

Rancho Mastatal Updates

June/July 2010

Our summer internship is well underway, groups are making their way to the Ranch, the gardens are rocking and we've broken ground on the CLSC. It's shaping up to be a busy and wonderful summer in Mastatal.

As much as we tried and wanted to, we were not able in the end to make arrangements to attend Sir Roger Whalley's wedding on Lopez Island in Washington. The coinciding Permaculture Course, cost for three to Seattle (we now have to pay for Solé to fly), new goats and ducks, an endless project list, and the thought of traveling with our daughter on back-to-back international trips (our yearly stateside trip's approaching fast) proved too much. We struggled for months over the decision, almost hitting the "Buy" button on one hurried occasion in June, but it just wasn't meant to be. We love you Rog and are talking seriously about a trip to England with BONNIE to see you and MELANIE in your homeland. We'll touch base with you in the coming months to talk about it more. We can't wait to hear about the festivities.



Goats in the Goat House

photo by Timo

Increased food production continues to be the focus here as we add to our growing collection of farm animals, continue to plant fruit trees, and further dial in the front gardens. We're committed more than ever to growing healthy food and supporting local agriculture. The "farm" beyond the Hankey now boasts 3 goats, 4 ducks, 40 chickens, a pond full of fish, and about a dozen new species of fruiting trees. We've also exposed the front fence area at the main house in an effort to increase air movement and sunlight and will be planting this newly revealed trellis to black pepper, loofah, cucumber, passion fruit, yam, and wing beans. On the kitchen front we're slowly beginning to eliminate imported foodstuffs as we ramp up our production of homemade vinegars, green papaya kimchi, ginger and turmeric soda, Cranberry hibiscus jam and peach palm flour. We've added some new greens species to the front garden such as water and Okinawan spinach and continue to crank out delicious salads for up to 40. It's been an enlightening and thrilling process and we feel as if we've truly turned the corner with regards to food. During our upcoming trip to the States we'll continue to fabricate sauerkraut and kefir fruit popsicles to keep a growing Solé well fed.

And speaking of our little one, Solé's thriving, speaking much more Spanish than English right now, and growing by leaps and bounds. She's tough to keep quiet most of the time and loves spending time with the "cabras", "patos" and "pio-pios". She's happiest when with friends, at the beach and spending time with her books and the animals. We're looking forward to seeing many of

you in the coming months and hope that this has found you all happy and well. Until next time, gracias a la Madre and be well.

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A community effort, plastering the exterior walls of La Choza

photo by Aaron Drury

RM Program News: Summer Internship

We recently welcomed our new batch of interns and are enthusiastic about getting them up to speed as we enter our final trimester before returning to the States for our yearly visit. The early energy has been fabulous and we're optimistic about a productive, educational, balanced and positive summer. KASSI, ANDREA, CELINE, AGUSTIN, VIKKI, WARREN, MICHELLE, HANA, EILEEN and MARY ELIZABETH make up the crew this summer with CAROLYN, TYLER, TIMO, JOHN, LEANNA, MARK, ROBIN, SOLE, JOHN and soon-to-return AMY and RACHEL JACKSON rounding out the rest of the all-star team. We'll be hosting four educational groups and a Permaculture Design/Build Course during the current internship and hope to wrap up construction on the bio-digester, get the fish poly-culture established, further dial in our gardens, make great progress on the community library and so much more. Each summer intern is assuming a managerial role for the next three months. These positions include "Chicken Manager", "Pooru", "Zone 1 Garden

Master", "Goat Slope Manager" and so on. There's a lot to get a handle on around here nowadays and we're confident that the new crew is up to the task. Please join us in welcoming the new interns and we'll keep you abreast of their progress in future correspondence.

Building Report: The Meth Lab

The Meth Lab is inching closer to completion each day. The daubing is "oh so close" to being done and when it is we'll be able to sand and seal the floor, plumb and install the toilets, and start shitting once again into our magical, gas producing bio-digester. The project, promoted and initiated by our good friend Jose Luis Zuniga and then moved much further along by the Yestermorrow crew in March, is ever closer to being a finished product with hopes of finalizing all of the remaining details during the summer internship. While building the toilet structure, we've been temporarily using our original 5-gallon bucket Humanure Handbook-inspired 8-year old composting toilet while keeping the bio-

digester productive with CHILO-provided, fresh cow manure. It's incredibly satisfying cooking breakfast, pasteurizing the locally produced milk, boiling water and preparing parts of lunch and dinner with locally produced cooking gas. We're still learning how to maximize the production of methane and hope that once we begin adding human waste again that we'll be able to perfect our poopy cocktail. The recipe may change in the not-too-distant future if we do indeed decide to add a pig to the mix though that wouldn't be until next year. And we also hope to plumb at least part of the bio-digester to a yet-to-be-designed rainwater collection system. There's still plenty to do before the project makes it onto the completed list but we're getting there *poquito a poco*.

