. If not, wait longer. If you dig in and see beautiful, rich, sweet, black gold, then you are good to go! Add it to your garden rows or beds and mix it in well. Your plants will thank you, and in turn you will thank your plants. And, you will thank yourself for adding the compost to get the most out of your garden - the organic way.

*Sam Adels and his wife Claire Briguglio were the 2015 resident stewards of the Good Life Center. They are learning from the example that Helen and Scott set - living simply, gardening, and welcoming visitors to their homestead. They are transplants, and like seedlings, are putting down roots in order to grow.*



## 2017 MONDAY NIGHT SPEAKER SERIES

"*Living Sanely in a Troubled World*", the by-line to the Nearings' most influential book, "*Living the Good Life*", is the central concept of our Monday Night Speaker Series. Authors, filmmakers, academics and farmers will address issues of sustainability and coping in a troubled political landscape.

### July 3: Amanda Gustin

"*Hippies, Freaks and the Counter Culture of the '60s*"  
Amanda Gustin of the Vermont Folklife Center will speak about the Nearings' influence on the counterculture of the '60s and '70s.

### July 10: Iver Lofving

The film "*Peak Oil, a Love Story*" premieres as part of the series. The film focuses on 10 years in Iver Lofving's life and his changing views on how we might respond to the issues raised. Iver will lead the group in a discussion on renewable energy.

### July 17: Clara Coleman

Four Season Farm manager Clara Coleman discusses food sustainability and year round greenhouse growing.

### July 24: Greg Joly

2017 is the 100th anniversary of the United State's entry into World War I and Scott's political radicalization. Homesteader and GLC steward Greg Joly explores Scott's spirited opposition to the war and examines links between national and international events of the time.

### July 31: Dr. Masi Brown

A discussion on the South African philosophy of *Ubuntu* and how it applies to world conflict.

### August 7: Dr. Allison Dibble

A discussion about the latest research on bees and their importance to our food supply.

### August 14: Caitlin Shetterly

Maine native reads from her latest book about her research and experience with GMOs.

### August 21: The Mercer Family

The Mercer family use music and prose to inspire sustainable, organic, creative ways of life, and share their experience of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's courageous efforts to block the oil pipeline.

### August 28: Panel Discussion at the Brooksville Library

As part of the Brooksville Bicentennial Celebration, the last Monday Night Meeting will be at the Brooksville library and feature a community panel discussion on the Nearing legacy and its influence on the town.

## OPEN FARM DAY

Sunday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 10:00 AM - 3 PM

### Mark your calendars!

Join us at historic Forest Farm, home of Scott and Helen Nearing, for our 4th year of participation with the State of Maine in promoting it's diverse agricultural community. We will be offering documentary films, house and garden tours throughout the day as well as demonstrations on compost building, care of garden tools and more.

Bring a picnic to enjoy on the lawns or beach. Relax in a yurt. Books by and about the Nearings will be for sale and light refreshments will be provided.

Hope to see you there!



## GO PAPERLESS!



Tell us if you would prefer to be contacted only by email. Send a quick email to Mary Hildebrand: [hildebrandsm@yahoo.com](mailto:hildebrandsm@yahoo.com)



## DONATE!

Friends,

The GLC cannot carry on without your support. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the GLC! <http://goodlife.org/donate>

Visit our website [goodlife.org](http://goodlife.org) and check out our Facebook page.

*Thank you from the Good Life Center Team!*

## 2017 GLC BOARD MEMBERS

Warren Berkowitz, Farm Manager  
Doris Groves  
Bob Jones, Chair  
Kim Peralta, Secretary  
Josh Saltmarsh, Webmaster  
Charles Stephens, Treasurer  
David Zachow



Apple Pruning Day at Forest Farm April, 2017 - photo by Bob Jones



Photo by Claire Briguglio

## 2017 VISITING HOURS\*

- June 22 - Labor Day: Thursdays - Mondays, 1 - 5pm
- Labor Day - Columbus Day: Saturdays & Sundays, 1 - 5pm

*\*Visits may be arranged in early June and on weekdays in Fall on days we are not open, by calling the Farm Manager, Warren Berkowitz: 207-374-5386*