



# The Garden Companion

## Biointensive for Russia's newsletter

Volume 16

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### LUDMILA ZHIRINA RESUMES TEACHING BIOINTENSIVE IN RUSSIA'S NORTH

Longtime readers should remember Dr. Ludmila Zhirina of the NGO VIOLA, who worked with us to disseminate and test GROW BIOINTENSIVE sustainable mini-farming in the Bryansk and Orel regions of Russia from 1995 to 2010. Ludmila then moved on to learn and teach other organic farming methods, working with the Russian Socio-Ecological Union (RSEU) and Friends of the Earth (FOE). But in the fall of 2016, inspired by the recent publication of the third Russian edition of *How to Grow More Vegetables*, she returned to teaching Biointensive at a workshop held in St. Petersburg and its region. Among the participants were Irina Skiba, a farmer and educator from the Yaroslavl region, and Inna Yuzhakova, a teacher from the Vologda region. Irina and Inna then invited Ludmila to conduct a teaching tour in May 2017 to the Yaroslavl, Vologda, and Arkhangelsk regions of Northwest Russia.

This tour happened as planned with BfR's support of \$1200 for travel, visual aids, and books. *Many thanks to those of you who donated!* Accompanied by Irina and Inna, Ludmila accomplished an extraordinary amount in only eight days, traveling more than 1200 miles and holding 20 classes, work sessions, and discussions in rural schools and libraries and at farms and orchards. Ludmila also collected heirloom seed varieties, some of which were planted in Bryansk gardens that summer.

Five sets of colorful posters were printed for use during the workshops. Sets were left with four of the hosting organizations for later use, and they have also been shared electronically with many more groups.

Local educational administration authorities were fully in support of Ludmila's trainings. The school principals, teachers, farmers, orchardists and beekeepers who hosted the travelers all sent their gratitude for our support. Ludmila wrote, "I think *continued on page 3*

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### DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Spring has burst forth following the terrible fires that encircled the built area of the Ojai Valley, with green vegetation dominating the scorched hillsides across the river from Mulberry Haven. We've recently had rain totaling five inches in two days, raising the nearby reservoir level. This may well only be a brief reprieve in our drought outlook, but it certainly lifts our spirits for now. We're expecting a good mulberry harvest, so do plan to visit for U-pick if you're in the area!

In Russia, the year 2017 was one of our most productive in terms of teaching Biointensive in BfR's 25-year history, with the Grassroots Alliance PERESVET teachers working with Eco-Schools/Green Flag, and Ludmila Zhirina of the NGO VIOLA taking two teaching tours of Russia's northern provinces. Ludmila and her partner Irina Skiba even succeeded in registering a new NGO, "Biointensive for the North of Russia." See article at left and our new website [biointensiveforrussia.org](http://biointensiveforrussia.org) for details.

Earth Day is approaching, and we'll be at booths at



park celebrations on April 14 in Oxnard and April 21 in Ojai. We'll display photos of our garden at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ojai, where we grow a basket of produce each week for those in need. We're looking forward to telling folks about our exciting (but as yet unfunded) plans for joint activities with our Russian partners, about which you may read more in the article below!

*Carol Vesecky*

### WEBINARS, VERMONT AND ST. PETERSBURG WORKSHOPS ON GB AND PERMACULTURE PLANNED

"East Meets West in Nature's Garden" was the project's title, as submitted to the USAID-funded Eurasia Foundation; its goal was to bring the GROW BIOINTENSIVE<sup>SM</sup> sustainable mini-farming system (GB) to 50 schools in seven cold-climate regions of Russia and five locations the US in 2018-2019. We had high hopes of receiving the grant after becoming "finalists," but our hopes were dashed after an arduous period of responding to follow-up questions. Now we're back to fundraising to salvage at least part of it, the budget total being \$40,000. Read on about the project (planned dates have been deleted), and please donate to help us at least to do the webinars, if you're able! The GB method – using no *continued on page 5*

# The NGO VIOLA in Bryansk

The NGO VIOLA was originally founded by Dr. Ludmila Zhirina and her scholarly colleagues to research and teach ways of mitigating the effects of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. This work continues: for example, current VIOLA co-director Dr. Oleg Kalmykov worked with young volunteers to search for earthworms in the forest near Novozybkov, the Bryansk *oblast'* city which had suffered more radiation than any other in Russia. They learned that earthworms can be bioindicators of the level of radiation contamination of the soil.

