



## Local food for those in need

A garden project grows in Brewer

BY SHELBY HARTIN  
BDN STAFF

A network of raised garden beds recently constructed on the grounds of the Bangor Area Recovery Network in Brewer contain a variety of vegetables. Cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, basil, tomatoes, summer squash, spinach, swiss chard, lettuce, cauliflower, broccoli and more have started to reach toward the sky, their green faces turned toward the sunlight.

Food AND Medicine, a nonprofit organization in Brewer, is behind the project, the idea for which was formed last summer as a collaborative effort between the organization and the Bangor Area Recovery Network, which is better known as the BARN. The Bangor Area Recovery Network serves those in recovery from drug addiction and alcoholism.

Food AND Medicine began in 2001 after layoffs in the area led to over 1,000 jobs lost. Mill closures in the paper, shoe and sawmill industries hit the area hard, so union members teamed up with allies to reach out to the workers who had lost their livelihoods. Under the leadership of director Jack McKay, Food AND Medicine was created. Their original goal was to fight for laid-off workers, but it has since grown into a multi-issue organization that helps people access food and other basic needs.

The community garden entered its first stages with the help of volunteer Gordon Provost, who started and raised seedlings in Food AND Medicine's on-site greenhouse until they were ready to be planted.

"He's basically been the crux behind the seedlings. He's done all the work," Adam Thiesen, organizer at Food AND Medicine, said of Provost.

Together, the two organizations built six raised bed vegetable gardens at the Bangor Area Recovery Network on 142 Center St. in Brewer and planted the seedlings, which will be used by the Bangor Area Recovery Network once they have grown.

Jerry Stauff, a recovering alcoholic in his 24th year of sobriety, and Cynthia Bain, a recovering addict and alcoholic, both who are part of the Bangor Area Recovery Network, also have been instrumental in helping the project come to life.

Stauff is Shoshone and committed to his native culture. He's a jack-of-all-trades and a craftsman. He can carve wood, construct drums, make dreamcatchers and construct practically anything, including garden beds, which he helped work on throughout the process.

Bain is a chef by trade. She just moved into her own apartment and is starting college in the fall. She is a mother and a grand-  
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Josh Wehrwein and his daughter Aria, 6, outside their three-story wooden yurt that their family is building in Sedgwick. In October 2010 the Wehrwein family began a journey out of suburbia and into "imagined living" in rural Maine. The family of four lives in a canvas yurt on the property.

## A yurt in the woods

How an unusual Maine man's legacy lives on

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

Melanie and Josh Wehrwein and their two young children, Caden and Aria, have lived for more than three years in a small fabric yurt on a patch of rocky land carved from the spruce forest around them.

There, they tend the large garden, haul their water, bathe in front of the wood stove or in the simple outdoors shower and spend a lot of time at the big wooden table at the center of the round room. It's snug, but it's home — at least until they can finish the three-story wooden yurt they and a community of friends are building on the other side of the garden.

**Watch the video**  
bangordailynews.com

They can't wait. "The smell of the wood is what gets me," Melanie Wehrwein said of the new yurt, which the couple believes is one of the biggest in the world. "The softness and beauty of the lines. It feels so right and so normal to us. Sometimes we forget that it isn't."

Though it may not be exactly normal in American culture to live this way, yurts — a traditional, circular Mongolian home — have a small but passionate group of fans in the western world. They know about yurts thanks to the life and work of Bill Coperthwaite, an Aroostook County native who lived for years in a wooden yurt in Machiasport and who was a lifelong advocate of the building style. He died 2½ years ago at the age of 83, but his love of yurt building lives on, and the Dickinsons Reach foundation he started to promote yurts continues today.

"The fact that you can say 'yurt' and people know what you're talking about — that's



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Josh Wehrwein holds the door to his family's canvas yurt while his wife, Melanie, and their daughter Aria, 6, put their shoes on in Sedgwick recently.



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William Coperthwaite, author of "The Handmade Life: In Search of Simplicity," sits suspended by fishing line that he incorporated into the design of his Machiasport yurt in 2003.

because of Bill Coperthwaite," Peter Forbes, his friend and biographer, said recently. "I've never met a person more true to himself. He was just so true to his own sense of what the good life meant. ... He lived very, very differently from the way most Americans lived. That is why he is so inspiring to us. You can make your own life. The making of your own life does not require money. It only requires ingenuity, and everyone can do it. That's why it was revolutionary."