Conservation Update: Making Earth

Making earth has become a weekly standard at the Ranch and comes to us as a result of a more focused effort on growing our own food. *Tierra Fermentada* and *Bokashi* are two terms that get tossed around the premises quite commonly these days. *Bokashi*, which means fermented organic matter in Japanese, is made here by combining chicken bedding (chicken manure and sawdust), molasses, cow manure, biochar (charcoal produced on the goat slope), EM (Effective Microorganisms), and water. We've been working to continuously have a batch in production and are starting to time it with the weekly chicken coop clean-outs and biochar sessions so that we can maximize the fabrication of this nutrient-rich soil enhancement. The new raised beds in the front garden have been receiving a bulk of the new earth and the increased production out there is a testament to our commitment to improving the fertility of Zone 1. Aggressive mulching and swales have also been playing an important role in keeping our front gardens healthy. We're confident that with good planning and a bit of sweat equity that we'll be able to quadruple our veggie output in a relatively short amount of time. More to come soon.



One of several composting toilets on Rancho Mastatal - this one in back of Jeanne's



Goats arrived on January 2010
photo by Chris Manning

Farm Facts: Alicia

Alice, one of our two lovable and loving goats, succumbed to an unidentified bite and died on the night of July 13 around 9 p.m. after struggling with health issues for numerous days. It's was a somber and heartbreaking week as we tried to nurse Alice back to health. In the end it just wasn't meant to be. Animal husbandry has added a new aspect and reality to the Ranch. The obvious agricultural benefits and additional love that they bring to our environs can be tempered by the difficulties of keeping them healthy and happy. The result for us has been a crash course in animal care and a difficult but important lesson in mortality.

Alice brought an immense amount of happiness to the Ranch in the short time that she was with us. She also taught us an invaluable lesson in goat care. She brought so much happiness to so many during her short stay in Mastatal. We miss her dearly. Rest in peace Alice.

Community Stories: Ground Has Been Broken

Seriously. After months of talking, drawing, fund-raising, preparing and envisioning, the first steps of CLSC construction were taken this past month in the center of Mastatal. It's been a long road of behind-the-scenes and intangibles getting to this point, many of which still continue. Yet come mid-June, enough was in place to get cracking on site. With batter boards and lines up, and two big deliveries in a week's time – the remaining timbers for the frame and the foundation materials – the momentum started to roll, and pier preparations were suddenly underway. The cutting of rebar and concrete culverts was followed by the factory-grade production of twenty-four steel cages, while the first loads of sand and stone made their way to the site. There, amidst the curious inquisition of *telesecundaria* students and the dizzying commentary of *Copa Mundial* radio announcers, a network of concrete piers began to rise from the earth. Limited by the rains, digging and pouring proceeded on a small batch schedule, yet sure enough, one week later the twenty-four piers were in place. A giant step, and one that marks the transition to woodworking. Indeed, the cutting of the deck and frame linger large on the horizon, with some final preparations to be had first. Many thanks to ALEX and JUNIOR for sacrificing their long list of tasks and jumping right in to this community project "*con ganas*." The boys look forward to the mallet and chisel work ahead, which will embark as soon as TYLER gets back from a brief visit to the States. Meanwhile, it sure feels good having the foundation in, and we're excited to keep going up soon.

Intern/Guest Gossip: Circle Time

Palms to palms
My prints to yours
And yours, and yours, and yours, and yours.

Lock souls instead of eyes
Lock time, stop.
Stop thinking locked thoughts,
Stop stopping.

Lock into step, in rhythm
My breath to yours
And yours, and yours, and yours, and yours.

Lock hearts, minds,
But not locked into anything, really...
Linked.
Possibility seeps between us
And weaves in, stitch our fingers
My life to yours,
And yours, and yours, and yours, and yours.

- Morgan Bayda

Comida Corner: Cranberry Hibiscus Jelly

This was "invented" by a recent Scottish volunteer named Claire after a large Cranberry Hibiscus harvest from the front gardens. It was served with pancakes and turned out beautifully. The jam will be quite tart from the leaves and lime but also sweet. Use also as a chutney. Makes 1 largish jam jar.