A biology professor, Ludmila knew from research that deep aeration of the soil, as takes place with Biointensive double-digging, can help to reduce the radionuclide contamination in vegetables by allowing it to sink deeper, thereby becoming less available to the root mass of plants. Her meeting with Carol in 1995 at a USAID-supported EcoForum in Kiev led to workshops in Bryansk and Willits CA, printed materials, support for years of agricultural experiments during the growing season, and an expedition to test radiation in the vegetable harvests in Ukraine and Russia (reports are in our newsletters posted online). Various members of VIOLA have taught workshops in schools and colleges throughout the Bryansk *oblast'*, and the method is regularly taught in schools and at the local agricultural university.

In 2010, still living in Bryansk but with a second base in Moscow at the Socio-Ecological Union, Ludmila moved on to learn and teach other organic farming methods such as Biodynamics and Permaculture in various regions of Russia. But the publication in 2016 of the third Russian edition of *How to Grow* attracted her back to teach Biointensive, beginning in St. Petersburg and its region that autumn. Then,

in 2017 she made two remarkable tours to teach Biointensive in rural areas of three northern regions of Western Russia. Thus, Ludmila is now able to teach all three approaches that encourage us humans to grow food more in harmony with nature's cycles. In fact the NGO VIOLA held an international conference in Bryansk in October 2017, presenting Biointensive along with Permaculture and Biodynamic farming.

As mentioned above, during 2017 with BfR support, Ludmila traveled north to the Yaroslavl, Vologda, and



Arkhangelsk regions, first in May (the snow having melted), and again in August to present workshops in Biointensive to teachers and students there, coordinated by the Gardens of the North NGO in Vologda and other

groups. More details are in the article beginning on page 1 and also our new website [biointensiveforrussia.org](http://biointensiveforrussia.org).

Planting by the phases of the moon, described in *How to Grow* and practiced by Biodynamic farmers and gardeners and some (but not all) Biointensive gardeners was taught, and heirloom seed-saving will be encouraged. Ludmila has also started a seed-saving project in the northern cities, in fact she's collecting seeds by bike in the photo. Go, Ludmila!!! ♦

## CITIZEN DIPLOMACY IS BACK

*During the late Cold War of the 1980s, we worked for peace as "citizen diplomats" by hosting Soviets visiting the US and traveling to the USSR to make friendly contacts with Russian citizens. Sharon Tennison of the Center for Citizen Initiatives was one of the movement's pioneers, organizing dozens of tours and following up by running programs in the 1990s for thousands of Russians to learn our best business practices during visits to the US. She watched with dismay as relations between our two countries cooled in the last decade, and started up the tours again in 2015. See her website [ccisf.org](http://ccisf.org) for more details; here follows an article therefrom on the 2017 tour that I planned to join, but in the end could not for several reasons. There are **many** informative links, so do visit [ccisf.org](http://ccisf.org) for those! -cbv*

**OBSERVATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS FROM RUSSIA** by Rick Sterling, reprinted from *GlobalResearch.ca* and [ccisf.org](http://ccisf.org)

**Introduction** For over two weeks this May [2017 -ed.], a delegation of 30 Americans visited seven regions and ten cities across Russia. Organized by Sharon Tennison of Center for Citizen Initiatives, the entire group began in Moscow with

several days of meetings and visits, then broke into smaller groups going to cities including Volgograd, Kazan (Tatarstan), Krasnodar (near Black Sea), Novosibirsk (Siberia), Yekaterinburg and the Crimean cities Simferopol, Yalta and Sevastopol. After these regional visits, delegates regrouped in St Petersburg to share their experiences. Following is an informal review with conclusions based on my observations in Kazan and what I heard from others.

### **Observations and Facts**

- \* *Western sanctions have hurt sectors of Russia's economy but encouraged agricultural production.* Exports and imports have been impacted by Western sanctions imposed in 2014. The tourist sector has been hard hit and education exchanges between Russia and the USA have been interrupted or ended. However, the sanctions have spurred investments and expansion in agricultural production. We were told that farmers are saying 'Don't lift the sanctions!'
- \* *Some Russian oligarchs are making major infrastructure investments.* For example, billionaire Sergei Galitsky has developed Russia's *see top of next page*

*Observations, continued from page 2* largest retail outlet, the Magnit supermarket chain. Galitsky has invested heavily in state-of-the-art drip irrigation greenhouses producing massive quantities of high quality cucumbers, tomatoes and other vegetables, which are distributed via the supermarkets throughout Russia.

