

Festival to focus on organic food, products

BY MARTY FIGLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

An exciting, fun-filled and educational event will be the two-day Michigan Organic Harvest Festival in the Job Skills and Campus Events Building at Washtenaw Community College near Ann Arbor, Friday-Saturday, Sept. 29-30.

The two days will be filled with classes, organic food grown by Michigan farmers, an outdoor farmers market and workshops on soil, organic livestock, organic certification, pesticides and food safety.

Guest speakers will be Jay Feldman, National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides; Cissy Bowman of Indiana, Hoosier Organic Marketing Enterprises; Joan Gussow, author and nutritionist; and Robin Mather, Detroit News food editor.

Workshops include such topics as "Where it all Begins," "Life in the Soil," "Benefits of Beneficial Insects," "State Support and Promotion of Organic Products," "Food From the Lab - Milk From Machines" and "Great Lakes Protection - Why Farming Must Change."

There will be an opportunity to visit exhibits by local growers and producers of organic and "earth-friendly" products and to network with farmers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers. This event is sponsored by Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance, Whole Foods Market, Ann Arbor, and Michigan Department of Agriculture.

Advance registration for the festival is necessary for meals and child care. Registration costs are: two days, \$40 (includes two lunches); one day, \$25 (one lunch); two days, \$30 (no meals); one day, \$20 (no meals).

Lunches are \$8 each, Friday and Saturday; Friday dinner is \$15 (limited number available). All the food is organic. Child care and children's activities are \$5 for four hours (ages 5-12).

Call (810) 632-7952 now so that you won't miss out on this opportunity. For more information about the festival, call (616) 446-8769.

Growing organic

Anne and Peter Bray of Birmingham will be involved with the festival. They have been gardening organically for 20 years and say the time and effort has been very well spent. Their garden is a National Wildlife Federation mini-refuge, as well as a working garden.

When they first moved here from England, where "there was no other way to garden," they found little information about organic gardening was available. Anne discovered the magazine Organic Gardening in a local drug store

and they were on their way.

They chose this method because they wanted their children to know what fresh home-grown vegetable plants looked like and how they tasted, as opposed to those available in the markets.

Over the years, they have experimented with various crops such as cabbage, green beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes and winter squash. They especially like to harvest kale and dig carrots and leeks in January and February.

"We have a tradition to harvest Brussels sprouts on Christmas morning," Anne said.

They are also growing fewer exotic varieties and are learning about and growing more native American plants. Flowers are always included.

The garden is free-form and informal with a mix of flowers and vegetables.

"We have lots of volunteers from annuals (including lettuce) and if they come up and are no bother we let them do their thing."

They are also letting more wildflowers grow in a small grassy area.

The wildlife garden is always in transition and they find it is low maintenance and a lot less work. One part is reserved as a wildflower refuge where spring flowers bloom at that time and then are kept under a permanent leaf mulch, which enriches the soil, controls the soil temperature and keeps it moist.

Sharing

Flowers are left to go to seed, which encourages many birds. They encourage rabbits, chipmunks, lots of insects and occasionally a spotted toad. A permanent pile of leaves is used by wild bees where they lay eggs. The bees are no bother.

"We share the parsley with worms which will become swallowtail butterflies. Several birdbaths are located throughout the garden and they get very heavy use, especially in late August when blue jays and robins bring their youngsters in for 'Bird-bathing 101.'"

She says the birds have enough to eat during the growing seasons, so they only feed them in the wintertime when the weather is very bad.

Because they use no chemicals on their property, they use alternative ways to control insects and weeds. They have found that by spreading rock phosphate lightly on the grass in the fall, it changes the soil chemistry so that dandelion seed won't germinate.

"Peter is a great fountain of knowledge when it comes to vegetables and composting."

Anne advises gardeners to "be relaxed, then all kinds of things start happening (in the garden) when you loosen up a bit."



MARTY FIGLEY

Growing organic: This Birmingham garden was grown organically.



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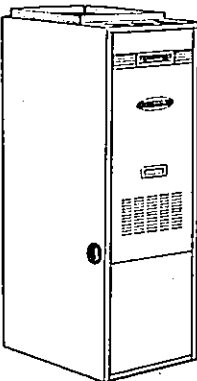
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Plant exchange scheduled

A plant exchange will take place 8:30-11 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 23, at the Grosse Pointe War Memorial parking lot, 32 Lake Shore Drive, Grosse Pointe Farms.

Bring your perennials, herbs, seeds, bulbs, house plants and shrubs. All plants must be healthy. Try to label plants with name and growing conditions. Call (313) 881-4594 for information.