

Party of Abundance

My Treasured Fellow Plant People,

As I meander to my cabin and computer to say hello to you today, I brush through stands of cow parsnips. Surprise! I see faded, tan-colored seed heads instead of green. Cow parsnip's leaves are browning too. On the pipe-like stems, the green color has receded to the bottom half. On the fireweed next to them, I find no green—only white and red. Nearby, nettles that have looked so lush now display a subdued gray-green. Cottonwoods over my head are withdrawing their vibrancy from their leaves and sending it into wood and root.

While I wasn't looking, all the Green Beings surrounding me have been pulling their life force down, down, into the soil beneath me. Every vegetative form is steadily and purposefully marching into the next cycle. Never hesitating or doubting, they are drawing in and consolidating their plant energies into the ground beneath me.

That means I am perching atop one mighty sub-soil repository, a safe subsurface storage tank of plant energy. This reservoir must sprawl over the Northern hemisphere. I am walking over this mammoth Earth Battery that is filling and charging, decomposing and recomposing. I feel a hush as the land is gently getting ready for bed. The sun's arc now bows in respect for the Earth's time of rest. Quietly these energies will compress, then build new tides to rumble forth next spring.

Right now, the Green Beings are throwing us a huge going-away party! What a bounteous celebration they leave with us as they move downward. They freely offer abundant gifts—seeds, ripe squash, mature broccoli heads, and umpteen berries. I pluck a juicy rose hip from a Christmas bush dripping with red baubles.

We are gathering in and storing the given wealth, and the land is gathering in and storing its energies. Our green friends cycle into their roots. We cycle inward too. We breathe and reflect. Then we emerge, ready to create the next big show, partnering with generous plants.

I smile to think of us all...picking, preserving, and savoring this grand finale. Our grateful and satisfying harvest unites us all in the rhythms of Mother Earth.

What else unites us? Deepening our relationship with plants, wild and cultivated. Our appreciation. Our choice to cooperate with life forces rather than fight with them. Our willingness to grow plants in partnership with nature's wise ways, and to eat in celebration of wholeness.

In that spirit, I pass on these juicy newsbits to you. You have given me a Big Wild Herb summer with you. I thank you for that. Now I'm off to snack on the last snow peas and nibble on nettle tips.

P.S. If you receive extra copies of this bulletin, please bear with me. I am revising lists and expanding my website. If you want to be off this list, just let me know.

Harvest thanks and blessings to each of you!

–Ellen V. V.

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Test your Soil Now

Get a jump on spring and do a soil test now.

September is a great time to find out what nutrients your soil needs for the next growing season. Avoid the 2 week wait of spring soil tests, and be ready with the selection of amendments you'll need to apply in May 2008.

Here's how. Collect representative samples of your soil from several areas in the garden in a clean container. Mix. Then extract 2 cups and place in a labeled *Ziploc* bag or a bag provided by your lab of choice. Be sure to state on the written form that you want recommendations for organic growing. If you can, specify which organic fertilizers for NPK you'll be using. (Eventually see my website for a list of organic amendments available in South Central Alaska area.) For soil test labs, see attachment.

Mat-Su Course in OG Growing Methods

It's also time to plan this course into your winter schedule. This class is only 6 Friday evenings, January 25, Feb 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29 (pending final approval). You'll refine your composting techniques, learn how to fertilize organically, and manage pests and weeds non-violently. We sure have fun. Come join us! Register in November through UAA. Call 745-9746 for information or see www.uaa.alaska.edu and follow Wolf Link for Agri 138, Organic Gardening.

This from a former student: I phoned the office of Johnny's Selected Seeds because my tomato variety from this company did not fruit. An expert talked with me at length, and asked about my soil, organic matter, soil amendments, growing conditions, dates, spacing, etc. He was very impressed when I pulled out my garden plan and recited all the specific information. He said, "Wow, you know a lot. Where did you learn all that?"

