

Bringing biochar to your backyard

BY JOSH WEBER

Williams Community Forest Project (WCFP) is hosting a Backyard Biochar workshop presented by Kelpie Wilson, principal consultant at Wilson Biochar Associates and an editor at *the Biochar Journal*.

Although biochar is really just charcoal, or carbonized biomass, not all charcoal makes good biochar. For instance, barbecue charcoal retains oils and tars that have fuel value but can inhibit plant growth. Good biochar is highly porous and is more like activated charcoal, used for water filtration, than like barbecue charcoal. Natural biochar is found in soils all around the world, wherever there are forest or grass fires. In fact, the most fertile soils in the world, like the black soils of the Iowa Corn Belt, have a lot of natural charcoal in them. Charcoal itself is not a big source of nutrients, but it helps soil retain nutrients and water, boosting plant growth.

Kelpie first got interested in biochar as a writer covering environmental news for *Truthout*. Around 2006 she became interested in stories of vast areas of black, fertile soil in the Amazon, where biochar has been made by indigenous people for thousands of years to improve poor tropical soils in which to grow crops. She soon became an advocate of biochar.

The process of making biochar releases energy. As

an engineer, Kelpie is interested in renewable energy from biomass that can also produce biochar. As an environmentalist, she is interested in sustainable forestry and the role of fire and charcoal in building forest soils and recycling nutrients. She is especially excited about using biochar production to remove carbon from the atmosphere. Plants use CO₂ from the atmosphere to build their tissues. Normally, that carbon goes back to the atmosphere when a plant dies and rots—microbes eat the plant sugars and oils and exhale CO₂. We can circumvent that process by converting dead plants to stable carbon as biochar, which does not rot. We add the biochar to improve soils, grow more biomass, and pull even more carbon out of the atmosphere. It is a “virtuous cycle” that can replace the current “vicious cycles” that are degrading soils and the climate.

At the workshop, Kelpie will teach several ways of making biochar using simple equipment and will show the “Top Lit Open Burn” method of smokeless biomass burning. This method can be applied to fuel load reduction projects that normally use burn piles to dispose of forest slash. Homeowners can use this method to treat brush piles, producing biochar for the home garden while drastically reducing the amount of smoke that is created.

Kelpie will also offer methods

Backyard Biochar Workshop

Learn

how to burn debris piles in a new form that creates less smoke, releases less carbon and leaves behind more charred biomass for gardening.

8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Saturday March 14
Williams Grange
\$30 - \$15 sliding scale
Lunch Provided

Workshop led by Kelpie Wilson
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Pre-Register ~ call or email Josh
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Presented by
Williams Community Forest Project
Learn more at
www.biochar-journal.org
www.williamscommunityforestproject.org

for post-treatment of biochar to make powerful soil amendments for the garden or orchard. Attendees will see techniques and equipment used to inoculate and compost biochar to make fertilizers that feed the soil food web, resulting in healthy soils and plants.

The workshop will be held at the Williams Grange, 20100 Williams Highway, Williams, Oregon, on Saturday, March 14, from 8:30 am to

3 pm. The entry fee is a sliding scale of \$30-\$15 per person with lunch included. For more information, see www.biochar-journal.org and www.williamscommunityforestproject.org.

Remember to also save the date of April 4—the WCFP and Bureau of Land Management will lead a trail maintenance work party on the Grayback Trail in Williams, Oregon.

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Love of place can unite people

BY CHRISTINA LYNN MARTIN

The Applegate Valley is a celebration of diverse cultures ultimately uniting over the love for this place. It is natural for the Applegate Valley to be home base for *Romancing the West*, a documentary concert spanning 240 years of the history of the American West.

This community's heart mirrors the heart of the neighborhood in which I grew up in the 1960s. These young families, of diverse beliefs, rode the Cultural Revolution together. They had all bought into the American dream on streets lined with blossoming plum trees. It was a neighborhood that socialized together on warm summer nights as the children grew. Although we weren't crushed by the hatred of racism or stripped of our dignity by poverty, we were deeply aware that others were and felt an obligation to them that would last a lifetime.

The neighborhood rallied around their interracial/intercultural families during the turbulent 1960s, including a large Italian-American family whose hippie children and their friends set the tone for the street, which was electric with the rumble of Harley-Davidsons, VW buses, and the music of the era. There was an acceptance between the conventional and nonconventional families. The spirit was, “We are united in our love of this little street. We are in this together.” This little neighborhood

attracted educators and artists. Dutch painter Frans Van Lamsweerde and his family, and singer Barry White and his family lived there for a time.

We couldn't believe that segregation was still a way of life in the South. It hurt then just as it hurts so deeply today as racism in its many forms continues to divide us. While our heroes John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy fell in their courageous pursuit to deliver to all Americans that which our founding documents had already granted, we continued to hope. These tragedies made deep impressions on us.

My mother Maureen was compassionate, teaching me about the sufferings of the Native American tribes. As we watched our favorite movie, *How the West Was Won*, we talked about the truths that Hollywood left out, even while capturing challenges the pioneers faced. Its influence on me was evident when the headline in a Fresno newspaper wrote of our show recently, “*Romancing the West, How the West Was Sung*.”

When my family moved to Orange County in the 1970s, counterculture had exploded into the Jesus movement, and Chuck Girard in the band Lovesong was the soundtrack for those of us who were there. Many of us later came to the Applegate



Christina Lynn and Butch Martin of *Romancing the West*, a documentary concert based in the Applegate Valley.

Valley. Chuck, a featured artist in our show, takes us to Orange County in rare film and song, just after we visit Haight-Ashbury.

Living in the Mission town of San Juan Capistrano and in Oregon inspired many of my songs, and coproducing the 150th birthday for Historic Jacksonville was my catalyst to finally write *Romancing the West* to hopefully make a difference by telling of the courageous people who have shaped history—from Chief Joseph to our own Judge Hannah of Jacksonville, who wrote many of Oregon's foundational laws, from activists like John Muir to activists like Caesar Chavez.

My husband and partner in *Romancing the West*, cowboy poet Butch Martin, grew up on a Midwestern farm listening to the siren sound of steam engine whistles as they headed west. He spent much of his time in Hannibal, Missouri, home of Samuel

Clemmons (“Mark Twain”) near the launching point of the Oregon Trail. As a young adult he went west to the Wyoming Wind River Reservation, where he raised Morgan horses on his ranch, wrote and performed his ballads and poetry, and shared the stage with Baxter Black and Red Stegall before moving to the Applegate Valley, where he made his life with his beautiful lady Liz Henderson until she passed away in 2012. Butch and Lizzy celebrated western

life through the carriage business they operated, participating in wagon train reenactments on the Oregon and Applegate Trails. Now we carry on her legacy with ours as we share the history we all celebrated throughout our lives.

The courage of those who fought for dignity and mutual respect in the fever of Western Expansionism demonstrates the triumph of the human spirit. It was that triumph that brought down the Berlin Wall that separated the family of German-born Martin Gerschwitz of Iron Butterfly for much of his life, inspiring his passionate performances in *Romancing the West*. From my childhood home to our Applegate home, the love of place can unite a people.

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Romancing the West comes to Plaisance Ranch in Williams on April 11. For more information, visit www.romancingthewest.org.