- \* *There has been a resurgence of religion in Russia.* Russian Orthodox Churches have been revitalized and gold leaf glistens on the church domes. Muslim mosques have also been refurbished and rebuilt. A brilliant new mosque is a prominent part of the Kremlin in Kazan, Tatarstan. There are many Muslim in Russia. This research puts the number at ten million though we heard estimates much higher. We saw numerous examples of interfaith unity and cooperation, with Muslim Imams working side by side with young Russian Orthodox priests. We also heard stories of how churches had been used as prisons or food warehouses during the Stalin era.
- \* *Russia increasingly looks east.* The Russian emblem of a double-headed eagle looks both east and west; it is a Eur-Asian country. While Europe is still important politically and economically, Russia is increasingly looking to the east. Russia's "strategic partner" is China – economically, politically and militarily. There are

*Ludmila, continued from page 1)* they believe the Bio-intensive method will work well with their cold climate, short summers, and wet soil." One teacher wrote later that her village residents read our book out loud to a group every evening!



During the tour, Ludmila distributed the print version of the Russian *How to Grow* to teachers, and access to the electronic version was also shared. (It is available for

a \$5 donation to Ecology Action at [www.growbiointensive.org/HTGMV-Russian/index.html](http://www.growbiointensive.org/HTGMV-Russian/index.html).) People in all areas visited promised to practice GB, and invited me to visit them. Ludmila continued to advise the groups via Skype in June and July. Photos of the May tour may be viewed online at Bio-intensive for Russia's Facebook page.

Ludmila made a followup training tour in August, during which she worked with four farm families who had begun teaching Bio-intensive to local groups during the summer, after attending Ludmila's workshops and reading our book. They met with many local groups, along with 15 students and three teachers from the Waldorf School in Voronezh in Central Russia who traveled north to join them. They discussed their results and topics such as composting in a cold

increasing numbers of Chinese tourists and education exchanges with Russia. In the United Nations Security Council the two countries tend to vote together. Huge investments are planned for the transportation network dubbed the "Belt and Road Initiative" connecting Asia with Europe.

- \* *Russia is a capitalist country with a strong state sector.* Government is influential or controls sectors of the economy such as public transportation, military/defense industry, resource extraction, education and health care. State owned enterprises account for nearly 40% of overall employment. They have universal health care in parallel with private education and health care facilities. Banking is a problem area with high interest rates and the failure/bankruptcy of numerous banks in the past decade. We heard complaints that foreign multinational companies can enter and control sectors of the economy, drive out Russian competitors and take the profits home.
- \* *There is some nostalgia for the former Soviet Union with its communist ideals.* We met numerous people who speak fondly of the days when nobody was super-rich or horribly poor and when they believed there was a higher goal for society. We heard this from people ranging from a successful entrepreneur to an aging *continued on page 6*

climate with moist, clayey soil, and compared the Bio-intensive method with Permaculture and Biodynamic practices already being used.

They also held lengthy work sessions in gardens, took part in local organic farming festivals, showed environmental films by French director Jean Bertrand, and developed plans for teaching Bio-intensive to children with psychological problems.

Most of the photos of the homes, gardens, farms, schools (including some of students digging in the snow!), orchards, and apiaries Ludmila sent from her May tour have been posted, nearly all with captions, on the Bio-intensive for Russia page at Facebook. So, do pay it a visit! Click on Photos, where you'll see Albums at the top, and follow the story from the beginning in Albums I-III: Yaroslavl, Vologda, and Arkhangelsk provinces.

#### **BfR's new website**

Ludmila's excellent photographs of each garden she visited during her August tour inspired us to post them on a new website, which I highly recommend visiting so you can see what can be grown during the long days of a short summer in a far northern climate! Here's the URL: [www.biointensiveforrussia.org](http://www.biointensiveforrussia.org). I can proudly report that with the aid of Squarespace I built the site myself! Currently it includes photos and narrative from at least 15 of Ludmila's visits in the three northern provinces; soon I'll add photos from other regions. We'll be sure to continue to maintain the old website at <http://biointensiveforrussia.igc.org>, with your support and that of our longtime webmasters Berta, Shoshana and Tamara! ♦

## The Grassroots Alliance PERESVET in Bryansk

Dr. Igor Prokofyev and his colleagues Oleg Zavarzin and Natalya Koryagina continued to teach workshops in 2017 through the EcoSchools/Green Flag program – see <http://www.ecoschools.global> and <https://www.nwf.org/Eco-Schools-USA.aspx> and in other ways. Igor wrote that Green Flag is helping PERESVET “to spread biointensive teaching to various regions of Russia: from the north to the south.”

