Has it really been that long?! Catching Up with New Year Recommendations

MISS YOU! As an overachiever by nature, I didn't realize that my needing to post an update to our blog was so outdated! It's been on my neverending list of to dos. I actually have piles of topics to discuss as they come up in newspapers, online articles, books, magazines, and networking discussions, and yet they slowly make their way on our site, and in stacks in my art room. As you may have already read, this site is an ongoing project and passion of mine that has developed from my passion for food, gardening and sustainable living. It has become something bigger. Or perhaps I'm branding so keep your eyes open.

WHAT'S BREWING?

We've also been brewing a variety of brews. Our, 'You Gourda Be Kidding Me' Porter was titled as a contest on facebook, of which my cousin Jake, the beer connoisseur, landed it the special comical title. We made this Porter late fall and used 7 lbs of various squash and pumpkin for the blend. I baked the squash in quarter pieces with the whole spices laid on top. Then we added them throughout the brewing boil in 15 min. increments, in addition to adding 1/3 vanilla bean every 20 min over the course of 1 hour. Our seasonal brew we bottled, and mighty spendy indeed but we were able to produce about 33 bottles of a unique, spicy, sweet, robust medium dark craft beer with a 7.3% ABV. This was also the first recipe that we created and brewed together. Usually I have assisted with the process as minimally as possible but this one was the first batch my husband and I brewed 100% together. We were rather impressed at how well we work together during the process. It went quite a bit smoother than the Friendly Neighbor Brewing nights at home. But we are a good pair in the kitchen too so I'm not surprised. This was also rewarding since their last

batch became part of the lost souls of beer explosions. And a whole batch was ruined from excessive carbonation which could have been caused from fluctuating temperature changes where they were stored, apparently a common mishap for Texas according to AHS(Austin Homebrew Supply). We have a Honey Kolsch on tap that should be ready by next weekend. I got Davin an awesome thermal growler with my dividend check from REI for Christmas. Great way to give a green gift! It's insulated and will keep beverages hot/cold for at least 24 hrs it says.

GREEN GARAGE SALE? REI-buy a **lifetime membership** for $20, get great deals and a dividend check of 10% back from your purchases throughout the year to spend at REI on anything you want. Another green way to take advantage of REI, check out their free programs, classes offered, and volunteering opportunities in your location. Also great company with wonderful benefits to work in a healthy and fun environment. One of our favorite REI regular events includes their garage sales, great deals on returned items from customers; shoes, bags, watches, bikes, racks, etc. Check different store locations to find out when their garage sales are happening. We've attended one in Portland, Oregon and several in Austin, Texas that had fantastic deals!

COMPOST TEA YOU SAY?

Since the fall I have also attended an invaluable Compost Tea Class at Third Coast Horticulture Supply in Austin that offered alternative methods of gardening by moderating garden techniques by monitoring, analyzing, and hosting the ideal amounts of fungus and bacteria within our backyard ecosystem. The perfect balance of the two prevents disease, pests, freezing, and heat stress among other things and also allows the plants to be incredibly resilient, strong, and much more efficient in their production abilities. No need to feed plants on a regular basis with various plant foods when the growing medium is in complete harmony by the perfect balance of bacteria and fungus, the system feeds itself. Creating compost tea can be done a number of ways but with proper aeration(using a pump) in a five gallon bucket and a fine mesh

cloth, a tea can be made while mixing medium materials and soaking them in water. There are several different formulas that one can use to create their own compost tea and you can also buy the product already made and ready to use. One may also take the compost tea mixture and apply it in undiluted measurements like an extract which can have a larger impact on the overall effect, especially on a commercial farm scale.

