



# environment

## BUCK UP YOUR GREEN IDEAS

Skilling Up the Nation! Buckinghamshire initiative, LILI, teaches us what's needed for Low Impact Living. It's time to brush up our skills, increase our knowledge and put what we learn into eco-action!

Everyone these days is talking about 'going green' and becoming more 'eco friendly'; getting in touch with where our food comes from and growing more of it ourselves. But what if you don't have a clue where or how to start? Hidden away in darkest north Buckinghamshire – perhaps a surprising place for such a venture – you can find the answer.

The Low-impact Living Initiative (LILI) was started eight years ago by two members of Redfield Community, a housing co-op just ten miles from Milton Keynes. To them, it seemed natural to live a non-consumerist, low-impact lifestyle and they had lots of knowledge and resources at their disposal to do so. Then they started wondering if other people would be interested in learning about natural building, renewable energy and local food production. LILI was duly formed and started running courses in 2001: biodiesel, solar hot water and compost toilets.

People certainly were interested and the course programme has grown enormously since then, featuring exciting-sounding titles like herbal medicine, keeping chickens, growing mushrooms and straw-bale building. Still true to their roots, LILI continues to be based in the stable block of Redfield Community, but now also runs courses and attends events all over the country.

Founder and director, Dave Darby, is on a mission to share eco-knowledge with everyone, for as low a cost as

possible. "With the growing threats to our planet, we need to encourage people to educate themselves, and as quickly as possible. Our course programme is extensive and we keep prices to a minimum."

LILI is a non-profit-making organisation and there are nearly 40 factsheets available for free download on its website. These are often used as resources for colleges and environmental centres. There is also a very active web forum on all the topics covered and a chance for free information exchange.

If you don't fancy diving in the deep end with a course, you can find a lot of information in a book and LILI publishes its own book titles. It has a huge online green bookshop with new titles being added each month - and postage is free.

LILI is intending to start an eco land project in partnership with a local authority somewhere in the country. The idea would be for small plots, of 5 acres or less, to be leased or sold to plot-holders. These plots would have planning permission to build a home, but with very strict eco-criteria regarding the building and use of land.

Because of what these low-impacters do and how they do it, two years ago they were asked to look after one of the nation's great treasures - WWOOF.

It stands for World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms and is all about giving people the chance to learn



and use organic methods in farming, smallholding and building.

In return for 5 or 6 hours work, 5 days a week, hosts provide food, accommodation, knowledge and experience. Scarlett Penn, contract manager, says "Interest in the WWOOF organisation has grown immensely in the last year. What better way to learn, have fun, meet people and take a break, all at the same time...and all without money changing hands?!"

As more and more people look for different and, some would say, more meaningful ways to live, "skilling up" is a big part of the transition. So, we can conclude - maybe a trip to darkest north Buckinghamshire could be worth its weight in...carrots.

[www.lowimpact.org](http://www.lowimpact.org)  
[www.woof.org.uk](http://www.woof.org.uk)