Their travels included St. Petersburg, Bryansk, Kazan, and even Finland. Natalya also worked to establish links with schools in Belarus (helping them develop an energy saving program), and hopes to teach Biointensive in that country as well. On April 22, PERESVET will hold a Biointensive conference in Bryansk for teachers from the above cities and also Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Tver, Yaroslavl, Kazan and other regions.

Our plan under the grant was to include Igor, Oleg, and Natalya and if possible three more teachers from the Green Flag program, plus four other Russians, in our Vermont workshop. It is unlikely that we will be able to support that financially at this point, unless an angel appears very soon.

But we have sent \$300 to help support their conference in Bryansk, and with enough contributions, we'll be able to



send funds to help with future trainings PERESVET is planning in Kazan and surrounding towns, and Orel, St. Petersburg, and Kaluga.

We're also working to develop plans to connect with PERESVET and our other Russian teacher networks during the coming cold-climate growing-season months via blogs and possibly a webinar. Igor suggested making observations and sharing experience relating to double-digging, compost, and

companion planting. Please get in touch if you'd like to join in at any stage!

Igor pointed out that *A Farmer's Handbook* [available in seven languages at [www.growbiointensive.org/Self\\_Teaching.html](http://www.growbiointensive.org/Self_Teaching.html)] "is a very useful guide for beginners," adding "We must recommend it to them and also experienced gardeners." Do have a look when you get the chance! ♦

### RUSSIANS CAN DO IT AND SO CAN YOU, SO, GET GOIN' GROWIN'!

by Carol Vesecky

But first, a little history. The original Earth Day was celebrated in 1970, during the era when Stanford University Libraries systems analyst John Jeavons and others at Ecology Action (EA) in Palo Alto became concerned about the global problems of shrinking arable land, increasing population, and resource-depleting, chemical-based agriculture.

They were looking for ways to make the world work more sustainably – and John soon found one in the Biodynamic/French Intensive method of growing food developed by Alan Chadwick at UC Santa Cruz. Along with his volunteer and paid apprentices, John mastered the B/FI method over the following eight years in a large research garden they established at Syntex Corporation in the Stanford Research Park.

Eventually shortening its name to Biointensive, then registering it as GROW BIOINTENSIVE® (GB)

Sustainable Mini-farming. John began to teach the method at Common Ground, EA's education center and store in Palo Alto. The book *How to Grow More Vegetables... (HTG)* that John wrote with his colleagues followed in 1975 and quickly found a broad readership of would-be gardeners in need of clear instructions on how to make compost, prepare growing beds, and start and transplant seedlings.



Ecology Action moved its headquarters north to Willits, CA in 1982, and from there has directly and indirectly trained hundreds of thousands of gardeners in 130 countries. The book has been published in nine languages and has been used worldwide by Ecology Action's partner organizations the Peace Corps, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, and other NGOs in Latin America and Africa to help teach families how to grow healthful produce for the table.

After moving back to Palo Alto with family from Leicester, England in 1997, I got acquainted with John and family at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto while fundraising for UNICEF, and quickly realized that Ecology Action was a cause worth volunteering for. While learning to use computers, I typeset the French translation at Xerox PARC and the German translation of HTG in WordStar on our first home computer.

