

The Canadian Organic Grower

Editor

Janet Wallace
1650 Stronach Mtn. Rd, RR#1,
Margaretsville NS BOS 1N0
T: 902-825-2432
janet@cog.ca

Contributing Editors

Roxanne Beavers, Jean Duval,
Matthew Holmes, Pamela Irving,
Anne Macey, Beth McMahon,
Gwen O'Reilly, Elizabeth White

Advertising

contact COG office (see address below)
or email ads@cog.ca

Subscriptions/COG Membership

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K1N 7Z2
T: 613-216-0741 or 1-888-375-7383
F: 613-236-0743
office@cog.ca www.cog.ca

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EDITORIAL

Going batty ...

Recently, while flipping through a UK organic gardening catalogue, I was pleasantly surprised to find a seed blend entitled “Bats in the Garden Mix.” The mix contains nectar-rich flowers, including many with night-scented blossoms that attract nocturnal flying insects. These, in turn, attract the bats.

When I think of gardeners willing to spend money and devote garden space to attract bats, I feel a sense of hope. I love to hear about gardeners using their plots as more than a place to grow food and flowers. Perhaps they, as I hope most organic growers do, see their gardens and fields as part of something larger. Our lands are not simply affected by surrounding land: what we do on our gardens and farms influences the land and wildlife beyond our property lines.

It's like looking through a pair of binoculars. Usually, at first, each eye sees a different image. By adjusting the binoculars, we can eventually see one image that merges the two earlier ones. Being an organic grower is a bit like that. We can't just look at one thing at a time, but need to look at many different factors, such as soil, weeds, beneficial organisms, weather and crop choice. We then find a way to incorporate all of these variables into the single entity of our farms and gardens.

As consumers, we can consider many factors when shopping for food, such as the linkages between our food, environment and community. For example, in shopping for flour, our purchases influence important issues such as genetic diversity, the economic viability of farmers, and global

climate change. But we don't need to forget taste and health. Fortunately locally-grown and milled flour made from organic heritage grains not only is a great choice for environmental and social reasons, but also makes healthy and delicious baked goods.

In this issue, we focus on grain. When I think of the prairies, I often envision endless fields of grain. However, organic farmers are bringing diversity into these landscapes—with different grains, varieties and management techniques. Av Singh explores the world of ancient wheats, and Brenda Frick weighs the pros and cons of growing heritage cultivars and mixes of grains. Stuart McMillan describes how organic field crop farmers can use their buffer zones, not just to protect their land from sprays drifting from neighbouring farms, but also to create oases of biodiversity. Dan Jason encourages gardeners to include plots of grain amongst their vegetables [when I first read his article which begins by describing grains as grasses, I had visions of a city street and all the ‘lawns’ growing grain]. And because we don't just grow grain, but eat it too, Sylviane Duval offers recipes that celebrate a variety of organic grains.

We also provide a listing of companies that provide seeds of interest to organic growers. Many of the companies provide certified organic seed of heirloom varieties. Whether you are planting vegetables to eat, grain to sell or flowers to attract bats, I am sure that you will find the seed you need in these listings.

—Janet Wallace, Editor

Cover photo: Quinoa – a colourful and useful grain for the garden or field.

Photo credit: Janet Wallace