

## Membership Profile



### Gaia College

**Owners:**

Heide & Michael Hermary

**Type of Business:**

Educational Institution

**Product / Service Specialty:**

Education in Organic Ornamental Horticulture

**Location:**

Cowichan Station, B.C.

**Year Company Formed:**

2001

**Number of Teachers:**

1 full time, 5 part time

**Year Joined BCLNA:**

2001

Gaia College arose from the need for comprehensive education in organic ornamental horticulture, fuelled in part by impending municipal pesticide legislation.

Working without pesticides is not a matter of "what can I spray instead", but supporting nature to heal itself. The transition to organic practice requires a paradigm shift – a fundamental change in understanding how nature works. Our goal – our passion – is to help facilitate this process in our industry and our communities.

It took us 2 years to develop our curriculum. We found that there were no text books for organic ornamental horticulture – so we wrote our own. We found that although many landscapers were interested in learning about organic alternatives, they did not present a geographic market – so we put our course on-line. Our students



taught us that the need for education in organic practices is much broader than we originally thought – past and present students include not only landscapers but horticulture instructors, landscape architects, community activists, and organic farmers. We have students in many countries including China, and our program has become the basis for organic certification for landscapers in B.C. and in Quebec.

Since our inception we have worked closely with the industry to ensure our courses meet industry needs. Last year we offered our first classroom program, the Organic Land Care Lecture Series, designed to prepare landscapers for organic certification. Surprisingly half our students were home gardeners, keenly aware of the need for change, and willing to spend a lot of time and money to do just that.

Based on these experiences we developed two new comprehensive classroom programs to be offered this fall and winter: a Certificate in Ecological Landscape Design, and the Organic Garden Expert Course, which prepares students to become a resource to their community, spreading the message through example and advice.

Our greatest challenge now is to find enough instructors with organic horticulture education and experience!