

Organic Garden Tour Draws A Crowd

By Nelson Lebo
Proctor Academy

Over 50 organic farmers and gardeners from across the Granite State gathered at Proctor Academy's football field in the early evening of Friday, July 22. But the cars parked behind the end zone were not hosting tailgate parties. This Friday night had more to do with the sidelines. The purple blooms of morning glories and comfrey, and a confetti of nasturtium blossoms rising from the monoculture of turf suggested something happening on the east end of Proctor's campus besides touchdowns.

The gathering marked the second in a series of five farm and garden tours sponsored by the New Hampshire Chapter of the Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA). Billed as "Three Organic Gardens and One Great Potluck," the all-Andover event proceeded from Proctor's organic garden, to the home of Deb and Mike Huntoon overlooking Highland Lake, then on to Rick Estes' Studio-in-the-Woods at the top of Old College Road. Elizabeth Obeleanus, coordinator of the NOFA-NH farm and garden tours, estimated the turnout to be the largest in the history of the NOFA tour series.

Proctor Organic Garden

What five years ago was a jungle of crab grass, rag weed, knot weed, chick weed – and any other weeds you can name – has been transformed into a thriving garden that has:

- supplied Proctor's kitchen with hundreds of pounds of fresh vegetables and herbs
- been used to educate hundreds of students in classes ranging from the sciences to foreign language
- inspired some of these students to pursue organic farming after graduation
- been a model of success that has drawn teachers from other schools.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, the greatest steps American consumers can take to reduce their ecological footprints are 1) drive less and 2) eat less meat. The Proctor garden satis-

fies both suggestions.

The no-till bed system eliminates the need for rototilling, and all food is delivered to the school kitchen across campus in a garden cart or on the bed of an industrial tricycle. In an era when it takes industrial agriculture five to ten fossil-fuel calories to produce one food calorie, the Proctor garden actually turns a net energy profit.

This zero-emissions garden is the best example of sustainability being actively practiced on the Proctor campus. It has inspired students and teachers alike to refocus on community and ecology. With dirt under their nails and hope in their souls, those students most involved in the garden enter the world after graduation with a sense that they can be agents of positive change in a world that needs them more than ever before.

Huntoon Gardens

At the top of their long driveway, Deb and Mike Huntoon introduced themselves and told how they started using organic methods in the early '90s to eliminate potential hazards from garden chemicals and to focus on a healthier environment and food.

When they moved to East Andover in 2001, there were only a few hostas and some shrubs in their yard. Over the past four years they have added over a hundred varieties of flowers, shrubs, and trees.

Spread across a large lawn that runs from the house down to the Franklin Highway, the gardens include a perennial garden, an asparagus patch, a tomato/potato bed, an herb garden, a berry patch, and more. Under threatening skies, interested growers listened to Deb explain the evolution of their landscaping project and reveal some of her tricks and techniques. Fortunately, the downpour held off until we had completed the tour and were browsing on black raspberries.

Estes Garden And Greenhouse

People scattered to their cars, pointed them west, and drove to the final destination of the evening at the top of Old College Road. Rick Estes has been growing organically for home and market since 1977, mostly at his farm in

Salisbury, where he also began experimenting with solar energy. Rick has served as NOFA-NH President, and is a frequent presenter at the annual NOFA Conference in Amherst, Massachusetts.

In a clearing between his fencing studio and his house, Rick uses a raised bed system to maximize the limited fertility of the soil. "When I was growing commercially I would spread cow manure across the whole field: in the beds and the rows. With this system, I fertilize only the beds, not where I walk."

Rick's raised beds are carefully designed to meet his subsistence growing needs as well as his busy schedule as a builder. He knows the wood that holds the raised bed soil in place will last less than a decade, so he's designed the system for replaceability. With rebar pounded into the ground, a couple of electrical metal tubing clamps, and a cordless drill, Rick claims he'll easily replace the 16-foot boards when the time comes.

As the skies threatened another shower, Rick led us into his home where a solar greenhouse is being used for both seedling production and winter heating. However, most people were interested in



Nelson Lebo surveys a small part of the Proctor Organic Garden. Photo: Charlie Darling

the unique design of the interior spaces of the structure. Rick entertained questions on the building of his home, while some brave (and hungry) souls made the dash back to the fencing studio, where the potluck dinner took place.

This NOFA event was an overwhelming success and highlighted Andover at the heart of the organic movement in New Hampshire. If you missed this one, there will likely be a sequel next year. Stay tuned.

For more information about NOFA, visit their Web site at NOFA.org.

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