



January 2004 * Issue #1

Natural Living Journal

Creating a sustainable lifestyle one natural step at a time. * On the web: NaturalLifeNetwork.com

Finding a Path to Natural Living

Lifestyle strategies based on the principles of nature to fight the root causes of environmental destruction.

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Love Affair with Straw Bales

Get inspired to build with straw bales for your home.

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Editor's Message

Premier Issue

We all know that the way we currently live is destructive to the natural world. Most of us agree – we've got to do something about these problems. The hard part is finding out what to do and how to do it. The goal of this journal is to share the stories of people who have already made the journey. By sharing our experiences we can quickly learn from each other.

The power of *Natural Living* lies in placing a higher value on a good life rather than money, our current representation of a good life. The idea of a natural life places higher value on truth, health, love, and quality. The primitive "economic" world we live in today is an aberration built as a framework without a foundation. The foundation of all life is nature. Economic life as currently practiced denies this reality. It is based on the common misconception that nature is unlimited. We developed this misconception because, until quite recently, human population was relatively small compared to our environment. Now, there are signs that we've gone well past the point where nature seems to offer unlimited supplies of all we need. The economic system hasn't changed. Instead, we're asked to believe that somehow, despite this error, things will work out. They can't. So, since the system will be forced to change by the reality of natural limits in our lifetime, *Natural Living* provides a wise investment in your personal, and your children's future.

You may ask, as I have, if this is so then why aren't things changing? For many, especially those in a position of comfort and power, there is no desire to change things. Change makes no sense for a large number of people who see disruption, hardship and unnecessary additional effort as the only results. The size of our world systems makes the machine of our current economics the largest force of momentum imaginable. Getting this large interconnected society to change direction could take longer than any other change society has ever had to make. Remember the Titanic – they saw the iceberg, but the ship was too large to turn in time to avoid it. Can we take this chance given that we only have about fifty years until our accessible fossil fuels supply run out? The sooner we act the easier it will be. Change can take place rapidly under certain circumstances. There is still time to turn the Titanic – if we make our move rapidly and effectively.

Change is a process. The idea of *Natural Living* is to apply a step-by-step process that can help us all make this journey. The steps of *Natural Living* are about changing those aspects of our life in conformity with nature's rules in a way that makes the greatest positive impact:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. Awareness | 5. Creativity |
| 2. Food | 6. Transportation |
| 3. Choice | 7. Plan |
| 4. Home | 8. Work |

In each issue of this journal we will focus on these steps as people from all over the world apply them. These steps combine elements of inner and outer changes. Together, by changing our thought patterns, and then our actions, we can help each other create a natural lifestyle that improves our lives and saves nature.

John Wilson, Founder of the **Natural Life Network**

Natural Living Journal

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We are always looking for new, interesting and inspiring stories, pictures, and poetry, about people who are achieving a natural lifestyle. If you would like to contribute an article or story then please send us a note with your idea. Contact John Wilson by email at john.wilson@naturallifenetwork.com

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Finding a Path to Natural Living

We all know that the way most of us live in North America is destroying nature. The signs are all around us. You can see it in the coal-fired power station spewing smoke into the sky above your neighborhood. The gray and yellow smog filled skies are the signs of all the pollutants dumped into the air we breathe by cars, trucks, and fossil fuel powered home furnaces. The forests are dying by the sides of our roads and acid rain threatens to destroy many natural conservation areas as well as farm land. Health effects of pollution are killing thousands of people each month with respiratory illness. The long term death toll is impossible to measure.

The difficulty is that so many effects are arising at the same time. Their impacts are taking place over many years. We are the frogs in the pot of water, the burner has been turned on, and while we might not notice it, the water is heating up. Some of the signs that things are warming up include:

- Global warming
- Water pollution
- Reduced or contaminated water resources
- Air pollution
- Reduced food yields
- Disappearing farm land
- Increasing species loss
- Increasing poverty
- Growing population increases
- War and terrorism
- Corporate and Government Corruption

We see the results every day in the newspapers. Cod fisheries are closed. Violence erupts in response to the lost jobs. Enron swindles billions through a wide circle of corruption in banking, government and the energy business sector. The United States invades a small **oil rich** nation, terrorizing and murdering their citizens, driven by unfounded charges that this country's murderous leader held weapons of mass destruction and was prepared to use them. Mass transit system expansion is thwarted in North American cities by powerful corporate and government profiteers. Oil companies, the most profitable of all corporate giants to the tune of more than \$10 billion in profits this past year, systematically avoid the costs of transition to energy supplies that don't kill people, and are passing along the costs of cleaning up their pollution, waste, and health care to the poor majority of tax payers.

