

Syllabus

Below is the general course outline without specific dates. The last day of class is a group discussion about what you've learned, how your perspective may have changed, and discussing next steps toward activating your farming ambitions.

The instructor reserves the right to make adjustments and changes as necessary to facilitate instructional clarity, which may be done orally or in writing at any class session.

Farming 101: Introduction to Small-scale Regenerative Farming		
Week 1	Mandatory Orientation: Welcome, Course Scope, Introductions	Homework
	Lecture: In the Spirit of Organics; Tour of Wild Willow Farm	
Saturdays 9am-4pm	Distinction between different agricultural models: (industrial, conventional, transitional, organic, sus-tainable, regenerative); ethical farming; regenerative farming practices; food miles; benefits of lo-cally produced food; reduction of purchased inputs.	
Week 2	It Starts with the Soil	Intro + Ch. 1, 2, 7
Online Lecture	Making & using compost, mulching, sheet composting, cover cropping.	
Saturdays 9am-4pm	Compost is proof that there is life after death. Students will be introduced to the benefits and use of compost, and will understand that composting is the cornerstone to soil, plant, and human health. Working in our Living Lab, students explore aerobic high-temperature, active, and static composting techniques, while building a compost pile. The farm's "recipe for success" is emphasized, including greens & browns (Nitrogen & Carbon), water, air, and volume. Vermiculture, and the use of compost tea is also introduced.	
Week 3	Growing Fertile Soil	Ch. 3
Online Lecture	Farm tools — proper use and care; evaluating soil texture and moisture; bed preparation; mechanical and manual tillage; compost tea and extract.	
Saturdays 9am-4pm	"Feed the soil to feed the plant." This class emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining fertile soil to ensure healthy plants. Topics covered include building fertile soil through the use of or-ganic matter and low-till practices, and understanding the role that the microbiology of the soil and plants have on soil fertility. Students will examine soil and evaluate texture and moisture, as well as soil type. The Living Lab will teach proper bed-preparation techniques with the least amount of soil disturbance. Wild Willow Farm's Complete Organic Fertilizer recipe will be shared, as students pre-prepare the mixture out of locally available products such as animal feeds. Focus will also be on the description of farm tools used in small-scale and handcrafted farming, that leans towards a goal of no-till farming methods.	
Week 4	Propagation & Planting Techniques	Ch. 4, 5
Online Lecture	Direct sowing and transplanting; starting seeds; planting practice.	
Saturdays 9am-4pm	Getting plants off to a healthy start is critical to successful crop production. Students will learn the fundamental concepts and practices used in propagating crops from seed. In the Living Lab, stu-dents will practice mixing potting soil and potting up plants, while understanding how to use a propa-gation nursery and green house. Also highlighted is how to grow and determine high quality starts, and growing starts from cuttings and divisions. Students will discover a number of different direct sowing methods, proper seed bed preparation for different varieties of crops, and inoculants neces-sary for living soil. Planting practice with seeds and from plant starts will include proper depth, spac-ing, and maintenance for good crop establishment.	

Week 5		How Water Moves through the Soil	Ch. 6
Online Lecture	Efficient irrigation practices.		
Saturdays 9am-4pm	The best place to store water is in the soil. This class addresses the quantitative and qualitative approaches to delivering water efficiently and effectively through an irrigation system. Students will experience the water situation in Southern California and determine sources of water in an arid climate. Topics will include how water moves through soil, the mechanics of an irrigation system and how it operates, how regenerative farming methods increase the water retention capabilities of soil, and water conservation techniques through building organic matter in the soil and appropriate plant spacing. The Living Lab will tour students through the irrigation systems at Wild Willow Farm. Students will learn to put together automatic irrigation valves, install drip irrigation systems, learn irrigation design concepts, and identify effective repair and maintenance strategies.		
Week 6		Integrated Pest Management	Ch. 8
Online Lecture	Identifying pests and pathogens and beneficials.		
Saturdays 9am-4pm	Increasing biodiversity is key to the health of any garden ecosystem. Students will become aware of the principles of Integrated Pest Management, and understand the delicate balance of microbes and insects for plant health. The class will highlight a plant-positive approach to pest control, to host both beneficial and predatory insects, and students will learn how to create a habitat for beneficials to thrive. Students will take part in a Living Lab farm walk to identify pests on crops, and also beneficials that are on or around crops. Mammalian pest management methods of exclusion will be emphasized, and the proper use of gopher traps. Students will also be introduced to the fundamental concepts and basic skills needed to prevent, identify, and manage plant pathogens.		
Week 7		Building Resiliency into Your Farm	
Online Lecture	Exploring permaculture practices and observing the farm with a holistic eye, plus a visit to our beehives. End of course pizza party and class photo.		
Saturdays 9am-4pm	A more resilient agricultural system is needed, especially in the face of climate change. We explore principles small farmers have established to be more resilient, as in the ability to bounce back quickly from a disruption, permaculture practices, rain harvesting methods, establishing reasonable expectations of your farm, realizing your resources, and holistic farm management that pertains to animal husbandry. Future farmers have the opportunity to research their local market and business model, and students are introduced to the array of landholding models such as sole proprietorship, partnership, LLC, nonprofit, or cooperative. The culminating Living Lab experience will showcase a tour of Wild Willow Farm's bee hives and honey harvesting.		
Week 8		Final class	
Saturdays 9am-4pm	On the final day of class we will do an overview of what was learned and everyone will have the opportunity to ask questions or go into specifics about any topic. We will have a group discussion about what you've learned, how your perspective may have changed, and discussing next steps toward activating your farming ambitions.		



Guidelines For a Successful Outcome

Come to Farm School Prepared!

- Arrive on time or earlier, and be ready to go.
- Close-toed shoes or boots are required, long pants and long-sleeve shirt are recommended.
- Protect yourself from the sun and other elements with sturdy clothing, appropriate layers for changing weather, sunscreen, etc.
- Wear a broad-brimmed hat that covers your neck, a great option for sun protection
- If you have gloves please bring your own!
- Bring a water bottle. We have purified water for refilling in the barn.
- We encourage you to have a notebook and take notes, write down thoughts, observations, questions, project ideas, etc.



Encouragement

- The more you work together, the more you'll learn—which is why it's so important that you show up and participate.
- Take advantage of your program—take notes, ask questions!
- Focus on goals for the day as well as on each task—weeding, planting, harvesting, irrigation, etc. Practice close observation of soil, plants, weather, insects, disease, and other elements on the farm.
- Learn how to pace your work. Think about how you would manage your time if this were your own farm/garden. Envision starting your own farm or garden!
- Practice mindfulness of the group—sharing tasks, helping each other, cleaning up and putting away tools, watering cans, hose and supplies, as needed.

What We Expect From You

- Solid, regular commitment. Past experience has taught us that the more a student dedicates him or herself to the program, the more they enjoy their work and the more they get out of the experience.
- Regular class attendance and completion of class assignments.
- Patience, compassion and respect toward yourself, the farm, staff and visitors.
- Responsibility for your work and tasks given to you, completed in a timely and organized manner.

What You Should Expect from Us

- Introduction to many skills and basic knowledge a small scale organic farmer needs.
- Quality, thoughtful and meaningful lessons.
- Connections and opportunities to connect to a network of resources.
- A functioning farm ready for an engaging, hands-on experience.
- Opportunities to grow.