



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

by

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LUSH GROWTH FOUND THIS MONTH IN TUSCANY AND STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

The woods and farmland looked so lush this week at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road, after all the rain and summer-like temperatures during my two-week absence visiting Italy's Tuscany. I had heard a lot about the region's beauty and was glad to have the opportunity to visit with friends.

Tuscany's growing season was much further along than Ohio's. There were roses, carnations and calendulas in full bloom; pink valerian and yellow broom flourishing on the roadside; and pots of geraniums, rosemary and lavender on patios. Ten-hectare family farms created hundreds of years ago remain, with woodlands, steep green pastures, fields of wheat and oats presenting a challenge to cultivate, olive grove and vineyards. After a train ride to Cinque Terre on the sparkling Mediterranean, the cliff-hugging walks between towns, the scents, bird song and sunshine were a wonderful tonic after an Ohio winter.

The food was incredible, served with such courtesy to visitors. The simplest foods were so flavorful. How is it possible for a green salad topped with fruit, including rings of blood red oranges, a plate of spaghetti laced with olive oil, or a risotto topped with mussels and tiny octopus be so delicious? Their soil and use of herbs is part of the answer, and the rest I hope to find out by investing in an Italian cookbook!

Like many travelers I was as glad to return as I was to go. Back at Stratford this was the final week for spring school tours. It was delightful to encourage the children to run along the paths beside the flourishing hayfields, sample the last of the winter greens and new carrots, and to see purple martins and tree swallows filling the nesting sites.

Stratford hosted a party on May 22 to celebrate the conclusion of a pen pal program offered to 5th graders at Conger Elementary School. Eighty students and eighty seniors from Source Point met, many for the first time, for lunch and a tour of the farm. The pen pals communicated after reading "Unusual Chickens for the Exceptional Poultry Farmer" by Kelly Jones, funded by the Health Care Foundation of Delaware County. As a part of the program the children learned about chicken health, and they cooked meals, incubated eggs from Stratford, donated the chicks, and created their own chicken poetry.

The continually moist conditions have not been favorable for hay making and the grass is already beyond its prime for hay. Even with sunshine, cut grass will not dry properly laying on top of wet ground. Parts of field 3 have been cultivated ready to “eventually” plant tomatoes and peppers, sunflowers and buckwheat. Oats are slowly emerging in the west end of the North pasture following last year’s heavy corn crop. For the first time the east end has been cultivated and taken out of permanent pasture to plant corn. The ground has been well fertilized by the livestock who favor the slightly higher location which allows them to see the barn and feel secure.

The big greenhouse is transitioning to summer crops and looks a picture along with the renegade flowering poppies and larkspur. The vegetable beds in the Children’s Garden have been well manicured by the education interns and filled with plants. After some critters started nibbling on the tender growth it ended the discussion about whether to replace the old fence. A no-climb fence will be erected as soon as it is dry enough to take equipment onto the grass.

Our outreach garden program with Liberty Community Center preschoolers will continue throughout the summer. The kids are enthusiastic and even encourage their parents to stay and help in the garden! Summer camp starts with 9-12 years old on June 4. Activity ideas recently presented by the OWU Child Psychology Class incorporated empathy for plants, animals and people alike. They will be implemented to help campers connect with the land and food production. Story Time on the Farm, the second Tuesday of the month, will see a huge rise in attendance now school is over. A new family archery program will be offered on June 2, as well as beekeeping, kid’s photography and cooking classes throughout the summer. Details and sign-up can be found on our web site.

Everyone is welcome to come out and discover the changing cycle of our working farm. You can fish in the pond, find shade on the extensive woodland trails, pick blackberries, and generally enjoy the peace and beauty of this magical place so close to Delaware.

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