How to make compost tea? Yes, more on this later. If I can upload documents then I will upload the free pamphlet we received at the class titled, 'Soil Simplified: An Introduction to Your Garden's Microbial Life.' The definition of Compost Tea in this piece of literature states, "Compost tea is a brew of oxygen rich water, high quality compost, and some foods to help microbes bloom in population. " The article goes onto discuss the goal of a good tea is to "substantially increase the amount of beneficial organisms. " Compost Tea(CT) may then be used to coat leaf surfaces, inoculate compost, and restore and improve soil health through a bio-film protection barrier that keeps pathogens from feeding on the plant. "The microbes also respire CO2 that helps fuel the plants metabolism and through usage of tea in compost or soil the biomass of healthy life is stored and converts into energy. As you may already know compost is already organic matter that has broken down over time by microbes and may be used as food aka energy, later. Adding compost to your garden adds diversity to your soil and compost varieties vary by different compositions used; essentially compost is composed of sunlight, water, oxygen, nitrogen-green and brown earth matter(leafy plants,greens, grass, etc. for green, and wood, leaves, paper, etc. for brown-just a few examples).Many people use mushroom compost-obviously excellent for contributing a mycorrhizal relationship with fungi symbiosis. Some use chicken manure, and cow manure, but a good rule of thumb is to know EXACTLY WHERE YOUR COMPOST MATERIALS CAME FROM if you don't make your own. A lot of people are easily mislead by garden products that are labeled as "Organic" because they don't understand the science of the matter at hand, for instance, Miracle Grow-Scott's, Monsanto product, advertises, "Organic Gardening Soil"-well duh, anything living is organic-

here's the definition I referenced from biology-online.org below but don't believe what you see if you haven't done the research yourself. Miracle Grow-Scott's-Monsanto, the bain of our existence globally, and is far from toting the organic emblem of health. Just because your dirt says it's organic, doesn't mean that it's nontoxic, chemical-free, etc. Do your homework, I'm just scraping the surface of the subject. Research your seeds, your plants you buy at the store, seed-starts, etc. GMO vs. Non GMO to help get your head in the game. Mother Earth News is a great online resource, digital publication, or magazine to subscribe to if you're a newbie and want to put forth more effort in transforming your garden, home, lawn, life, food sources, and lifestyle. Also, the LIBRARY, I must reference it again, next to online used books and swaping good resources with your friends.

Word origin: Latin organicus, Greek organikós, órgan(on).
Related forms: organically (adverb)

Organic~Definition: *noun, plural: organics*(Chemistry) An **organic compound**; or any **substance** containing carbon-based compounds, especially produced by or derived from living organisms.(Agriculture) An organic food; or any food that is *organically grown* (i.e. grown without using or applying synthetic **pesticides**, **fungicides**, inorganic fertilizers, or preservatives. A*djective*(biology) Of, pertaining to, derived from, or similar to an organ of the body. http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/Organic

Inorganic~Definition:*adjective*(1) Of or pertaining to substances that are not of **organic** origin.(2) Relating to a substance that does not contain **carbon**.(3) Of mineral, rather than of **biological**, origin. **http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/Inorganic**

THAT'S RIGHT, CHEMICAL FREE 2014-I know you wanted to accomplish that goal this year! :}

Furthermore, funny thing is, once you get into the matter of what's in your dirt, where your dirt came from, what dirt your food grew from, what the dirt and plants were sprayed with to keep things growing, it'll make you sick to your stomach so

just make sure to do your research if you are really interested in becoming an “Organic Gardener.” In order to slap on the label you need at least 7 years of chemical free gardening under your belt on your land in addition to all the other legislative hoops you must jump through the FDA and USDA for Organic certification. You can do just as good of a job as a chemical free, “organic” gardener by making sure that everything that goes onto your lawn, garden beds, water, etc. is eco-friendly, non-toxic, and natural based. That’s right, no more crap sprayed on your garden beds AND LAWN that kills fish, birds, livestock, children, pets, and adults-don’t worry, there’s enough studies to prove that, it does make a difference. Just because you don’t feed your edible plants and herbs toxins doesn’t mean they won’t get what you sprayed or fertilized your grass with, NOT Dillo dirt(Travis county human waste with pharmaceuticals in it)-Organics By Gosh sells this misleading product too, ironic, don’t ya think? NOT Roundup-our poor ecosystem! NOTHING TOXIC ON YOUR HOMESTEAD PERIOD, EVER! Did I sound a bit concerned on the topic? Do you really want that in your drinking water? Didn’t think so, oh, well, it definitely depends on where you live but heads up folks if you’re in Austin, part of your water may come from the Colorado River, and guess where those tire rims, styraphome and non recycled water bottles, and kid toys go to die-in the lakes, streams, rivers, and oceans, if not in landfills, and natural habitats already. If it’s not petrolium based ingredients in your body, home and garden products,then it’s chemicals that you don’t know how to pronounce, and toxins that you don’t want in your body or the environment that you live in. Do ya think our ancestors had all that garbage hundreds of years ago to live sustainably? Heck no, did they survive, hell yeah they did. And without all the pills to boot, don’t even get me started, jk. Get over the illusion that chemicals are not bad for you and you’ll be a lot better off. Promise. Trust the millions of people who have died on behalf of the multitude of discussions that have spawned on behalf of our exposure to man made ingredients, not derived from plants. There are always other options before using chemical agents that can end your life or blind you. Many of you already know what I’m loosely and somewhat lightly

