



CWA Enterprising Woods - Forest Garden Workshop Leckmelm Wood, Ullapool Saturday 12th October 2013

Summary:

As part of the CWA Enterprising Woodlands Highland project, in partnership with Ullapool Community Trust, CWA organized a practical workshop on Forest Gardening at the off-grid forest base of the founders of Reforesting Scotland.

The workshop was run by pioneering permaculture practitioner Emma Planterose Magenta and aimed to build on the seminar on Growing and Harvesting Food in Community Woodlands held in Torriddon, April 2013 (report available: <http://www.communitywoods.org/about-documents.php>)

Objectives:

Focusing on forest gardening observation and interpretation the workshop aimed to inform through practical involvement and to encourage sharing of experiences.

The workshop was intended for people involved in community woodlands, food growing, foraging and woodland management. The aim was to bring people together from across the community woodlands sector to develop/ increase their skills and knowledge around growing food in community managed woods and land.

One aim was that participants leave the day feeling inspired, rich with ideas and the knowledge of what to do next in order to develop them.

Location:

The workshop fully used the forest garden site in Leckmelm Wood, near Ullapool, Wester Ross. Participants were invited to park in the yard of North Woods Construction and walk 400m along the forest track to the West End.

Programme:

- 9:30 *Arrival, welcome, tea & coffee*
- 10:00 Introductions ~ to each other, the place and to the ideas
- 11:15 *Tea & coffee break with scones & home-made jam*
- 11:45 Guided Tour with themes ~ looking at soil building, competition & animals
- 12:30 *Lunch ~ Kale soup, Pumpkin Pie, Focaccia, Potato salad & Lemon verbena biscuits*
- 14:00 Tools & Hugel bed building
- 15:30 *Tea & coffee break with plum cake*
- 16:00 Propagation ~ seed harvesting, storing & exchange
- 17:00 Closing
- Evening *Fire & Food for folk staying for the weekend*



Photos from the day can be viewed online at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjN2v5Tj>

Participants:

- Ariane Burgess Findhorn Hinterland
 - Andy Robinson NW Mull Community Woodland
 - Michael Williams LLCCDC
 - Nicholas Blackwell CWA Individual member
 - Kim Gillies Urban Roots
 - Yvonne Goodall Abriachan Forest Trust
 - Sandy Goodall Abriachan Forest Trust
 - Gina O'Brien Aultnaskiach Dell SCIO
 - Simon Calder Ullapool Community Trust
 - Amy Clarkson Dunain Community Woodland
 - Alasdair Cunningham Dunain Community Woodland
 - Adam Pellant Assynt Foundation
 - Fiona Chalmers Forres Community Woodland Trust
 - Jonathan Caddy Findhorn Hinterland
 - Blair Duncanson Assynt Foundation/ Wild About Wood
 - Mike Ellis Helmsdale Woodlanders
 - Rona Ellis Helmsdale Woodlanders
 - Lesley Kilbride Applecross Community Trust
 - Tom Kilbride Applecross Community Trust
 - Charlie Kempton Hopkins North Cloich Forest Garden
 - Jake Child North Cloich Forest Garden
 - Jeff Askew North Cloich Forest Garden
 - Jess Windsor North Cloich Forest Garden
 - Matt Davies North Cloich Forest Garden
- plus 4 children





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Introductions:

We were blessed with a calm, sunny day. Several participants had arrived late on Friday night, having travelled from Mull and the Borders, to stay in the yurt and caravans. Others parked and walked along the track to arrive in the sheltered yard of the former sawmill, stable and store built from timber from the forest, milled on the Logosol chainsaw mill. All were invited to write their names on clothes peg “name tags”. The group comprised of Em and 24 participants with 4 children, 3 dogs, 3 ponies, 14 ducks and the cat. 5 of the participants had attended the Torridon seminar in April.

With all refreshed, Em invited the group to stand in a circle while each participant introduced themselves, where they had come from and what organization(s) they were connected with. In another round they were asked to express their particular interest in the workshop and what they most wanted to find out.

To gain an impression of expectations, levels of interest and motivation, Em asked participants to place themselves on an axis in response to a series of statements such as:

- *I have never planted a tree... planted a few.... planted 100's.... and have grown them from seed*
- *I have no land.... have access to some... have my own*
- *I have no knowledge of forest gardening... I've read about it.... have researched..... am active developing one*
- *I do not use the internet.... have occasional access.... use regularly*

Most had an idea and done research into forest gardening and the majority had their own land or access to some. It was notable that those without much experience or access to land did not think they gained as much from the workshop, as it was not designed as an introductory training.

Em then introduced the programme and the place, with a brief history of Leckmelm Wood and the forest garden. She emphasized that this would be a day without flipcharts and powerpoint as everything was around to see and demonstrate. However, the handbuilt blackboard stand and chalks were made good use of by the children, and there was an extensive library of topical books and publications laid out along with CWA literature.