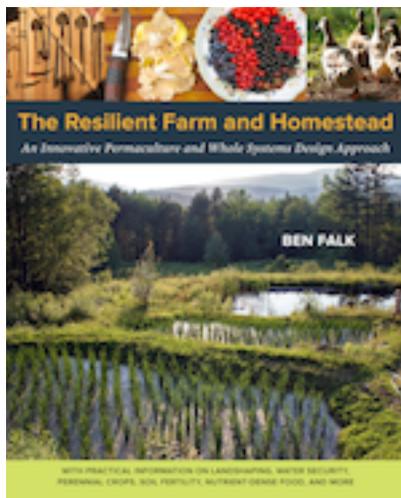
Involvement in a citizen diplomacy exchange with the USSR in 1986 led to my goal of publishing *HTG* in Russian as a way to cooperate with our former enemy [to enhance] our common planet's future. This eventually happened in 1993, and *Kak vyraschivat' bol'she ovoschei* evoked much interest among Russians already skilled in sowing seeds, digging the soil, transplanting and nurturing plants, and harvesting and preserving produce, yet taking great interest in innovations from abroad. These included "the Jeavons method" which was known already in the Soviet era from copies of *HTG* that had come into the country with travelers and, according to rumor back then, had been translated and published via carbon-copy *continued next page*

*Webinars, Workshops continued from page 1* chemical fertilizers – has been proven to produce higher yields of nourishing food while using fewer resources than conventional agricultural technologies. GB mini-farming provides food for humans while also producing compost materials to build healthy soil, thus enabling the impact on soil and resource consumption to be drastically reduced

In both GB and Permaculture, domesticated ecosystems (gardens) are integrated into natural ecosystems with their services. For example, in GB, compost piles encourage natural decomposition similar to that which occurs on the forest floor. Companion planting and hexagonal spacing reflect natural patterns. Sowing in seedling flats and transplanting greatly help to conserve water.

Carol Vesecky, Steve Moore, Ben Falk, Dmitry Philipenko, and other Russian participants would work together to plan a short interactive webinar and make suggestions for a short list of crops to be grown in participants' summer gardens for comparison purposes. The two approaches, GB and Permaculture, would be presented at the webinar, and each participant would introduce his/her work. Plans would be made for measuring of crop yields for comparison with the standard yields given in *How to Grow More Vegetables* and later comparison in a blog and fall webinar.

A Russian delegation of seven or more teachers and activists would attend a 5-day GB and Permaculture workshop in Vermont along with 25 American gardeners, then visit and work for several days in local school gardens and farms and meet with garden groups in the northeastern US. The participants would practice the techniques in their family and school gardens in Russia and the US over the



*continued from page 4* "samizdat." We appealed for Russians interested in learning the Biointensive method at EA's workshops in Willits, and Larissa Avrorina came from Novosibirsk, Siberia for six weeks to study with John and co-author a grant proposal with us. We thus received a USAID-funded ISAR grant which supported her in teaching many work-shops and conducting a major experiment at her base of Ecodom, a group researching small-footprint, off-the-grid homebuilding and ways of growing family produce in home gardens. It also enabled three more Russian women to attend a workshop in Willits, including Albina Kohegina and Natasha Krestiankina, who both taught Biointensive at the middle-school level for ten years in the Young Naturalist after-school program and biology classes in St. Petersburg.

summer, keep track of their yields, and share their progress via social networks and email.

Presenter Prof. Steve Moore and coordinator Carol Vesecky would travel to Russia in August to visit participant gardens, and conduct GB and Permaculture workshops and discussions in four cities. In September, October and November, the Russian teachers would present the method in their area schools. In the US, the American gardeners would give presentations in schools in support of school gardens and efforts to start them.

Presentation materials would be supplied to both Russian and American teachers and activists. The teachers would be encouraged to share their results with each other on social media, and their photos and reports would be added to our websites and [green-planeta.jimdo.com](http://green-planeta.jimdo.com), [ecocentr39.ru](http://ecocentr39.ru), and others in Russia and the US.

The project would have health and psychological benefits for families in both the US and Russia. In the Kaliningrad, St. Petersburg, Bryansk, Ekaterinburg, Krasnodar, and Kazan regions and many regions of cold-climate US, vegetables and other crops would be grown in rural and urban school gardens and local private gardens and mini-farms using organic, nonchemical methods in a manner that mimics nature and simultaneously helps preserve it. Families would consume fresh, completely local, nonirradiated produce that has been grown in soils that they trust contain no fungicide, herbicide, or insecticide residues, and no preservatives. Not being exposed to pesticides, young children would be less likely to develop behavioral disorders, autism, immune system damage, and motor dysfunction. Their food would contain no GMOs, and would be grown using less water and energy. Their soil's fertility would be increased. Local fauna and flora would benefit, not having been exposed to chemicals.