babbling about, those of you who are wanting to learn more? Get your hands on some documentaries via Netflix, library, or search for them for free online. Some titles of films to watch that might surprise you, not in any order, 'Corn, Death on a Factory Farm, Food Inc., Dirt. The Movie, Supersize Me which I've mentioned before…The Cove, there's a bunch that are easily accessible on YouTube for free too. Here's a quick link to some reviews from about.com http://documentaries.about.com/od/populardocsubjects/tp/Food_and_Nutrition_Docu.htm

On a positive note, I'd like to end my post with some uplifting insight and more positive information since I didn't foresee myself going on a last minute rampage. Also in the mean time, start your own research on ways to improve your garden and visit Third Coast Horticulture Supplies in Austin, Texas! There's also one in Muskegon, Michigan but I'm not sure if they know each other or not. The owner Shawn is a walking encyclopedia in the field and will show you how to test your samples under a microscope.

Other Must Reads for the NEW YEAR 2014!

A good start and a good read to help you grasp the concept of Compost Tea in it's entirety? Pick up a copy of Teaming with Microbes *The Organic Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web* Revised Edition by Jeff Lowenfels & Wayne Lewis and check out their website.

Sleeping Naked is Green by Vanessa Farquharson-got this awesome find at Half Price Books for $4 and it's a gem of knowledge. Even a bit ahead of herself at the time, this Canadian writer vowed to green up her life in 366 days and wrote about it. Great ideas, and comical events took place in her book and is a must read for autobiography, sustainable, earth lovers, and those wanting some new green ideas, published in 2009. A lot of wonderful references, and ideas for you to take as you embark upon your new year goals, or help you make some if you haven't already.

Texas Bug Book by Garrett & Beck, yes, we often wonder what strange new insect has come to taunt us throughout the growing

season, this one is pretty handy to have by your side. Got ours used at Half Price Books, but also Amazon has used copies for sale.

Beauty By Nature by Brigitte Mars-make natural products for you and your home from herbs you can grow in your garden. This is a gem of a find. Easy to follow, read, and use.

GAIA's GARDEN by Toby Hemenway-If you are looking for your foothold in the permaculture world this is the perfect book to get your feet wet and dirty.

Texas Mushrooms by Metzler, Metzler, and Miller-this is almost $30 or so, but if you are a mushroom forager in Texas, get yourself a copy. Also the National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms is a great handbook too.

Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens by Gail Damerow-How to care, feeding, housing, health, this book covers a lot of different topics that relate to your flock, so I was pleased when I was choosing, one book to buy. Again, there is countless info online,and in magazines but we've been pleased with this reference.

Texas Home Landscaping including Oklahoma by Greg Grant and Roger Holmes, includes drought tolerant plants, and natives, etc. They have a series that includes Cali, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Northeast, Northwest, and Southeast. Some of which include parts of Canada and British Columbia.

I like the local Agri-chapter free color publication of native plant species for Travis County available for more useful native plant selections, and non-native plant options that do well in the area. The last one they published was in 2009 I believe. Local Garden Centers in and around Austin still have copies available. Check out this link http://travis-tx.tamu.edu/agriculture-natural-resources/.