The programme was designed to allow space for networking and exploring in depth.





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Leckmelm Wood is a south facing 33 hectare plantation of mainly Sitka spruce, Scots pine and Douglas fir with a matrix of native broadleaves and understory of Rhododendron ponticum. It was bought from the Forestry Commission in 1993 by Em, Bernard Planterose and Martine Howard, and has been gradually inhabited and converted ever since.

Em described the development of the West End forest garden, from the felling out of the spruce through ongoing rhody removal and soil building to its productive present. She explained that, in Permaculture, a design is usually drawn up, but that here, due to changing circumstances and needs, a more organic approach is taken. She has been away for two-thirds of the 12 years based at the West End but always returns to a productive, if somewhat overgrown, garden. She has had help from many volunteers and Wwoofers and is now looking more at apprenticeships. Income is from a wide and varying range of products and activities, such as selling hardy, edible and useful trees, shrubs and herbs, letting out marquees, a yurt and caravans, and international youth trainings. Her costs are low as the forest is such a rich resource and she is off-grid and self-reliant. She explains that she has no particular skills, is not even a very good gardener, but is passionate and persistent. Her approach is deeply organic and largely manual *“this is my gym... it keeps me fit and healthy... I’m never ill”* but she is fully trained in chainsaw use and can swap sawlogs for “digger credits” to do heavy work.

Guided Tour:

After tea and coffee the group were led on a tour with frequent stops, explanation and questions. They looked at design, light, water, competition, orientation, access and materials. They saw progressive manual clearing of rhody, thinning of spruce at the vulnerable edges, terracing with brash, soil-building with biochar, mulching and composting. Rhody was turned from a problem into an asset, used for cooking wood, crop supports, temporary and decorative fencing and charcoal. Ponies were used for hauling logs, clearing land, rhody control, building soil, spreading fertility and for teaching. They are fed bought in hay and contained using moveable electric fencing powered by a solar energiser. Ducks are used for slug control, dog and cat for predator and deer deterrent. The polytunnel extends the growing space, season and produce.

A mixed herb salad was picked for lunch, with about 20 different leaves and flowers, showing how the harvesting technique can be part of the management.



Tools and Hugel Beds:

After lunch Keyhole gardens <http://www.inspirationgreen.com/keyhole-gardens.html> and Hugelkultur <http://www.richsoil.com/hugelkultur/> were introduced along with the tools Em considered most useful, such as the dutch hoe and spring tine rake. *“I rarely use a spade” “Raking is my meditation. I even do drainage with this rake... start a route for the water and let the water do the rest of the work”*. She demonstrated how to use the tools as extensions to your own body and how to protect your back.

Thus equipped, with wheelbarrows and forks, the group created a Hugel type bed with a range of prepared and gathered ingredients... rotting wood, leaves, rakings, biochar, dung, turfs and compost, sweetened with ground limestone and covered with flattened cardboard held in space with fresh cut alder branches until ready to plant.

There was extensive discussion about soil building, composting, slugs, ducks and biochar.

Propagation:

Tea and plum cake were well received, followed by a tour of the long-used and well adapted “fishbox nursery”. Tree and shrub growing from seed and cuttings was demonstrated and discussed with much interest, followed by going through to the mature garden to show and collect herb and vegetable seeds.



Several pillowcases of previously harvested seeds ~ ragged jack kale, hungry gap kale, hot red mizuna, green mustard, poppy, greater celandine ~ were laid out on the cart and bags provided for participants to take home and share. Seeds brought by participants included sweet cicely, lovage and salsify.

Evening:

Several participants stayed another night and continued the exchange, with food, around the fire, well into the early hours.

Food:

Em's daughter, Tiril, had recently returned from Italy and made an organic Mediterranean buffet using produce from the forest. It was served on the four-wheel pony cart with help from another organically grown friend, Cat Emberton. Participants readily tended the rhody stick fire in the outside kitchen for hot water for the fresh coffee and teas. Fresh picked Lemon verbena, Spearmint, Eau de Cologne Mint and Lemon Balm were available for herb brews.

Scones: Served with forest plum jam and gooseberry jam

Plum cake:

www.jamieoliver.com/magazine/recipes-view.php?title=plum-upside-down-cake-1

Lemon verbena shortbread: (Tiril's own recipe)

- 125 g butter
- 55g caster sugar
- 180g plain flour

Few large handfuls of dried lemon verbena finely crushed/processed. Cream together butter and sugar, fold in flour to make a soft dough, add lemon verbena, roll out and cut. Bake for up to 20mins depending on size. Check for just browning, then take out and cool on wire rack. Enjoy with freshly stewed lemon verbena tea!

