

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## November 2004

*Hi Everyone. We've made it back to Costa Rica safe and sound. The place looks fabulous and we're thrilled to be back at our home in Mastatal. Everyone looking after the Ranch in our absence did an amazing job to keep this often times bulky and awkward ship afloat. We are immensely grateful to everyone that participated in the Ranch's activities while we were away. We'd like to express our sincere appreciation to MEGHAN VITA, EMILY JUMP, CASEY BERKEBILE, ROGER WHALLEY, MANDI CAUL and BRIAN KACHEL and MARY SANDERSON and the other volunteers that arrived to the Ranch after we headed north. You guys are awesome! The weather in Mastatal during this time of year is tough to beat. Early to mid-December is an ideal time to travel south as plane tickets are still relatively cheap, tourists are few and far between (at least here) and the temperature and climate idyllic in so many ways. We hope that everyone out there is well. We're looking forward to bring you this newsletter once again from our beautiful rainforest home.*



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### **RM Program News: Permaculture Design Course Update**

The dates and program are more or less set for our summer Permaculture Design Course in Mastatal. The 2-week course will be held from June 23 through July 6, 2005 here at the Ranch. There is also a 1-week optional Permaculture tour of the area's outstanding sustainability projects from July 8 through July 14. The course's instructors, DOUGLAS BULLOCK, CHRIS SHANKS, and JENNY PELL come to the Ranch with decades of Permaculture experience. The main instructors will also be joined by MICHAEL SUZERRIS, owner of Yogalife Studios in Seattle,

WA, who will be providing daily optional yoga sessions. Funny enough, Robin took classes from Michael when we lived in Seattle and their upcoming reunion is totally unplanned. The world seems to be an especially small place here in Mastatal, as many of you already know.

The Permaculture Course will cover the following topics:

- Permaculture design principles and methodologies
- Reading landscapes, mapping and site analysis
- Plant propagation and seed saving
- Indigenous cultivation, traditions and practices
- Perennial polycultures and developing food forests
- Energy conservation and renewable energy sources
- Ecosystem restoration/bioremediation
- Hydrology and aquaculture
- Alternative economic systems and local self-reliance
- Forest management and agroforestry
- Patterns in nature
- Natural building
- Ecovillage design
- Urban Permaculture
- Whole systems theory
- Ecoliteracy
- Herbs and medicinal plants
- Integrated animal systems
- Integrated pest management
- ...And more

The classes will include lectures, hands-on projects, research, field trips, and design team projects.

The Permaculture Design Course price is \$1,400 (does not include airfare). Rancho Mastatal will be providing accommodations and meals. The optional 1-week Permaculture Tour price is \$700 and includes all meals, transportation and shared rooms. The **1-week tour** is limited to 8 students so those interested in the tour are encouraged to sign up early. During the tour, the instructors will bring you to their favorite projects and introduce you to their favorite people. There will be plenty of time built in to experience Costa Rica's rich biodiversity. The deadline to apply for the course and tour is May 20, 2005 and a \$350 non-refundable deposit is required.

Permaculture (permanent agriculture) is an ethical design system for creating human environments that are ecologically sound and economically viable. Permaculture integrates innovative science into the conscious development of cultivated ecosystems that have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural ecosystems.

Visit <http://www.permaculturenow.com> for all course details and <http://www.rancho mastatal.com> for information on the course site. Please contact either Chris Shanks, [ch\\_shanks@hotmail.com](mailto:ch_shanks@hotmail.com) or Jenny Pell, [jennyeverywhere@yahoo.com](mailto:jennyeverywhere@yahoo.com), (360) 385-7749, for specific questions about the course.

### **Conservation Update: Red Costarricense de Reservas Naturales Privadas**

The Red Costarricense de Reservas Naturales Privadas (La Red) is a loosely formed group of Costa Rican private reserves that share information about their respective projects, environmental problems, and local conditions in an effort to promote the preservation and conservation of Costa Rica's natural resources. La Red provides an excellent service and acts as a clearinghouse of information for individuals interested in Costa Rica's environment. The Red is guided by a board of directors who meet each month to discuss the direction, programs and policies of the organization. Members freely share messages and post pertinent information regarding Costa Rica's conservation movement. As an example of the Red's effectiveness and value, we were recently looking for a botanist to identify a number of medicinal plants that a recent visitor to the Ranch, CASEY BERKEBILE, had collected as part of her studies. I sent a message to the Red's email group and within hours I had the names, phone numbers and email addresses of 2 botanists willing to do the work. For more information about The Red's important work, please contact Sr. Carlos L. Sandí at [clsandi@earth.ac.cr](mailto:clsandi@earth.ac.cr).