This situation is of our own making. The billions of poor, the billions of struggling middle-income families teetering constantly on the edge of poverty, have a challenge confronting us. We are being treated unjustly by the wealthy corporate and government power brokers. We know we've got to fight but where do we find the time, money, justifications, tools, and power. Those of us living the dream that somehow we'll be okay have got to wake up. Unless we do something about it nothing is going to change.

We don't have to look very far. The answers are all around us. The answers exist in this piece of paper that you are reading right now. All we need to do is open our eyes, open our minds and *be* the changes that we know are needed. This piece of paper exists because of the infinite connections in nature. The sun shines on the forest. The tree is cut down to produce paper. These words are printed on the paper. You read the words. The connections run

deep. The people who cut down the trees need food to eat, shelter and water. The trucks that transport the trees are driven by people. Transportation of the trees and the paper to where you are now requires the burning of fossil fuels. The food that the truck drivers eat was probably fertilized with more fossil fuels. These connections never end. We are all connected.

What answers does nature show us? The first step is to continuously cultivate our awareness of inter-connection. We are one and the whole at the same time. Every action we take ripples out a set of effects while at the same time we are impacted by the effects of ripples from all of those around us. This inter-connection has driven us to the brink of disaster but it also holds the seed that can grow solutions. When we choose to recognize and live by the laws of nature the ripples begin a process of harmonization. The harmonization process in nature has the magical properties of healing, sustainability, diversification, and increasing intelligence.

We have waged war against nature in the name of progress, power and profits. Making peace will be critical to healing the wounds of destruction. The ability of seriously damaged ecosystems to recover within a number years is a testament to this power. We've been fighting this war as though we can win. As with all wars, this one is not winnable. By making peace we will discover that by working in partnership with each other and nature we will harness a new level of creativity and intelligence.

We have much to learn about the properties of nature. Time in natural processes is slow by human standards. The return of a farmer's field to the forest cover that originally covered the land could take hundreds if not thousands of years. The process can be seen in the abandoned lots both in cities and the countryside. First, drought resistant weeds will find a way to survive even within the cracks in concrete. After years of weed growth and decay, drought resistant bushes and even a few hardy trees may take root. Some will survive while many will not. In thirty to fifty years some trees may reach high into the sky, decaying material may provide enough cover for more weeds, bushes and new species of trees. In hundreds of years even concrete-covered lots may at least partially return to a natural state. In time, the restorative powers of nature can do the seemingly impossible.

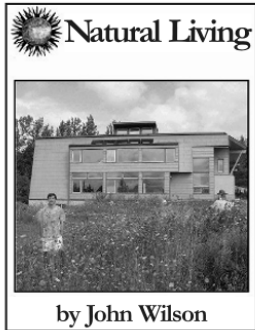
Nature is tuned to a system built into the universe that works. The sun is our world clock in a far deeper sense than just the twenty-four hour cycle of night and day. The sun drives the timing of everything on earth. The rates of growth of all things are limited by the rate of energy supplied by the sun. Storage of energy from the sun is possible. It can be stored from season to season or over millions of years. Nature has proven capable of storing up enough energy to supply our modern civilization with about a hundred years worth of fossil fuels. Over the long term, however, the economy of nature requires that we get and store our annual requirements from that provided by the sun on a daily and annual basis. The magic in nature is found in the unlimited ways that it provides for us to do this. The trick we need to understand is that this magic does have limits. We can perform much magic within these limits but we can't get away with going beyond these limits for long.

