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JOHN'S CORNER:

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

by John Ferguson

Experienced gardeners have claimed that vermi-compost (worm castings) makes all plants grow better. Another study by the USDA published in HortScience 51(7)847-8555, 2016 confirms this observation on tests with spinach. They found that vermi-compost, whether used as soil amendment or tea, left high residual levels of nutrients, organic matter, and carbon in the soil. It increased the cation exchange capacity (CEC) and increased the water holding ability of the soil. As little as 10% vermi-compost used in a soil mix increased the number of leaves and their size. It also increased the chlorophyll content and photochemical efficiency, yield, and electrical properties of the leaves. Additionally, it increased leaf succulence, and carotenoid, protein, and amino acid content. Other studies from Ohio State University found that 10% vermi-compost in a soil mix prevented all soil diseases in hanging baskets and pots.

A study (True Cost of American Food Conference, April 2016) on the long-term found the hidden costs of toxic industrial farming was extremely high. They included items such as environmental damage from artificial fertilizer runoff, health costs, etc. They used an example that the true costs of a quarter- pounder from McDonald's are not borne by the company, which show a profit, but by our society, which pays dearly. On one conventional farm in the study, the operational costs were \$89/acre. The total environmental costs were \$219/acre. This was a net loss to society of \$130/acre, which we the consumers pay in taxes, health care costs, etc. By comparison, an organic farm yielded benefits of \$172/acre to society. Another reason to buy organic whenever possible.

From Horticulture magazine, an article found that the award winning *Salvia coccinea* "Summer Jewel White" was very good at attracting hummingbirds, butterflies, and pollinators to its tubular flowers. It is a dwarf salvia that only grows 10-24 inches tall. It also thrives in drought, heat, and humidity.



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On the GMO front, Scotland, Germany, Greece, and Latvia have banned GMO crops from being grown. Russia has not only banned all GMO's, it is converting its entire agriculture to organic methods to become the number one supplier of high quality foods to the world.

A study from the Technical University of Denmark has found that the chemical bisphenol A (BPA) commonly found in plastic bottles, can linings, cosmetics and other products has been linked to a number of health problems. Even in small doses, BPA causes significant changes in metabolism as well as the reproductive tract. They found that it increases obesity, reduces sperm counts, and changes to breast development (including cancerous growths) in animal studies. Note: Many years ago, I was attending a lecture on environmental issues. Mountain Valley Spring Water was provided in glass bottles from a cooler in a ice water bath. After a few hours, we were given the same Mountain Valley Spring Water in plastic bottles to drink. One could taste the toxic chemicals.

On another health note from the Health Freedom Alliance published an article on farmed raised salmon. They found that farmed raised salmon is one of the most toxic foods in the world. When tested it contained dioxins, PCB's, and a number of other drugs and chemicals. Even the EPA recommends that one we not eat more than one meal of farmed raised salmon per month.

Wake Forest University has found that Tiger Moths use acoustical signals to tell bats that they are not good to eat. The signal also serves as a acoustical jamming defense mechanism. The University of Washington found that the Luna moth's long tail could confuse bats sonar through the twists and turns of it tail.

The pesticide Naled (a neurotoxin) used to control mosquitoes allegedly containing the Zika virus has been found to increase the risk of cancer, autism, and birth defects. University of California found that women living within a few miles of where the pesticide had been sprayed, had a 60% increased risk of their child developing autism spectrum disorders or experiencing developmental delays.

A report in Natural News on August 15, 2016 stated that GMO maize is not economical as it requires much higher costs and lowers yield and quality. If not for subsidies by governments around the world, it would have failed economically.