Good luck to you on your journey this year! May you encounter invigorating new moments to shine and be inspired. As I continue to study in the Graduate program at Texas State with my Interdisciplinary Studies in Sustainability I will keep you posted. I will start adding more information to the different

site topics too. Gardening and Food recipes will be of focus in the beginning of the year. Cheers, and straight ahead!

Becoming a Dairy Goat Shareholder

My husband and I considered joining a local small scale Dairy Goat Farm, small scale meaning it's basically a small heard that consists of five goats; Eve, Trisket, Abernathy, Misty, and Penny. We purchased a quarter share for $7 and once a week we are able milk goats. We end up getting 5 quarts of goat milk a month. We could have invested in a full share which is 5 gallons of goat milk a month and about $35. (We didn't continue being shareholders after the first month however because we didn't agree with the animals living arrangements.)

I've always had a love for goats, ever since I helped take care of 27 on a farm that had 59 animals, many of which were different. My interest in them has grown as we develop our passion for buying a larger homestead property in which we will have a few acres or more. My need for goat milk has increased since I started making chevre goat cheese and paying an upwards of $16 a gallon just to make 1 lb of cheese! After sourcing local farms and the farm that produced the milk I bought, from Wheatsville Coop; I knew that there had to be another way! I was fortunate to be able to speak with one of the owners of Wateroak Farms, Mark, who was extremely helpful in my cottage production of cheese. Although I can not sell the cheese that I make from the milk that I get from City Farm Austin, I will be able to learn an entirely new skill set. I

am new to the milking field and it was a bit challenging for me. I hope to get better as time rolls on. My husband picked up the skill rather quickly but then the Lord has blessed him with being very gifted with his hands so that doesn't surprise me.

So we add another skill to our list of things that we have learned how to do to become more self sufficient. Last winter Davin and I helped harvest 18 Muscovy ducks at a friends local Organic Duck Farm; Munkebo; boy was that a lesson, challenge, and experience. I can't say that I'm a fan of plucking molting ducks, it's probably the least favorite part of the job altogether, in due part because they were molting which meant extra presents secreting from their skin once plucked, disgusting. Not sure if I am able to post those pictures because they may be a little offensive but educational nonetheless. Also a great way to meet new people, learn new skills, and have a better understanding of where our food comes from.

We have by far a lot more to understand and learn what to do to be able to be 100% independent and live off the grid, but since we brew our own beer; make our own cheese-I'm still just a beginner in this field and I'm still experimenting; grow our own food and preserve it using several different methods; harvest rainwater; learned to milk goats; learned how to process poultry; learned some basic permaculture practices; are getting our own chickens-we would like 3 to start since we do live in an HOA that doesn't allow us to have them but another family owns a rooster that crows every day and has for years and we live along the greenbelt and have created the perfect urban homestead with room to grow; we have been blessed that our endeavors have educated us in the field of sustainability prompting our response to learn more.

We fish freshwater and saltwater fish for our food supply. We enjoy hiking, exploring, backpacking, camping, and getting our hands dirty whatever way possible outside. If we can benefit

from an activity in some way we have gained yet another priceless lesson in life. We have so much to learn from our ancestors, and neither one of us grew up on a farm although my father has been doing agriculture for years as a farmer who went to school for geology. I've learned a little from him but a lot more from all of the organic farms that I have worked on or volunteered for over the years. Also the continuing education class I took one summer at Austin Community College was extremely useful in becoming a better Texas gardener. I learned that I couldn't just throw a seed in the ground and expect it to grow like it does in Michigan. You laugh, I know, but people think they are "black thumbs" because they can't grow plants here but the reality is that plants only need 6 hours of sunlight in Central Texas. Whoa! It takes a completely different understanding of the land, water, soil, sun, and weather elements to be successful! It's no wonder your plants may be struggling which is why it's advantageous to learn about alternative gardening methods, including wicking beds, shade screening, gardening with raised beds, berms and swales, etc. Also make sure to rotate your crops.

As for now, we are headed to Habitat for Humanity to get more supplies for our greenhouse that is being converted into a chicken coop and a more efficient outdoor growing room.