The answer to limits in nature has been increasing levels of intelligence and creativity. The potential for this lies in the very fabric of everything that exists in nature. Limits are simply the rules within which we, and all life, must learn to apply this intelligence and creativity. These limits don't necessarily restrict the potential for solutions. Limits are the shadows of the greatest intelligence of

Natural Life Network

Natural Living

Discover in detail how the Wilson family achieved their "Natural dream" home step-by-step. Creating your own natural home and lifestyle using the proven process of *Natural Living*. You'll learn first hand how to create a straw bale home, powered by solar/wind, using natural healthy materials and a green roof.



Wilson Natural Home Video

This inspiring 25 minute video shows you everything. "When it comes to living green, you can't do much better than the Wilson family." -Toronto Star



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all. Finding these limits and learning to live within them are the ultimate destiny of all life. In this lies the meaning of life itself. This is the search for the ultimate truth.

So what answers does nature offer to the problems of destruction all around us? The answer is life itself. The system of life in nature revolves around the sun. The cycles of life are driven by the yearly rotation of earth around the sun, the daily rotation of the earth in relation to the sun, combined with the yearly cycle of seasons that drive weather patterns. The sun is the renewable energy source for life on earth. The Gaia hypothesis suggests that all of life on earth itself is the regulating system of earth. The earth ecosystem has been created, transformed and maintained by a

process we call life. Life formed early in earth history and created the necessary levels of water and oxygen-rich atmosphere necessary for more complex life. These in turn have created the vast diversity of plant and animal life that has terra-formed both land and sea into a complex balanced living planet...Gaia. In these cycles and systems, we will find the answers to a natural sustainable evolving future for all life.

Earth history shows us that our sustainable future rests upon maintaining balance between the essential elements using the complex processes of life systems. Clearly the essential elements that must concern us most are: sun, water, air, earth and life systems. The problems point directly towards imbalances in these essential elements of the system of life. Global warming is a result of the use of fossil fuels rather than solar energy. Water pollution arises because we dump waste rather than recycle it naturally. The air we breathe is polluted by the fossil fuels we burn in cars and power plants. The earth we use is being covered by concrete in cities, contaminated by industry, and rendered infertile by unnatural farming practices that includes the use of fossil fuel based fertilizers and toxic pesticides and herbicides. The growth in human populations and increasing "modernization and industrialization" is resulting in species and ecosystem destruction everywhere.

The answers that nature's holistic model provides include:

- Sun and Air** – Modify our human "ecosystems" (cities, towns, villages, provinces, states and countries) to be sustained by the energy provided by the sun.
- Water** – Recycle water through natural living machines. Eliminate the use of water as a waste transport system using composting techniques.
- Earth** – Use compost and organic techniques for farming and landscape management.
- Life** – Create evolutionary changes to restore the balance to natural processes.

Nature tells us that all the answers already exist. This natural balance has existed for millions and billions of years here on earth. The tools required for humanity to live according to this model have already been invented. The only remaining hurdles are those in our own minds. The practical hurdles imposed by the natural model have been overcome:

- Sun and Air** – Solar, wind, and biomass energy sources are sufficient for the sustainable supply of all our requirements.
- Water** – Sewage and industrial water processing systems exist that eliminate the need for water or transform the use of waste into food.
- Earth** – Permaculture techniques, organic farming, natural fertilizers and composting can supply us with all the food we need.
- Life** – Maintaining the remaining biodiversity and working with nature creatively has proven capable of finding all the answers to sustainable living.

We can see these natural living models in action everywhere. They do work in the real world. Nothing new needs to be invented or discovered. Solar powered homes and businesses have been in existence for decades. The majority of the world sustains itself in housing that uses natural materials and passive solar techniques. The use of composting systems for waste processing is as old as civilization. Natural techniques for maintaining soil quality and productivity have been required in many regions. Life has always

been able to find answers to the most complex problems of sustenance. So can we.

Finding the path of *Natural Living* means looking to nature for models that are based on closed loops, dynamic equilibrium, and harmony. Ecosystems in nature have evolved into complex systems where one process feeds the next in a large closed loop. All of these processes are powered by the energy from the sun. This is the model that we must follow.