Russians and Americans would forge friendships that endure via email and social networks. They would have the opportunity to continue to share techniques that help build fertility and increase yields while conserving resources. They would become citizen diplomats, staying in touch and building positive images of life in the other country to present to family, friends, and community. ♠

We first met Ludmila Zhirina of the NGO VIOLA in Bryansk, Russia at the ISAR USAID-supported EcoForum in Kiev in 1995, and she sent her group member Albina Samsonova to a workshop in Willits in 1996. This and a workshop taught by Albie Miles in Bryansk led to extensive teaching activity in that province which continues to this day. Igor Prokofiev, Natalya Koryagina, and Oleg Zavarzin worked with VIOLA then, and are now still teaching, based at the Grassroots Alliance PERESVET organization. Also attending the 1996 workshop was Vladimir Loginov, who has taught many young people through various programs in his home region of Krasnodar *krai* and continues to teach Biointensive. (He's also a strawbale builder!)

*continued on page 6*

*Get Goin' Growin', continued from page 4*

Irina Kim in Chirchik, Uzbekistan received a copy of the first book, and quickly started a two-year high-school program to teach GB along with soil science. She and her students traveled to 13 villages in remote areas to teach adults and children, and she also taught workshops at universities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Irina and Prof. Bakhtiyar Jollibekov (from Nukus, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan) attended a workshop taught by Prof. Steve Moore at the Educational Methods Center in 2002, along with several of the teachers mentioned above. Between 1997 we led US teachers on five trips to teach 12 workshops in Russia and Uzbekistan, and 25 former Soviets have attended workshops in Willits since 1994.

Ludmila Zhirina works now in the Russia's north (see [biointensiveforrussia.org](http://biointensiveforrussia.org) and the article on page 1) with a team of teachers to offer Biointensive in rural and urban schools. She and organic farming educator Irina Skiba



recently registered a new nonprofit, Biointensive for the North of Russia, and Ludmila has written a detailed school curriculum to be made available to teachers all over Russia through the organization of which she is a leader, the SEU/FOE-Russia. Her colleague there, Dmitry Philippenko, now teaches in the Kaliningrad region.

Due to the dysfunctional agricultural system back then, Russians during Soviet times had to grow their own to get quality produce. Better produce is available now, and Russia has become a leader in organic agriculture. But now Russians must again grow their own to feed their families, due to reduced *continued on page 8*

*Observations, continued from page 3* aging Soviet era rock musician. That does not mean that these people want to return to Soviet days, but that they recognize the changes in Russia have both pluses and negatives. There is widespread disapproval of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the economic chaos of the 1990's.

\* *There is a range of media supporting both government and opposition parties.* There are three major TV stations controlled by and supporting the government. Along with

*"I am observing the current political situation between Russia and the United States with great sadness. We discussed this problem with Joanna Macy. Together we explored the need for friendship between our countries in 1990. Now again, Russians do not like Americans, and Americans do not like Russians. It is sad. Only NGO members can start a new stage of the dialogue."*

*-Ludmila Zhirina*

these, there are numerous private stations criticizing the government and supporting various opposition parties. In print media, the majority of newspapers and magazines are critical of the government.

\* *Public transportation is impressive.* The streets of Moscow are jam packed with new cars. Meanwhile, underground there is a fast, economical and efficient subway system which is the most heavily used in Europe. The Moscow metro carries 40% more passengers than the New York subway system. On major routes the trains arrive every 60 seconds. Some of the stations are over 240 feet underground with the longest escalator in Europe. Inter-city trains such as the Sapsan (Falcon) take passengers between St. Petersburg and Moscow at 200 kms per hour. Despite the speed,

the train is smooth and quiet. It's an interesting way to view rural Russia as one passes ramshackle dachas, cute villages and abandoned Soviet era factories. A major new transportation project is the bridge between Krasnodar and the Crimean peninsula. This short video portrays the design.

\* *Putin is popular.* Depending on who you ask, Putin's popularity seems to range between 60 and 80%. There are two reasons: First, since he became leader the economy has stabilized, corrupt oligarchs were brought into check, and the standard of living dramatically improved. Second, Putin is credited with restoring international respect for Russia and national pride for Russian citizens. Some say "During the 1990's we were a beggar nation." Russians have a strong sense of national pride and Putin's administration has restored that. Some people think Putin deserves a break from the intense pressure and workload. That does not mean everyone likes him or is afraid to say that. Our official Moscow guide took delight in showing us the exact spot on the bridge outside the Kremlin where she believes Putin had one of his enemies assassinated. Other Russians we spoke with mock these accusations which are widely believed in the West. As to the accusations that Putin is a "dictator", about 75 students in Crimea openly laughed when they were asked about this Western belief.

