



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection
by
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FORAGING FOR WILD PLANTS AT STRATFORD

Fourteen folks went foraging at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road on the last Saturday of April. They were participating in the wild plant identification walk and luncheon organized by the Herb Group. Foraging was once the only way to find food, and has now become a popular hobby. A comprehensive handout, prepared by Linda Haas, with color photos and cooking suggestions, helped participants identify the spring edibles.

Lunch is not always served after a walk, so ours was appreciated. The fare included: burdock, daikon, and carrot soup; quiche with dandelion, garlic mustard, violet greens, spinach and chickweed; cream of asparagus soup; cheese and herb biscuits; breads; herb butter; violet jam; hickory nut/maple syrup pie and herbal teas. The food was so flavorful it is no wonder foraging is in vogue!

Stratford's Earth Week celebrations fell on the same day and involved tree planting, garlic mustard pulling and removal of other invasive plants. This year's tree varieties included Dogwood, Elderberry, Viburnum, Chokeberry, Hazelnut, Redbud, Burr Oak, and Sugar Maple. The removal of invasive honeysuckle along the driveway during the past year provided plenty of space for the new trees. A total of 1,158 trees were planted by 127 volunteers, who between them donated 251 hours of their time..

The second incubation of eggs from our chickens resulted in a much higher percentage of live chicks, with five out of the eight eggs producing healthy chicks. We will never know the outcome of the five eggs in the hen house nest. Not because the hens stopped sitting on them, but because they simply disappeared. They were marked so they could not have been gathered as fresh eggs, and their loss remains a mystery!

During the winter the saturated ground in our fields became compacted. With less than normal spring showers, and record high temps during the last few weeks, the top layer has dried out too quickly and cracked. Fortunately rain fell this week and improved the soil conditions. Farmer Jeff cultivated half of field 6 and planted a mixture of oats, alfalfa and orchard grass. In field 7, where the rye grass succumbed to an early frost last fall, he planted the same mixture. Around the perimeter of both is a "nurse crop" of buckwheat. It will attract the pollinators and they will help fertilize all the plants.

The grass will be ready soon in fields 4, 8 & 9 to make hay. The animals have been moved to field 5. Among them are the first of the kid goats, triplets born in late April and

twins in early May. The four fattening pigs have now gone to the processor and the meat is available for purchase.

The apple crop will be good for the fourth year in a row but sadly the pear fruit buds were killed by the last frost. The growth in both greenhouses is a sight to behold, with pink poppies blooming in the larger one, and a full house of strong vegetable seedlings in the other. At this time of year I realize how much grass has to be cut around the farm, including the children's garden and the lawn in front of the Education building, where the kids gather. Volunteer Tom Karbler takes care of the apples trees, and cuts the grass in the orchard with a push mower. This is no easy task when the hens create dust baths in the grass to cool off, and Tom has to push the mower up and down the gullies!

This month Stratford was a grateful recipient of a grant from the Delaware County Commissioner's Community Enhancement Fund. I spoke to Barb Lewis, Delaware's newest Commissioner, to find out more about the Fund and the reason Stratford Ecological Center was awarded the monies. Barb shared they grant modest financial support to deserving non-profit organizations that provide important services to our community, which government cannot provide. These services enhance the quality of life in Delaware County.

Barb went on to say she voted to award us seven thousand dollars, to provide continuing educational opportunities at the farm, because Stratford Ecological Center is a precious gem for Delaware County. It brings our community together in so many positive ways, while preserving an invaluable piece of nature for our children's future. It is open to all and truly enriches every visitor.

For those who have not yet experienced the many aspects of Stratford we hope you will come out and see for yourselves what Barb has already discovered. Thank you for your support Commissioners.

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