

Foodbank lets people grow foods in creative ways

Rutland Herald



STAFF REPORT - Published: May 3, 2009

For many of us, growing some of our own food is a significant first step towards self-reliance, healthier eating and greater security. In the process, we also gain a stronger connection to nature and ecology. But even in Vermont - where we are blessed with farmland, a relatively healthy farm economy, and viable agricultural traditions and new skills - we still depend mostly on other areas of the world to supply our food.

In the simple act of gardening we can find the solutions to some of our greatest problems: the economic crisis, uncertain supplies of food, global warming, energy depletion, and many different health problems. As we work with the land, we learn about our particular microclimates. We spend more time outside, and we get exercise. When we share the fruits of our labors, we encourage others to garden and we build community. And it all tastes good! No matter where we live, we can all take small steps towards remaking our areas to be more productive, nourishing and ecologically regenerative.

To promote local and sustainable agriculture, the Vermont Foodbank is offering free workshops this month on permaculture and sheet mulching at its Manosh Branch in Wolcott. Participants will use the small lot surrounding the Manosh Branch building and transform it into an edible landscape with fruit trees and bushes, raised beds for vegetables and herbs, and a mixture of ornamental and medicinal perennials. The goal of these workshops is to provide food, beauty, and a place for sharing garden skills. Donations of plants, help, manure, compost, leaves, grass clippings, wood chips and hay are welcome for these projects!

The term permaculture refers to the concepts of permanent agriculture and permanent culture. As the process of designing our landscapes to meet our needs in an ecologically regenerative way, permaculture requires us to consider the ethical and environmental effects of our support systems. But rather than the "reduced impact" approach, permaculture speaks to our potential to create beautiful, stable, diverse, and productive ecosystems for our continued evolution. In this approach, natural ecosystems serve as our models to shape a design for ecological living that integrates the plants, animals, buildings, people,

communities, and the landscapes that surround us.

Sheet mulching is a specific gardening technique - a form of no-dig gardening that offers a low-cost way to break new ground, suppress weeds, hold moisture, and add organic matter to the soil by layering different types of compostable materials. Sheet mulching cuts down on maintenance costs, increases water storage, prevents erosion and improves soil. It also makes it possible to create garden areas without hard digging first, where environmental or physical restrictions apply.

These workshops are free, but pre-registration is required. To sign up or for more information contact: Rebecca Beidler, 472-8280, rbeidler@vtfoodbank.org.

The Vermont Foodbank is the state's largest hunger relief organization, serving all 14 counties through a network of 270 nonprofit food programs - food shelves, soup kitchens, senior meal sites and after-school programs. The Foodbank's Salvation Farms Gleaning Network is a resource available to farmers and food sites that provides volunteer crews for salvaging farm surplus and arranging storage and distribution of produce donations to Vermonters in need. For more information about Salvation Farms and the Vermont Foodbank visit vtfoodbank.org or salvationfarms.org.