### **Current Political Tension**

\* *Russians are highly skeptical of accusations about Russian "meddling" in the U.S. election.* One foreign policy expert, Vladimir Kozin, said "It's a fairy tale that Russia influenced the U.S. election." They contrast the unverified accusations with clear evidence of U.S. interference in past Russian elections, especially in the 1990's when the economy was privatized and crime, unemployment *see next page*

Biointensive for Russia is a citizen-exchange ecological gardening project, fiscally sponsored by Ecology Action. We promote GROW BIOINTENSIVES<sup>SM</sup> sustainable mini-farming (GB) through publications and seminars, working with environmental groups in Russian-speaking Eurasia. These currently include the NGO VIOLA and the Grassroots Alliance PERESVET in Bryansk, Russia, the NGO Green Planet in Kaliningrad, Biointensive for the North of Russia in Yaroslavl, and Eco-Schools/Green Flag-Russia, based in St. Petersburg.

and chaos overwhelmed the country. The role of the U.S. in “managing” the election of Boris Yeltsin in 1995 is widely known in Russia, as is the U.S. funding of hundreds of Non Governmental Organizations in Ukraine prior to the 2013-2014 violence and coup.

\* *There is a strong desire to improve relations with the U.S..*

We met numerous Russians who had participated in citizen exchanges with the U.S. in the 1990's. Almost universally these Russians had fond memories of their visits and hosts in the U.S.. In other places we met people who had never met an American or English speaking person before. Typically they were cautious but very pleased to hear from American citizens who also wish to improve relations and reduce tensions.

\* *Western media reports about Crimea are hugely distorted.* CCI delegates who visited Crimea met with a broad range of citizens and elected leaders. The geography is “stunningly beautiful” with mountains dropping to beaches on the Black Sea. Not reported in the West, Crimea was part of Russia since 1783. When Crimea was administratively transferred to Ukraine in 1954, it was all part of the Soviet Union. Crimeans told the CCI delegates they were repelled by the violence and fascist elements involved in

the Kiev coup. Bus convoys from Crimea were attacked with injuries and deaths following the Kiev coup. The new coup government said Russian was no longer an official language. Crimeans quickly organized and held a referendum to secede from Ukraine and “re-unify” with Russia. With 80% of registered voters participating, 96% voted to join Russia. One Crimean stated to the CCI delegates, “We would have gone to war to separate from Ukraine.” Others noted the hypocrisy of the West which allows secession votes in Scotland and Catalonia, and which encouraged the secession of Croatia, but then rejects the overwhelming vote and choice of the Crimean people. Sanctions against tourism are hurting the economy of Crimea yet the public is confident in its decision. The Americans who visited Crimea were overwhelmed with the warm welcome and friendliness they received. Because of the sanctions, few Americans visit Crimea and they also received substantial media coverage. In reaction, political officials in Ukraine accused the delegates of being “enemies of the Ukrainian state” and put their names on a blacklist.

\* *Russians know and fear war.* Twenty-seven million Russians died in WW2 and that experience is seared into the Russian memory. The Nazi siege of Leningrad (now called St Petersburg) reduced the population from 3 million to 500 thousand. Walking through the cemetery of mass graves brings home the depth of suffering and resilience of Russians who somehow survived a 872 day siege on the city. Memory of the war is kept alive through commemorations with huge public participation. Citizens carry poster size photographs of their relatives who fought or died in World War 2, known as the “Immortal Regiment”. In Kazan, the march involved 120 thousand persons – 10% of the entire city population – beginning at 10 am and concluding at 9 pm. Across Russia, millions of citizens actively participate. The marches and parades marking “Victory Day” are more solemn than celebratory.

*continued on page 8*

## How You Can Help!

**Purchase a book!** We now have copies of the third Russian edition of *How to Grow More Vegetables* here at BfR for sale at \$20, plus postage. Write Carol for details.

