



# WWOOFing



## what is it?

In 1971, a lady living in London – Sue Coppard – decided she needed to get out of the city on a regular basis. She felt she needed to breathe the country air and do something physical, useful and meaningful. She approached an organic farm in East Sussex and negotiated for herself and three friends to stay overnight and be fed, in return for help in the vegetable garden. The trip was a great success and they started to do this exchange every third weekend.

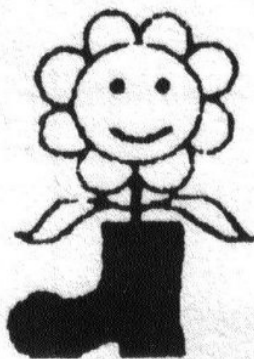
News gradually spread of 'Sue Coppard's land army' and other farms began to get in touch, eager to host these willing volunteers. And so Working Weekends on Organic Farms was born. There have been 2 name changes since then; WWOOF now stands for World-Wide Opportunitites on Organic Farms. With 6000+ hosts in 97 countries.

WWOOF works a bit like a dating agency. The national organisation – WWOOF UK for instance – holds a list of the hosts for that country. The volunteer pays to join the organisation and is then given access to the host list. Where there are only a few hosts in a country and no national organisation exists, WWOOF Independents holds the host list. Because WWOOF is a charity that wants to be as accessible as possible to everyone, all joining costs are kept to a minimum. In the UK it costs £20 to be a volunteer and this gives you access to the 400 hosts in this country for a year. Hosts pay £30 to be listed.



*you'll get to do lots of healthy outdoor things in beautiful surroundings; kids are often welcome too.*

## what are the benefits?



1970s WWOOF logo

Well, the hosts get willing workers for the cost of bed and board, and the volunteers get time in the countryside, gain new skills, and everyone gets to meet new people. There are several other organisations that run similar volunteer programmes (see resources), some of which freely admit they are based on the

WWOOF idea. HelpX allows you to work with farms, hostels, B&Bs and sailing boats. Workaway covers 'painting to planting, building to babysitting, shopping to shearing'. Se7en (social & environmental volunteer exchange network)

offers opportunities at schools, orphanages, wildlife reserves, natural parks and sustainable living initiatives. And Couchsurfing is more about a place to stay and the social interaction that naturally results - although you are expected to muck in with household chores.

What sets WWOOF apart from these other organisations is that it's all about the organic mindset. It is used by people who are keen to learn about the land and sustainable living. Very often, for people wanting to buy their own land, WWOOF is a sort of apprenticeship, to talk about potential issues and pitfalls and to get a feel for what crops and livestock they may or may not like to work with. WWOOFing is a great way to meet exciting, inspiring, like-minded souls and to reconnect with the earth. You can learn all sorts of wonderful skills in farming, animal husbandry and more sustainable ways of living. You can rediscover the link between local food production and local community, whilst getting outside, doing something meaningful and helping organic farmers and smallholders.

## what can I do?

Get WWOOFing! You can WWOOF in the UK or overseas. If you'd like to get an idea of the possibilities on offer, most national websites offer a preview facility without the contact details. If you like what you see you can join either as a volunteer or, if you have a property which could benefit from some enthusiastic help, join as a host. As a volunteer, you join the national



organisation of the country you are wanting to volunteer in; join WWOOF Italy if you want to volunteer in Italy for instance. Just make sure before leaving home that you have the right to enter that country when you arrive. As a host, you join the national organisation where your property is based. If you live outside the EU, you might want to have a look at the immigration thread on the forum (see resources) before WWOOFing in the UK.

Once you're set up as a volunteer it's up to you to have a look through the host list, decide on which hosts you'd like to visit, then contact them to negotiate your stay. It's a good idea to telephone a host before you commit to staying with them, to make sure expectations of both sides can be met. If you are travelling with children or a pet it's absolutely essential you make your host aware of this and get their prior agreement.

Many hosts struggle to make ends meet and depend on the help of WWOOFers. Because of this they like to book up volunteers well in advance; this means it's better to plan your stay in advance, to avoid disappointment. Also

remember that a great many people WWOOF in August and a lot of hosts can be completely full at this time if you don't book early. If you arrange a stay and then can't keep the arrangement, be sure to tell your host so they can replace you.

You can WWOOF on farms, smallholdings or communities (a good way of meeting more people); and you can WWOOF for a weekend or for longer stays - all by negotiation with the host. You should be given a variety of jobs. Some will be great fun and others won't! Expect both. Your host or a representative should work with you at least some of the time, so you have a chance for a social, cultural and knowledge exchange.

Expect to do roughly 5-6 hours a day, 5 days a week in exchange for full board and lodging. At some places you will eat as part of the family/host unit, at others you may eat separately or with other WWOOFers. Accommodation varies from host to host, but you may be offered anything from a private room to a tent. Many sites offer caravans. All this information will be part of the host's details. Many hosts also offer bikes or other methods of transport so you can get around the local area on your days off. Take with you work clothes, wellies, waterproofs and any protective equipment you may have (especially gardening gloves), enthusiasm, tolerance and respect for your host and their home. Oh, and don't forget your sense of humour!

## resources

- go to [lowimpact.org/WWOOF.htm](http://lowimpact.org/WWOOF.htm) for info on how to join WWOOF in the UK and abroad, plus the official WWOOF forum, or call 01296 714652
- Adam Greenman, *the Practical Guide to WWOOFing* - available from LILI

## other volunteer organisations

- HelpX - [helpx.net](http://helpx.net)
- Workaway - [workaway.info](http://workaway.info)
- Se7en - [the7interchange.com](http://the7interchange.com)
- Couchsurfing - [couchsurfing.org](http://couchsurfing.org)



*picking apples and dealing with the harvest; you may get to press apple juice and take some away with you.*

Contact us or visit our website to find out more about our message, networks, factsheets, books, courses, products, services, magazines, links, forum, events and volunteering on organic farms. You can also become a Friend of LILI, receive our e-newsletter, and help us change the world.

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