In nature the sun rains down photons of energy each and every day. These packets of energy heat the land, air, earth and water. Plants in the water and on land convert the sun's photons into a chemical energy form that they can use to grow through a process called photosynthesis. The cells in the leaves of plants are able to transform the photons hitting them into an energy form they can use. Specialized cells in the plant are supported by cells that allow the transfer of energy, consumption of carbon dioxide in the air with oxygen as a byproduct, and other cells that enable the plant to grow flowers for reproduction. The information required to recreate this plant is held in the genetic code transferred between plants by insects and the wind. This genetic code holds all of the information necessary for this plant species to recreate the cells used to form the plant species somewhere else. The plant needs soil, water and sunlight that combine elements necessary to build the cells. Animals eat the plants. Plants grow, and then die, returning more complex nutrients to the soil. More complex plants grow. Genetic mutations and evolutionary processes combine to change all forms of life over time providing a mechanism for

handling changes to the environment.

We do have a very good understanding of nature's model for life. Our task now is to combine this knowledge with our creativity to create human community ecosystems that reflect this understanding. Houses must be transformed to operate like a plant. Transportation systems need to emulate the patterns of animals and insects. Communities must evolve towards systems and interactions common to ecosystems. We do know how to do this. There are people doing this all over the world. We must now relearn what we have forgotten. We must now open our eyes to all of the potential that nature offers. We must overcome ourselves. We must remind ourselves that we are inextricably linked to this whole. As we overcome ourselves we transform the whole.

This natural living model works as follows. The houses we build and live in must harvest the local solar energy using solar panels, solar water heaters and passive solar design. Natural "waste" materials such as straw bales will create the breathing walls that also insulate against heat and cold. "Waste" management will use recycling, reusing, composting and living machine processes to create closed loops for water and material usage. Food will be grown organically using natural non-toxic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Communities will work together to help each other achieve these changes. The community will facilitate changes to infrastructure necessary to encourage walking, biking, and roller blading. Transportation systems will revolve around public systems of trains. Cars will use hydrogen as a fuel with water as exhaust.

We can do these things. The hard part is taking the first step.★



Love Affair with Straw Bales

One of the best things about building with straw bales is the opportunity to involve others, whether amateurs or experts, in the construction of your home. With minimal instruction and supervision, a team of inexperienced family, friends, and other enthusiasts can help you to erect your straw bale walls in just a few days. We call it a “straw bale happening”.

What is it? Friends, family and a small group of experienced straw bale builders gather for a few days to prepare and stack straw bales for a building. For a volunteer, it’s a chance to exchange experience with others, and plan for your own future straw bale structure. The new skills you learn can be used in preparing to build your own home. Whether or not you plan to build with straw bales yourself, the opportunity to participate in a straw bale happening provides a great sense of accomplishment. It just feels good to help others. And the best part – it’s fun!

Common Questions

What about the three little pigs? Sure enough that is what most of us think of the first time we hear about a straw bale home. The reality is that straw bale homes may be the most sensible, long lasting, and sturdy homes you’ll ever build. In terms of withstanding earthquakes you can’t do much better than a straw bale home. As far as fire and pests are concerned the thousands of straw bale homes in existence, some for more than fifty years, have proven that these are not an issue. As long as the straw bales are kept dry, your natural insulation material will last for a hundred years or longer.

A Sense of Community

Working together like this, you develop a sense of teamwork and camaraderie. Networking with people of all ages and backgrounds, who share in a common interest and purpose, leads to the sharing of ideas, solutions to problems, and an all-important level of encouragement. The resulting optimism and positive attitudes generate a sense that it can be done – and we’re doing it together. It’s amazing to witness the enthusiasm of volunteers so interested in learning by working hard, for free, for somebody else.

What did I learn? In April, my family hosted a straw bale happening. Having participated in one before, I thought I knew what I was doing. Aware of the complexity of the job, however, and having no formal training, we decided to bring in some



experts. Chris Magwood, Peter Mack, and Tina Therrien, of Camel’s Back Construction, provided their expertise in organizing and supervising the work party. And what we gained from their knowledge and experience was well worth the added cost.

I also picked up some great tips for building with bales, for example:

- Staple the chicken wire the outside frame before starting to stack the bales of straw.
- Complete one row before starting the next one.
- Decide which wall needs to be the straightest (usually one side will have a bit more “character” than the other). Then use huge (and I mean huge!) wooden mallets on each side of the stacked bales to straighten the walls.
- Don’t forget to stuff gaps on the outside and around posts before start the next layer.
- You can apply either two or three layers of stucco. If you plan to add color, apply the final pigment layer with a paint roller several weeks after completing the first two layers. This allows time for the stucco to dry properly, and the color layer will hide any cracks or flaws.