### **Building Report: Hooch Nearing Completion**

The Hooch is less than a week away from being completed! The final floor plan will take 3 beds and 1 hammock and will sleep up to 4 people. The structure is beautiful and the views off the backside outstanding. This will provide a wonderful sleeping opportunity for those interested in resting with nature amongst the trees. We'll do our best to post some updated pictures on the Yahoo! Group Page soon so that you can all see how it turned out.

The completion of the Hooch will clear the way to finish up what work remains on the cob floors at the main house. We are currently applying the final coats of linseed oil and beeswax which will make our newest earthen floors ready for action. This will bring us one step closer to the reestablishment of Robin's jewelry studio. We will move our carpentry and other tools into the new "bodega" to make room for her new workbench and jewelry tools, the latter which have been in boxes since our arrival to Costa Rica over 3 years ago. We're all anxious to see what Robin has in store.

And finally in the building department, we plan on breaking ground on "La Choza" towards the end of January when we'll be hosting a group of natural building enthusiasts associated with the Yestermorrow Design/Build School. Robin's most recent designing efforts have been spent on dreaming up some awesome new ideas for a new cob shower structure that will serve the "La Choza", the future site of our little house.

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Mary's Memories**

I have been realizing how less squeamish I am after being on the Ranch for as long as I have. Back home, if one spider is in the house, I kill it or let it outside...here – if it is as big as my hand, I might do something about that one of many creeping around. I have gotten so used to the sounds of insects all day and night, as well as hundreds of different bird calls you'd never hear back home. Waking in the middle of the night to bats in the roof, and occasionally one in the house dive bombing you as you attempt to sleep. Seeing all kinds of lizards and snakes, wearing insect repellent everyday, hand washing clothes, the need for two showers a day because you are so sweaty (but often times disregarding this need and just stinking). Going to bed super early and getting up just after dawn. Every meal from scratch, free of preservatives and pesticides. Chocolate

is like gold. ROOMMATES!! Medicinal healing from the jungle, the indigenous ways. Becoming so fond of and making friends with people I can barely communicate with. Constant lessons about life, myself and Spanish. Sunburns in December. Long, uncomfortable bus rides through this breathtaking country. Short phone calls home to my nearest and dearest, realizing the importance of all of those people in my life. Loving life, loving travel, loving building, so many lifelong memories....; PURA VIDA!

### **Community Facts/Stories: School's Out**

The academic year is winding down as students anxiously await their final grades. Early-December marks the beginning of summer vacation for youths throughout Costa Rica. For approximately 2 months we will not be seeing the customary blue and black uniforms of the hundreds of thousands of grammar and high school students throughout the country. Summer, at least here in Mastatal, signifies frequent trips to the local rivers and daily soccer games in the afternoon. We're all looking forward to the break.

### **Comida Corner: Emily's Oat-Chocolate Bars**

These delectable goodies come from our friend and wonderful cook, EMILY GREEN. She perfected this recipe for all those choco-holics out there. These are a favorite for birthdays and times when chocolate is needed. They are simple, quick and oh so good!

3 cups flour 2 cups oats 2 teaspoons salt 2 sticks of butter 3 teaspoons baking powder 1 ½ cups tapa dulce (or brown sugar) 2 teaspoons vanilla chocolate chips

Mix dry ingredients. Mix softened butter with sugar and vanilla. Mix dry and wet ingredients and add chocolate. Lightly oil Pyrex baking dishes and cover the bottom with a layer off dough (about ½ inch thick). Bake at 350 degrees for 10-15 minutes.

Happy Bakin' and Buen Provecho!

### **Inspirational Impressions: John Muir**

I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in. John Muir

Abrazos,  
Tim and Robin