"Oh, from Ellen's class at Mat-Su College!" I proudly told him.
--Jan Bass, Spring 2007

Postponed Tune in Class

I have not posted a new date for the *Talking with Nature* course yet.

But the next for-sure classes are at Bioneers. See below.

Bioneers Conference

Drink deeply from this well of positive action, amazing projects, and inspiration. It's all about community, our environment, the economy, holistic health, buying locally produced foods, renewable energy, and green building materials. You'll leave with a "high" from national and local speakers, workshops, and mingling with other passion Earth stewards and innovators. It's at Alaska Pacific University on October 19-21, 2007. Register at www.sustainak.org. Yep, I'll be presenting "Becoming Backyard Bioneers" 101 and 201. Both will be tune-in classes and focus on my latest Earth-healing work. See you there!

Encouraging News

National Trends in Eco-Agriculture, Markets, & Health

Rising Popularity for Organic and Fair Trade

A new study in the United Kingdom shows that more than 37% of those surveyed are willing to pay more for organic and Fair Trade products, up significantly from 24% in 2002. *The Daily Mail* reported that "changes are being driven by concern about global warming and exploitation of the developing world."

Meanwhile, Fair Trade sales increased by 40% from 2005 to 2006, to the benefit of 1.4 million farmers and workers worldwide. Cocoa showed the greatest increase in demand at a whopping 93%, coffee at 53%, tea at 41%, and bananas at 31%. Demand for Fair Trade cotton doubled. "More important than the higher prices is the stability that Fair Trade brings. We are not as vulnerable to market volatility as we used to be," says Valentin Chinchay, a Fair Trade Coffee Cooperative member in Ecuador.

In Canada, the national rail service now serves Fair Trade coffee exclusively, as do all Hilton hotels in Sweden. In Ireland, all government departments now purchase Fair Trade products whenever possible. In Switzerland, Fair Trade bananas lead the pack. In the United States, organic Fair Trade coffee sales jumped 94%.

Organic Products Proliferate

As more consumers recognize the superiority of organic foods, industry is responding with a whole array of new certified product. A sampling of companies extending their market share includes: Del Monte Foods, with a range of organic vegetable and meat products, including corn, green beans, peas, beef and chicken broth, to be sold nationwide; Kraft Foods, which announced this year that it would launch organic nut varieties, including an organic nut selection and organic cashews, under its; Planters brand name; Schunck Markets, Inc., which is launching a new line under its Full Circle label of 120 privately labeled organic and all-natural products, including cereals, fruit preserves, canned vegetables, rice, mild, pastas, peanut butter, soymilk, coffee and teas; and Safeway, Inc. which is expanding its O Organic" line of products to include baby food

and foods for children ages 6 to 12, and introducing a product line called “Eating Right” for teens and adults.

Certified Cooking School

Sebastopol, California, is home to the nation’s first certified organic cooking school. California Certified Organic Farmers has announced that the Patty James Cooking School and Nutrition Center is ready to roll. “Helping people remove toxins from their diet is a big part of my life’s mission,” says Patty, who has been using organic ingredients in her nutrition classes for three years. Her goal is to help “as many people as possible eat 100 percent organic.” She also heads a Summer Cooking Camp for youth.

--Above articles from ACRES USA September 2007 p. 12

National Restaurant Chain Serves Family Farm Meats

McDonald's subsidiary restaurant chain, Chipotle is beginning to resist the ways of its parent corporation. Although most of the restaurant's patrons don't realize it, the chain now quietly refuses to use factory farmed meats, sourcing its pork and chicken from free range and family farmed operations. "A majority of customers don't even know we do this. We think this is a better way to go, and as people become more aware of where their food comes from they will care," says Chipotle president, Steve Eells. Hopefully, Steve can clue in his parent CEO at McDonald's on some of the finer points of animal welfare.

--from Organic Consumers Association's *Organic Bytes* 9-29-05