

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Urban homesteading - Fairview Gardens classes to teach locals traditional skills

KARNA HUGHES, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

January 15, 2011 12:45 PM

Putting food by. Raising chickens and hens. Growing your own chard, carrots and kale. In recent years, a small but burgeoning segment of the local food movement has had people learning the skills their forebears once used as the only means of survival.

In its most ambitious educational offering to date, the Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens will host a series of 19 public workshops on urban homesteading.

It kicks off Jan. 22 with "Introduction to Beekeeping" with local hive master Paul Cronshaw from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the farm, 598 N. Fairview Ave. in Goleta. Other workshops will follow about once or twice a month throughout the year.

Mark Tollefson, the nonprofit group's new executive director, said a few factors inspired him to create the series.

"One thing was just the public interest, between e-mails through our website from people all over the country and phone calls with people asking, 'What do you do with your bees? What do you do with your chickens? What do you do with soil fertility? I just live in an apartment, how do I bring what you guys do to my space?,' " he recalled.

Another was increasing reports in the media not only about these kinds of topics but contaminations of the industrial food supply, like the romaine lettuce and peanut product recalls in recent years, and concerns about food safety and security.

"There seems to be more focus on how we do look at what sustains us," said Mr. Tollefson. "We're looking to give people the (means) to, in some ways, start a knowledge bank of these old skills, so it's not just carried by a few people."

The classes range from aspects of sustainable gardening, like garden planning (Feb. 12), composting (Feb. 26 and Oct. 22) and installing greywater systems (April 16), to domestic skills, like preserving jams and jellies (July 23), canning vegetables (Sept. 17), making your own chemical-free soaps (Sept. 24) and more.

Participants needn't have any experience or be hard-core gardeners to come to the classes:

An April 30 class on sheet mulching may appeal to those without green thumbs -- its subtitle is "lazy man's gardening"; and a June 18 seminar on container gardening will teach apartment and condo dwellers how to maximize their small spaces.

"If you're smart about it, using vertical integration, you can grow almost a quarter of your food needs right on your patio," Mr. Tollefson claimed.

Those further along might be interested in workshops on intensive gardening (March 26), butchering chickens ("From Yard to Skillet," Oct. 15) or even growing and prepping wheat for homemade bread (Nov. 19).

Mr. Tollefson will co-teach a May 15 class in "Wild Fermenting" in which people will learn techniques for making everything from sauerkraut and kimchi to mead and beer.

As the son of a homesteader from rural Alberta, Canada, he said the series is close to his heart.

In the 1950s, his father, three uncles and grandmother raised their own meat and vegetables and preserved foods for the winter in a house that had no running water, no indoor plumbing and no electricity.

"The joke was if you wanted water, you ran for it, ran to the well and took back two pailfuls of it," he recalled.

And he grew up that way in the early part of his youth. "I felt lucky I had a chance to have had firsthand experience with that," he said.

He hopes the Urban Homesteading series will make Fairview Gardens even more of a public resource and foster a sense of community.

"There's tons of opportunity for people to come together and make connections and really start to build community," he said. "I feel we either all succeed or we don't succeed."

The fees are \$40 for half-day classes and \$85 for full-day workshops. Discounts are available for students, Fairview's Community Supported Agriculture members and those who sign up for several classes in a series.

To sign up or for more information, call 967-7369, e-mail mark@fairviewgardens.org or go to www.fairviewgardens.org/classes_classes.html.

e-mail: khughes@newspress.com