### 'A Handmade Life'

The Wehrweins met Coperthwaite as they were deciding to change in their lives by moving from the New Hamp-

shire suburbs to rural Maine. Six years ago, Melanie and Josh Wehrwein and their kids were living one version of the American dream: a 2,500-square-foot house in the middle of a subdivision. The high school sweethearts figured they would stay there forever, raising their family and putting down roots in the house that Josh Wehrwein, 41, described as a "rectangle with vinyl siding." But Colin, now 9, was a colicky baby, and because of that they started to really look at the way they ate.

"That got us thinking about a lot of things," Melanie Wehrwein, 39, said. "The stepping stone was food. We joined a  
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## Inside Things to Do C3

## Drought plus cold adds up to challenges

Gardeners roll with weird weather

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

Welcome to the new normal. That's the message this year is sending to Maine farmers and gardeners who are contending with bizarre weather patterns and having their old assumptions about how to grow vegetables and fruits challenged, according to an agriculture expert from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

"This is definitely a different kind of growing season," Tori Jackson, an associate professor of agriculture and natural resources, said Tuesday. "It does follow a pattern we're seeing a lot more frequently, which is variation in climate. This is going to be our new normal. Learning how to roll with the weather at different times of year is what we're spending a lot of time on at [the University of Maine Cooperative Extension]."

So far this year, several tricky conditions have included the following:

— March weather was so warm that fruit trees started to bud out, only to be followed by a sub-zero cold snap in early April that killed a lot of the buds.

— A dry spell in May, in which nearly 2 inches less rain than usual fell in Bangor, was so extreme it caused some farmers and gardeners to lose seeds, which withered in the ground instead of germinating.

— Colder than usual temperatures in the first half of June caused many farmers and gardeners to use crop protection, such as row covers, low tunnels and high tunnels to help crops grow.

"The dry spell, particularly, and the unseasonably cool weather we're having now — this is not what you think of when you think of mid-June," Jackson said.

Still, that's what we have, so she has several ideas for how to cope with the conditions. Drip irrigation in particular is one of the most important things a vegetable or fruit producer can have, Jackson said, and overhead irrigation systems may have helped to save some of the state's strawberries from being damaged by frost.

"Overhead irrigation is great for frost injury prevention," Jackson said. "The damage can be mitigated with overhead irrigation. As water freezes, heat is released as ice crystals form, and the heat can protect the flower buds on a very cold evening. That was definitely happening in April and May."

In addition to irrigation, protecting delicate seedlings with row covers and tunnels is becoming more critical, especially for farmers who depend on having a successful growing season.

"It used to be that it was worth it for growers to not invest in [protection]," she said. "Over the past three years I would say those that had those things available to  
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## Bison a low-maintenance herd for County couple

BY JULIA BAYLY  
BDN STAFF

SMYRNA — There's a lot to love about raising bison for meat, according to Linda White.

The best part? How little day-to-day work is actually involved.

"They are really self-sufficient animals," White said. "They forage on their own, and all we do is put out hay for them, [and] the hardest part is putting up the 600 bales of hay we use every year."

There are 33 bison roaming on 50 acres of White's Tatonka Spirit Ranch. Tatonka is the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota word for bison.

"Actually, there could be more," she said recently sitting at her kitchen table. "The cows are having calves now, and new baby bison just keep showing up."

The bison require no midwifery, and White said they are an animal best kept at a respectful distance at the best of times.

"They don't need any help from



JULIA BAYLY | BDN

About 33 bison, including several calves born this spring, roam the 50 acres on Tatonka Spirit Ranch in Smyrna recently.

me with the calves," she said. "And it can be hard to count the calves if they stay hidden behind their mommas."

White got into bison six years ago when she and her late husband, Casey White, purchased a bull and four females with the



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Linda White and Randy Lee take a moment to enjoy each other's company while watching their herd of bison recently at Tatonka Spirit Ranch in Smyrna.

idea to breed them for the meat. They named the farm after that first bull, Tatonka, who tragically froze to death after falling into a pond and was unable to pull himself back out.

"Casey got to see two [calves]

born on the farm before he passed," Linda White said. "Right off I was very lucky because a lot of local people stepped in to help."

One of those who stepped in was Randy Lee, who White described as her "significant, significant-other" and who convinced her to stay in the bison business.

"I was ready to sell them all early on," White said. "But then Randy came on board, and he was all about keeping going."

Together, the couple increased the herd in size and quality to the point White felt she was ready to slaughter, butcher and sell the meat this past January. For now, the meat is available exclusively at White's Oakfield convenience store Whitey's Market. With the bison burger selling for \$9 per pound and a strip steak running about \$13, White said bison is a pricey option when compared to buying beef in the supermarket.

"But I had a feeling it would  
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