Focaccia: (Tiril's own recipe)

- 500g strong white flour
- 300ml tepid water
- 7g dried yeast
- Slug of good olive oil
- Tablespoon of sugar
- Good pinch of salt

Mix water, sugar, oil and yeast together, leave to activate and bubble and foam. Add to flour and salt, mix together to form a dough. Leave to rise under wet towel in warm place. Knead again after 45mins, and again 45 mins after that. Roll out onto tray, about an inch thick. In a bowl place finely chopped red onion, a variety of tomatoes, best with cherry tomatoes, oregano or any other fresh herbs, good amount of olive oil and lots of salt. Mix together then arrange on the bread. Leave to rise for an hour or so, then place in oven at high heat for around 25 minutes, but look for browning a good rise.

Tuscan kale soup: (From a true Tuscan!)

Make a veg stock from onion, garlic, carrot, celery, soya sauce and water and salt and pepper. Drain the liquid and place in large pan. Add chopped fresh kale, if you cannot find this, then any other variety will do. Cook for 10 minutes or until soft. Meanwhile toast your bread, leave to cool, then rub fresh garlic into the bread. When the soup is ready, place cold toast into the bowl, drizzle good quality olive oil on top, then add the kale soup, covering the bread. Sprinkle fresh ground chilli on top to add a needed kick!

Pumpkin pie:

Made with a variety of polytunnel grown squashes, ricotta and Parmesan cheeses.

Potato salad:

Warm Duke of York and Pink Fir Apple potatoes with parsley, chives, celery and butter



Further Information:

- www.permaculture.co.uk ~ the highly informative Permaculture Magazine
- permanentpublications.co.uk ~ great source of useful and inspiring reading, and the directors have a forest garden
- “Forest Gardening” by Robert Hart ~ the classic
- “The Woodland Way” by Ben Law ~ another practical book, includes photos of Leckmelm Wood in the early days!
- “RHS Propagating Plants” ~ Em found this book invaluable
- www.agroforestry.co.uk ~ superb, dedicated research ~ all you need to know, and more
- “A Handbook of Scottish Trees” ~ contains good propagation information
www.reforestingscotland.org/publications/books/a-handbook-of-scotlands-trees

Feedback:

All the participants were very satisfied with the location, organisation, catering and facilities of the workshop, with the majority rating of very good, plus additional comments of “beautiful” “excellent” “led superbly” and “well managed”.

Reasons for participation:

- to learn techniques useful for increasing biodiversity
- interest in forest gardening/permaculture techniques
- to meet and chat with others involved
- for ideas how to proceed with a forest garden
- furthering knowledge from Torridon event
- to gather information in preparation for buying a woodland
- to look at more food in woodlands
- curiosity
- to gather ideas and make contacts
- way forward
- growing awareness
- to gather ideas to transfer to own site
- to learn how to encourage involvement in woodland management



Benefits gained from attending:

- gained new skills, met key people and exchanged knowledge
- inspiration & knowledge
- applied learning to pass on
- broadened perspectives
- meeting others with similar interests
- chance to discuss in very relaxed way and learn about practicalities
- far better understanding of what is possible in former Picea woodland
- inspirational setting
- inspired by ponies and Hugel beds

- great weather, teas and food!
- opportunity to ask questions and speak with others about their land
- hands on experience
- saw things in practice that we had read about
- hard facts about improving soil and planting crops with trees
- useful info on clearing rhododendron without chemicals
- ideas for encouraging volunteer participation in relaxed and informal way

Experience, skills and ideas will be used to:

- grow food, make beds, dig less!
- advise members
- put into practice at home
- woodland croft on Mull
- feedback to community woodland group
- apply learning and pass onto other crofters
- create a forest garden, get a pony and ducks!
- good contacts made for further work/collaboration
- replicate and experiment!
- get ponies and build Hugel beds
- help design of new forest garden
- use many points to produce produce

Participants would like CWA to organize:

- charcoal burning workshop
- propagation workshop
- herbal pesticides
- more like this!
- further site visits
- pruning fruit trees
- woodland buildings
- website access regarding species and general technical information
- propagation/cultivation of understory/shade tolerant plants
- succeed in grant applications to further fund establishment of woodland gardens
- more in depth forest garden such as Graham Bell's
- cob oven building
- woodland crafts and products
- shelter and hut building
- dynamics of soil
- biochar
- more hands on courses

Participants would recommend others to take part in such an event as:

- an excellent starter
- very informative with fresh ideas
- it was a good way to do things and good broad introduction
- the more people working on the land in a practical way the better
- a re-run would be attractive to other people
- good to talk!
- network of inspired people

Other comments included:

- very inspiring, great venue
- Em is a great tutor and guide
- fantastic informative day
- splendid weather
- food ~ all home-made and hand-picked salad from site
- great quiche, soup, salad and cake
- brilliant day
- great day ~ very enjoyable
- Em ~ great host on a great site