Straw Bales vs. Conventional

The natural curved lines and spaces formed by straw bale walls produce a spiritual sense of closeness to earth, a sense of harmony with creation and life. Look at the teepee, igloo and many other examples of aboriginal dwellings. When you enter one of these structures, this spiritual feeling surrounds you. You can feel it if you spend a night in a cozy warm round teepee. This is the feeling I get in my own natural home, both inside and out. When guests visit my home, they feel it too.

Shortly after finishing our straw bale day, I spent a day insulating other parts of our home with Roxul insulation. I realized with startling clarity that straw bales are much more pleasant to work with than conventional insulation material. It doesn’t irritate the skin, you don’t need protective goggles, and a day of straw bale building is actually lots of fun. Now, who can say that about a day of working with slag waste insulation or fiberglass insulation? *

Natural Living Journal next month...

- Natural Home Tour
- The Solar Village update

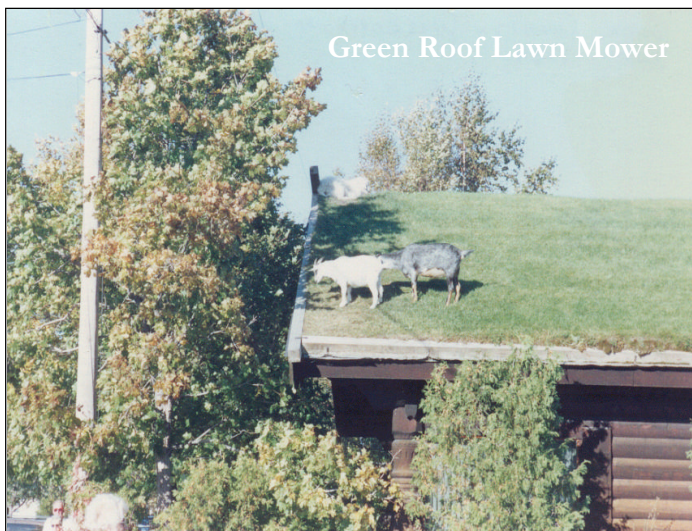
What is the Natural Life Network?

The Natural Life Network is a group of people who share information, ideas and experiences in order to achieve a natural life. What is a "Natural Life"?:

1. A continual passionate search for a love, a spiritual connection with earth, life and nature.
2. A positive attitude supported by the knowledge that the answers and solutions we all seek are found in nature.
3. Life is supported by simple rhythms and patterns, which are best followed.
4. Nature sustains and survives through simplicity and diversity, which provides the model under which we must live.
5. Nature is efficient and recycles everything, resulting in no waste. We need to follow this model to be in harmony with the earth.
6. Natural processes are balanced and self-regulating.
7. Life is a reflection of our interpretation of existence in time, for which the only sustainable model to follow, is nature.
8. Our only real connection with the infinite is through our children; through them we are all connected to each other and the infinite.

Goals

1. Enjoy the happiness and love we have every moment.
2. Work to restore the natural balance and state of nature.
3. For every activity of daily life make a conscious effort to reflect on all of the choices, and then always select the one that maintains the natural state of nature.
4. Create a self-sustaining organization that is dedicated to developing, refining and communicating the concept of a natural life.
5. Create a small community based on the principles and processes of a natural life. This new community will be self-sufficient through principles of nature and the use of solar energy. This community will be called The Solar Village.
6. Plan, and then embark on a two-year sailing voyage around the world using solar power. Document and communicate the many examples of others applying the principles and processes of natural living. *



Join Us

Become a part of a community of people around the world dedicated to living in harmony with nature. We've created this network so that we can all share our ideas, experiences and knowledge. The changes we envision are complete and revolutionary; however our goals are to make them the norm. The organization is about the practical, inspiring and real application of living gently on the earth so that our children may enjoy a clean, healthy and productive environment.

The dream, the visions, are the same and yet perhaps broader. Yes, we want happiness, freedom, truth and beauty in our lives but more than that, we want this for our children and their children.

