

The First 30 Years of Natural Life Magazine



A Short History...

Natural Life magazine and its publishing company, which was then called The Alternate Press, are turning 30 this year. Publisher Rolf Priesnitz launched *Natural Life* in 1976 to meet his personal need for information about renewable energy, organic gardening and other alternatives, and because he felt there was a need for a forum for sharing ideas about self-reliance. He and his wife Wendy, who became editor after the first issue, were looking for a way to provide a family income while they stayed at home so their two daughters Heidi and Melanie could learn without attending school. So they rounded up some help, printed 50,000 copies of the first issue and mailed them out to a variety of mailing lists, including the subscribers of Rodale's *Organic Gardening and Farming* magazine. All the publishing took place in their small townhouse in Jarvis, Ontario, later moving to an unheated former dairy building across town. Later, the family and the business moved around Ontario and across the country to British Columbia and, later, Alberta.

Those were heady days, as the massive social changes of the 1960s led to the back-to-the-land movement of the 70s. A so-called "energy crisis" meant there was lots of interest in renewable energy sources, but unfortunately it was followed by an economic recession in the early 80s.

Many other magazines took root around the same time but, unfortunately, not all had the staying power of *Natural Life*. As a way to keep the spirit alive, The Alternate Press purchased the assets of some of those magazines and rolled their content and circulation into that of *Natural Life*. They included *Seriatim* from San Francisco, *Positive Vibrations* from Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, *Earthkeeper* from Guelph, Ontario and *Growth Spurts* from Toronto.

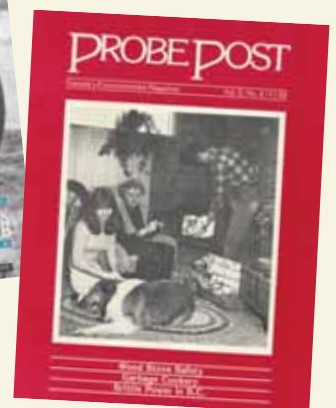
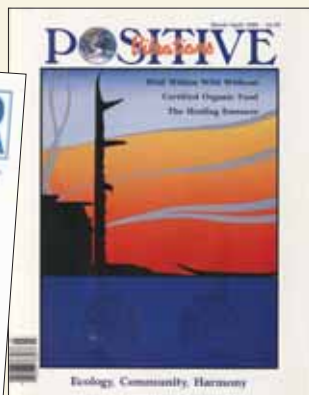
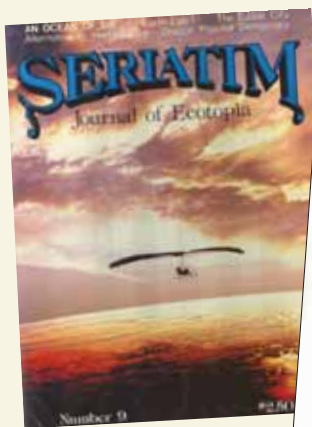
More positively, Rolf and Wendy helped others begin magazines, like John Holt and his *Growing Without Schooling*. And in the late 1970s, they almost bought *Mothering* magazine from founder Addie Eavenson (one vintage issue of *Mothering* actually carries an editorial saying that we had – one of those "oops moments" that we all experience, written to meet a publishing deadline but before the deal was finalized.)

In the throws of the mid-80s recession, Rolf worked with *Probe Post* magazine (published in Toronto by Pollution Probe) in order to take a financial breather from the trials of magazine publishing. *Natural Life* returned the favor in the early 90s when *Probe Post* decided to depart the magazine publishing world.

Along the way, The Alternate Press published a natural foods trade magazine (somewhat before its time in the early 80s), a green business newsletter (definitely before its time in the late 80s), a home business newspaper (a success from 1986 to 1993), a weekly community newspaper (couldn't keep up that schedule in 1997 and still couldn't!) and a homeschooling newsletter and magazine from 1979 to 1992.

When the ground-breaking website www.life.ca was launched in the mid-90s, The Alternate Press seemed too narrow a name for a multi-media business. So the name Life Media was adopted. And ever open to new ideas and new ways to communicate with people, Life Media produced a series of Natural Life Festivals and Expos from 1998 to 2001. Finally, in 2002, Life Media launched a new very successful new magazine called *Life Learning*. Rolf claims that it won't be the last addition to the family and he hopes to launch yet another magazine within the next year or so.

Meanwhile, *Natural Life* continues to grow with the times while staying true to its original mandate to provide trustworthy information and inspiration for healthy, sustainable living. **-NL-**



Houses of all Sorts

A wide variety of houses has been featured in *Natural Life* over the years: urban and rural, expensive and affordable, strawbale, solar-powered, wind-powered, domes, teepees and stackwall.



The Herb Garden

by Rachel McLeod



Our friend Rachel McLeod wrote Natural Life's longest-lived and most popular column – beginning almost at our beginning and ending in the late-90s. Many of her columns are archived at www.life.ca. Here is an excerpt from one published in 1992.

One day some years ago two members of the Ministry of Agriculture visited my herb garden. They were looking for information on herbs as a viable alternative crop for tobacco growers. We toured the garden, talking about the plants as we went. When they took their leave, one said to me, "You talk about the herbs as if they were people." That is so true, and it's one of the joys of growing herbs. They become your friends and, like good friends, they enhance your life by bringing pleasure and creative living to everyday activities.

Spring is almost here, the seed catalogs are tempting us and we should choose the herbs we plan to grow this

summer. If you already grow herbs, you may not need to buy many; you may have collected seed, some will self-seed and, of course, the perennials will appear as the weather warms and can be propagated by cuttings or division. But if you are growing herbs for the first time you will want to choose seed.

Start with annuals and biennials (they will be so marked in the catalog) – plants like chervil, summer savory, parsley, basil and dill. These will grow quickly in summer and should be harvested before they flower. Perennials such as sage, thyme and lavender take longer to become established and you may prefer to buy young plants in May.

Before you finally make your choices, give thought to where the plants will grow in your garden. For many years I have been advising beginning herb gardeners not to wait until they can make a special herb garden but to pop the herbs in between existing plantings, in the flower border, among shrubs or in the

rockery. Now I am taking my own advice.

The original plan was for a low maintenance garden that we could enjoy without too much work. However, soon I was cooking in my new kitchen and quickly realized that I needed my "friends". I simply couldn't manage without having fresh herbs straight from the garden for our meals. I needed everyday home remedies (like chickweed to draw out a difficult splinter) and dried herbs for gifts. So a lavender border was begun. And now the parsley, sage and French tarragon share space near the patio door with a tree peony and garlic chives.

The only important things to remember when planting herbs are that they need good drainage and, that for you to use and enjoy them, they should be well labeled and placed where they are easily accessible from the house. Some like full sun, others will take sun or part shade, some do not mind dry soil, others need a damp soil. Some will be too friendly and will have to be controlled before they become invasive. In the following months I will write about individual members of my herb friends and describe their likes and dislikes and their great qualities in enhancing our lives.

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