

The Herald

DUBOIS COUNTY, INDIANA
MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2012

■ YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER SINCE 1895

THE CULTURE OF PERMACULTURE

Michael Hicks of Jasper, left, showed Dave Beachy of Paoli, Grendlyn and Jon Cannon of Dubois and other attendees various plants housed in the greenhouse in his backyard Sunday afternoon. Hicks moderated a session on the basics of organic gardening, which covered topics including garden design, soil awareness and plant selection.

RACHEL MUMMEY
THE HERALD



Farmer shares organic knowledge

By JOHN SEASLY
Herald Staff Writer

JASPER — Jasper resident and organic farmer Michael Hicks started the gardens at his Riverside Drive home in 2010. Standing on the concrete driveway next to his back porch, he pointed to an area of dirt between the driveway and the brick wall of the house.

"Two years ago this was the only garden in the place," he said.

Since then, Hicks has transformed the property into a series of lush gardens with nearly 200 different plant species.

Sunday, 10 residents of Jasper, Paoli and Bloomington attended Hicks' free workshop on permaculture and organic gardening.

Permaculture, or permanent agriculture, is an approach to gardening and farming that seeks to replicate nature rather than dominate it through natural, sustainable practices. Using permaculture techniques, Hicks said, it is possible to create a thriving garden that yields healthy and delicious produce.

Hicks is the founder of the Living Roots Ecovillage in Jasper, which runs a local community-supported agriculture program.

Some of the people who attended Hicks' workshop have gardens themselves and want to improve them organically. Dave and Marlene Beachy of Paoli have gardened for years and are interested in composting. Others, like Amanda Tadatada of Jasper, have been wanting to start a garden of their own.

"The No. 1 most important thing is soil," Hicks said. "If you place your effort on anything, place it on soil."

The balance of silt, sand and clay in the soil has a huge impact on whether plants will be able to grow, Hicks said. In addition, soil's three main nutrients — nitrogen, phosphate and potassium —

provide essential nourishment for plants. An easy way to find out soil composition, Hicks said, is to get a soil test. The test costs about \$15 per sample and can be picked up at the Purdue Extension-Dubois County office and mailed to an Ohio company for analysis.

Adding organic matter is the most effective method of enriching soil, Hicks said, and it doesn't need to cost anything. The Jasper Street Department, at 305 S. Clay St., provides leaves during normal working hours to anyone who wants

See **FARMER**
on the back page

by the IRS. People in a hurry can mistakenly write a wrong address

day, and can be done online. Receiving an extension from the IRS

Contact Candy Neal at
cneal@dcherald.com.

Farmer

(Concluded from Page One)

them. Horse farmers are happy to give away their manure, and many farmers are willing to give away spoiled hay, which animals won't eat.

Hicks took the workshop students on a tour of his gardens, pointing out organic techniques. Mulching and crop rotation are essential to building good soil and preventing disease. With clay-heavy soil common to Dubois County, raised beds help improve drainage and require less maintenance in the long term. In the front yard, Hicks has rows of raised beds planted perpendicular to the slope. This distributes rainwater and prevents soil erosion.

While garden design and prep-

aration can be useful tools, Hicks said that gardening also should be about personal enjoyment. A garden should have plants the gardener likes to eat.

"What sounds exciting to grow?" Hicks asked. Certain plants, like tomatoes, greens and peppers, produce a lot, while others, like eggplant, broccoli and cauliflower, are hard to grow organically.

New gardeners should try to plant according to the seasons, he said, and seed more than necessary.

Hicks showed the students how to start a seedbed in trays and how to plant a young seedling in the ground.

"Once you know those (key techniques), it's not that hard,"

Hicks said. "Just add organic matter."

The students left the workshop with new information on organic gardening.

"I learned not to worry too much about certain factors," Marlene Beachy said, emphasizing the benefits of composting.

"I just like supporting Michael's community and hopefully I can start a garden," said Rafaela Schaick of Jasper, who has been a member of Hicks' community-supported agriculture program for the last year.

"Plants want to grow," Hicks said. "Just get out there and try it, see what works."

Contact John Seasily at
jseasily@dcherald.com.