Spring Fever=Ag+Edu+Bees+Onion Sprouting+Garden Seed Start Smarts

I seriously need to get with the program. Full swing in Grad school continuing my sustainability studies and ready for the semester to be over! Did I say that out loud? 9 credit hours was too much I think. I guess 6 hours is full time when getting your Masters degree; and mine is a curious blend of sorts; Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies-Sustainability Studies. With the possibility of moving I searched for other programs in the Houston area and none came close to this one. I do wish I was fortunate enough to be in another state that has better offerings for sustainability opportunities however I've gained a lot of experience in the field just by volunteering. The great thing however is that it's a new program at Texas State. I'm also a part of three projects in my first semester which is why I'm feeling slightly overwhelmed; I'm working full time as an Intervention Teacher for Elementary kids, and doing some nannying, while continuing my KKCreations shop online; my husband says that's a hobby. I am forever hopeful that my endeavors will turn from passions and dreams into successful and profitable differences. One day! We pray!

SEAWEED STUDY Did you know there's thousands of kinds of seaweed?! You may recall me discussing the marketing study I'm continuing for publication. The long term goal for this class; Specific Problems in Agriculture; Independent Study, is to help clean up the sargassum seaweed; brown seaweed that evades the Texas gulf coastline. If you have traveled among these areas you will notice the build up. The proposal is to combine brown seaweed with other natural compostable materials and

turn them into a marketable product; Seaweed Compost. The benefit would be shared by many; Texans wanting to contribute to education, cleaning up the ecosystem, gardening with compost that strengthens the drought tolerance of plants, supporting local products and jobs…sounds great right? There has been quite a deal of work put into it, in fact there is another student who has been trying to also turn the seaweed into an edible product. Got your juices flowing? Getting surveys completed has been a lot more difficult then I imagined! I've done a couple days at the Natural Gardener in Austin which has been quite lovely because of the people that I've met and spoken with about various topics. One customer posed several great questions that put me to the test about what's in seaweed and why or why not; would it be toxic? Especially from the oil spills a couple of years ago, and all the other pollution in our oceans. What do you think about that question? While becoming more curious about the scientific data myself, I came across this very interesting study :Chemical analysis and toxicity of seaweed extracts with inhibitory activity against tropical fruit anthracnose fungi; not what I was searching for but yet very interesting.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT My other projects involve Boots & Roots; Veterans Community Garden, Venture Entrepreneurship project that is also going to be a proposed new nonprofit business for the Austin community and Veterans. One of the approaches taken to boost revenue for the nonprofit is to get grant funding and have a vermiculture farm that can make worm composting products, earthworm castings, etc. It's a pretty intensive class; we've also been reading books like Innovation and Entrepreneurship, The Monk and the Riddle, and Running Lean. Some of the books can be pretty dry from time to time but all very useful tools for the new venture. My fave has by far been Drucker. The historical references he reflects on for innovative change are intriguing.

AGRIVOLTAIC AGRICULTURE My final project in Special Topics in

Agriculture is another study for publication. Based on previous studies done in France in 2011-2013. Renewable Energy, European Journal of Agronomy , and Agricultural and Forest Meteorology were all studies I reviewed in an effort to combine previous theories for successful biomass applications in Agrivoltaic systems. I go to the school farm on Friday to see what kind of layout I have to work with. This project will be the most learning curve of them all because I will have to build miniature field sets with photovoltaic opaque panels(solar) and have controlled crops to test in two seasons. Yikers. I'm still working out the kinks. We are thinking about using Chard as the main crop to test the soil, moisture in soil, and biomass. If anything else comes up like the leaf proportions, I may add that too. Please send me thoughts and suggestions on this topic because it will be probably the most challenging project for me to do; simply because I've never done a field experiment like this before.

BEES her Earth News this month was concerning the chemicals that are found in nursery purchased plants, they harm bees! So it's very important where you buy your plant starts from, especially if they are edibles. Read more on Cheryl Long's article on what I'm talking about online regarding Neonic "pesticides that spread thorough plants and contaminate pollen and nectar." As much as I love hardware stores that give veterans discounts; Lowe's and Home Depot were mentioned. I generally buy my plant starts at other local garden centers anyways. But love to get my hands on clearance non edible plants at Lowe's that are going to be thrown out. This article may change the way you buy your living green friends, to help take care of our little fuzzy friends. http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=2vQ5PV-bNtM

GARDEN STARTS I highly recommend going to the Sunshine Gardens spring sale March 1st in Austin to get your gardens ready. Bring cash and something to transport the plants with like a

wagon or cart. These community gardens are in the backyard for the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Another great way to support your local community and nonprofits! Learn more about them by watching this video. Sunshine Community

Other garden centers to visit this spring that offer affordable prices; Red Barn-love this place! AND they give military discounts, although they are north Austin they are worth the drive, they have a fantastic selection and are very friendly. Last year I got my onion starts there, Texas 1015 bunch for $2.99-steal of a deal, and my red onions for the same, 120 in a bunch. So, if you have looked anywhere, online, catalog, and other places you won't find a deal like that unless you use your own onions as plant starts. We are doing that with some of our 1015s and red onions this year since I hadn't used them all and they started sprouting; I harvested them in May 2013 and they lasted until January! So our new sustainable garden start is using our own sprouted onions.

SEEDS I order seeds every year from various companies online. I get numerous catalogs in the mail, some of wish I must discontinue since they send entirely too many. The most useful but somewhat expensive is Johnny's ; good company to support, employee owned. It's worth ordering a catalog because they give you an excellent and thorough description about what you're planting, the seed envelopes have entirely as much useful information on them as well. You could keep an old catalog for seed references because it's literally a little encyclopedia.

I also have gotten my tomato and pepper seeds from Tomato Growers Supply, and Burgess Seed Company. If I'm at Lowe's, yes I go to Lowe's, we save 10% always and we get great deals there, I may browse Seeds of Change organic seeds and Burpee Organic Seeds. This year I'm using a few new suppliers; Botanical Interests-killer deals on heirloom pole and organic seeds, Four Seasons Nursury-for inexpensive bulbs and bare root flowering bushes, Pinetree-unique herbs and fantastic

prices, Territorial Seed Company-many unique items including mushroom starts, rhizomes for hops, and soap making supplies, very inexpensive seed pricing! What's important to me when ordering seeds; non gmo, organic or a good second option, heirloom, zone specific, good insect plants, North American suppliers, company missions, quality products; free shipping, not outsourced-although I've found that some of the Midwestern garden supply companies are managed by the same companies of sorts and outsource customer service. I try not to use them for this reason because they don't understand what I'm talking about when dealing with plants.

Great fruit plant company I HIGHLY recommend Stark Bro's-guarantee to fruit, refund within the first year. Very happy with this company. I've purchased strawberry rhizomes, blueberry bushes, and grapes from them. Outstanding and personable customer service. Don't buy your fruit in a garden center when you can buy it online for much cheaper. Especially when it comes to strawberries, 25 shouldn't cost more than $12.00, you can't buy that deal in a store anywhere.

p.s. Our chicken coop is almost ready and we are getting 4 Barred Rock Dual purpose chickens! Yeah! Look for updated photos in our Sustainable Projects link.

Gardenshttp://www.motherearthnews.com/~/media/Images/MEN/Editorial/Special%20Projects/Issues/2014/02-04/The%20Dangers%20of%20Neonicotinoid%20Pesticides/Flying-Honey-Bee%20jpg.jpg