### Contribute financially to help:

- support webinars throughout the growing season for experienced and beginning Biointensive gardeners in the US and Russia to compare conditions and yields.  
Total needed: \$1500 - \$2000
- printing and paper to publish Russian translations of *How to Grow More Vegetables* and *The Sustainable Vegetable Garden*: \$200 will pay for 200 copies of HTG translation on newsprint, more for larger and better-quality editions
- support workshops for new Biointensive teachers taught by VIOLA and PERESVET in many locations of European Russia \$500 and more, depending on where and how long

### Volunteer your time:

- hosting, organizing, and/or publicizing events. Let's discuss!

**Here's my tax-deductible contribution to Ecology Action for a membership in Biointensive for Russia:**

\$1000 Workshop Sponsor\*  \$250 Supporter\*  \$100 Contributor  \$50 Donor  \$20 Member  Other

\*May receive the  3rd Russian  or 9th English edition of **How to Grow More Vegetables ....** (Check box)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: BfR, 913 Oso Road  
Ojai, CA 93023-9514

**Be sure to write your check to “Ecology Action” for tax deductibility!**

### Upcoming Events:

- For announcements of sustainability-related events and U-pick at Mulberry Haven and elsewhere, sign up for BfR's email announcements by writing to <cvesecky@igc.org>
- Earth Day celebrations: Plaza Park in Oxnard, April 14, 11-3 and Libbey Park in Ojai, April 21, 11-5. See you there!

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- \* *Russians see themselves being threatened.* While Western media portrays Russia as “aggressive”, most Russians perceive the reverse. They see the U.S. and NATO increasing military budgets, steadily expanding, moving up to the Russian border, withdrawing from or violating past treaties and conducting provocative military exercises. This map shows the situation.
- \* *Russians want to de-escalate international tensions.* Former President Gorbachev said to our group “Does America want Russia to just submit? This is a country that can never submit.” These words carry extra significance because it was Gorbachev who initiated the foreign policy of Perestroika which led to his own sidelining and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev has written about Perestroika as follows: “Its main outcome was the end of the Cold War. A long and potentially deadly period in world history, when the whole humankind lived under the constant threat of a nuclear disaster, came to an end.” Yet we are clearly in a new Cold War and the threat has re-emerged.

**Conclusion** Despite three years of economic sanctions, low oil prices and an intense information war in the West, Russian society appears to be doing reasonably well. Russians across the spectrum express a strong desire to build friendship and partnership with the U.S. At the same time, it seems

*Get Goin' Growin'*, continued from page 6 caused by low oil prices and the economic sanctions imposed by the West. For our part, we in the US can avoid eating GMOs and chemically grown food not only by paying higher prices for organics, but also by doing as the Russians do during the summer at their dacha plots – growing our own in our back yards. It's easier for us, since we need not travel to our gardens, as the Russians do, and also – in California anyway – we can grow veggies year-round!

All it takes is willingness to make a start, a small area of ground with sun and available water, and the book, which can be found at various prices on the internet in most of its nine editions. It is inspiringly and lucidly written and the instructions on double-digging, compost-making, seed propagation, transplanting, watering, plant spacing, garden planning, and fertilization are beautifully illustrated and clear.

My recommendation to you: get a copy of *How to Grow...* and get goin' growin'! And, oh – if you're in the Ojai area, assuming you'll offer to help out with garden tasks we can provide mentoring/exchange of garden lore at our two Biointensive gardens here, one at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church where we grow for the needy and the other at Mulberry Haven, where you could be rewarded with the chance to pick mulberries! ♣

Russians will not be intimidated. They don't want war and won't initiate it, but if attacked they will defend themselves as they have in the past.

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*For info, visit:* [biointensiveforrussia.igc.org](http://biointensiveforrussia.igc.org) (history); [biointensive.org](http://biointensive.org) (including many photos from 2017)

Biointensive for Russia is a non-profit project fiscally supported by Ecology Action, a California 501(c)(3) organization. Its mission is to share information between the US and Eurasia on environmentally sound lifestyles, including GROW BIOINTENSIVE Sustainable Mini-Farming. Carol Vesecky is Director and newsletter editor; Melissa Prager, Vickie Peters, and Stephen Vesecky assist in many ways; our webmasters are Berta Pires, Tamara Kowalski, and Shoshana Billik. The mailing of this issue of the *Garden Companion* was made possible by member donations. Do visit our websites [biointensiveforrussia.igc.org](http://biointensiveforrussia.igc.org) and [biointensiveforrussia.org](http://biointensiveforrussia.org) and/or write to Carol for more info!

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