Ingredients:

3 lb hibiscus leaves (about 2 large bowls)
3 cups strong *tapa dulce* (or sugar)
2 cups lime juice

Method:

1. Wash leaves and pulse in blender until medium fine
2. Add leaves and lime juice to pot and cook 5 minutes until mushy
3. Add *tapa dulce* to taste
4. Wrap lime seeds in muslin/garlic bag and add to pot (the seeds contain pectin which will help the jam set)
5. Boil until:

- it reaches 220 degrees Fahrenheit, or
- there's not much liquid left, or
- the jelly sets when a spoonful is left on a plate to cool

6. Remove bag of lime seeds and decant into sterilized jar.

Buen Provecho!

Futbol Follies: "Tiró, tiró, tiró, tiró, tiró, tiró, tiró, tiró, tiró...gol"

It's been a jam-packed month for futbol aficionados around here, both with the Copa Mundial taking off and a full schedule for Mastatal. They began the month with a first-time trip to La Pavona, near the Rio Tulin, an hour-long journey to what turned out to be a bit of a bust. The Galacticos took the field, a muddy one reminiscent of Zapaton's, against Deportivo La Gloria, but

the game was quickly put on hold following a hard tackle in the Mastatal box. The sound that emanated from the collision left no doubt that a serious injury was involved, and it was soon apparent that the young La Gloria striker had a broken leg. He proved to be quite a trooper as his teammates responded to his injury in anticipation of the ambulance, which was actually relatively soon to arrive. Forty-five minutes later, the game resumed, though the spirit was not the same, and *los amarillos* had a hard time readjusting after the break, falling 0-1 in the end. Next up were the ladies, though since their opponent never showed, they settled for a friendly against a hodgepodge squad of local women and children. It was a hard fought battle, but the Mastatal women suffered a 1-0 loss on a breakout shot from one of the youngsters.

The following week it was back down to the lowlands for yet another encounter in San Antonio de Tulin, though this time in the daylight hours. After an hour and a half flat tire delay, the Galacticos arrived a little sluggish, but held their own for the first half against a first-time opponent Las Delicias. The first half ended with a mini-scuffle deep in Galactico territory, and many argumentative minutes were thereafter spent determining how to proceed (sound familiar?). A new referee was attained and the players involved were expelled from the field for the second half. Los amarillos played well again on the big field, tying the game on a goal from RONALD, an out-of-nowhere veteran who showed up for the day. They later went ahead on a beautiful play orchestrated by ALEX, and were poised for victory until a tough play late in the game led to an autogol and a tie game. A tough outcome after coming from behind, but Mastatal went home with a ball nevertheless.

Mastatal hosted an event the following weekend for the church, attracting teams from La Fila, Naranjal, La Vasconia and La Gloria for a series of games. Deportivo Feminino Mastatal took on the ladies from La Vasconia in a heated match that went down to penalty kicks, which favored the visiting team and their slightly more vigorous goalkeeper. The Galacticos ended up playing late and last against La Fila, the rain having held off until then, in what turned out to be a sloppy mess that ended early due to dirty play. Los amarillos fared much better the following week in La Gloria, of all places, finally ending their losing streak on the small field, eking out a 1-0 victory over Playa Hermosa on a late goal from JUNIOR. The women also won their encounter, thanks in large part to the no-nonsense prowess of newcomer MARY. They went to penalties again, though a tactical late substitution shifted KATTIA to the net, where she stopped two shots and landed her own to seal the victory. From there the teams headed back home to catch the Mastatal youth squad in San Miguel, where they were to play a halftime exhibition in their new bingo-earned uniforms. They looked sharp and dominated play in the goalless fifteen minutes, enough to boost their confidence and get their unis caught on camera.

Meanwhile, World Cup action has been sizzling all month, posing a healthy distraction around town, with radios and TVs abuzz. Many eventually took to bringing their lunch over to the cantina for the midday matches, especially the latter rounds. There's been plenty of heartbreak, elation, wonder and appreciation for the world's most beautiful and popular sport. South America truly held its own this year, but Europe proved too much in the end. It's been 60 years since Spain last made it to the final four, but never have they won it all. Nor have the Netherlands, though this year they've won every match on their way to the final and are looking hungry for the cup. We're on our toes to see who will seize the day.

Inspirational Impressions: Circle Time

"Any third-rate engineer can make a machine or a process more complex; afterwards, it takes a first-rate engineer to make it simple again."

--- E.F. Schumacher, from *Small Is Beautiful*

All the best.

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew



Delicate flowers

photo by Anne Dzakovic