The quality of life matters. So above cost comes quality. It means understanding that less can be more and that doing nothing can do more.

The simple point is that we all can "do" much more – and that means all of us or it won't work. For example:

- Choose or create a home/community that is powered by the sun;
- Grow and eat organic food;
- If you must travel select the most efficient means, walk, bicycle, tele-commute, travel by train, bus, ultra-efficient car, or fly;
- If and when possible, work in nature – grow your own organic food, restore nature around you, put your investments to work for natural living.

What amazes me is that everything we need to live this way exists. The cost over the longer term is less. The results are a happier more healthy self and family.

Member benefits:

- Monthly **Natural Living Journal** full electronic edition.
- E-Mail **Question & Answer** (3 per year, no more than 1 per month.)
- **Directory listing (optional) and Natural Directory.**
- Discounts on some products and services offered by **Natural Life Network.**

Sign-up at: www.NaturalLifeNetwork.com *



The Natural Life Way

Here are some ideas for living the Natural Life way:

1. Spend 30 minutes (or as much time as you can spare) with nature – clear your mind of all worries and thoughts and simply become one with nature.
 - Become in tune with the infinite potential of nature through communion with it each and every day.
 - Restore nature in your back yard, on your balcony, or at your local parks.
2. Make conscious choices with everything you do. Don't let habits or common practices lull you into thinking choices don't exist.
 - Avoid accepting packaging, plastic bags, throw-away cups. Bring a mug, use re-usable shopping bags or boxes.
 - Ride a bike, walk or avoid traveling by car.
3. Make investments in nature. Think long term. Give to the life force that makes everything around you possible.
 - Treat yourself to organic food, which is tastier, healthier for you and gentler on the earth.
 - Let your lawn grow wild – grow wild berries and flowers on it.
 - Plant as many trees as you can.
 - Spend more to get the most efficient appliances. You'll save in energy costs over the longer term.
 - Use solar power so coal power plants don't pollute the air even though it may cost more up front.
4. Apply your talents to helping others, restoring nature, and expressing your love for the world that sustains you.
 - Create a business that supports the natural life ways of living;
 - Spread your interest and knowledge to your children and others, through volunteering at schools and community centers.
5. Define a vision, in the form of achievable goals that provide the guiding lights for the decisions you make. Be flexible and open to the infinite possibilities of achieving these goals.
6. Achieve your goals with openness to all potential solutions along the road. Maintain a constant concern for nature and your fellow humanity.
7. Measure your success based on the happiness you give others.

★

Poem for a Natural Home

This new house designed in the image of nature,
 Powered by the sun like the trees and plants all around us,
 Protected by earth and straw,
 Sitting gently on the land facing south,
 A place of calm, safety, and health,

Today we celebrate,
 Today we thank nature for all that it has given us,
 Today we remind ourselves that this home was created in the spirit
 of our love for our children, Ian and Claire,

That this spirit may live forever in nature. ★

Top 10 Things You Can Do

1. Make a commitment to live in harmony with nature and to show your love for humanity now and always. Put your happiness and joy for life as your first priority and express your love for nature and your fellow creatures before all else.
2. Change the way you live daily life. Ask how it affects nature and try to make sure it always restores or is in harmony with nature.
3. Start with your home and change it. Modify it, buy one, or create one that is efficient, made with natural materials, efficient appliances, and is solar powered.
4. Only consume organically grown food. Grow your own organic food.
5. Avoid traveling by cars and trucks whenever possible. Use a bike or walk. If you must travel by car or truck purchase or use only the most efficient non-polluting vehicle you can.
6. In every use of energy, try to find a renewable non-polluting source of power, ideally solar, wind or small-scale hydro.
7. Eliminate every element of waste. Use only materials that may easily be used in a natural cycle of reuse. Use composting toilets. Compost all food waste. Eliminate packaging that can't be composted or recycled.
8. Patronize businesses, services and entertainment that apply as many of these top ten things as possible. This includes hotels, restaurants, parks, shopping facilities, entertainment complexes, businesses, and banks.
9. Products should be natural, non-polluting, re-usable and long lasting. Wherever possible, do without.
10. Encourage and inspire others through your actions. ★

