

## How to Make a Self-Watering Container by Alysha Punnett

Self-watering containers (SWC) are an efficient and effective way to grow vegetables and herbs in pots. They are great for the summer growing season, which often inconveniently coincides with the summer holiday season. SWCs allow you to leave your plants, sometimes for up to two weeks, without fearing that they will perish in the summer heat. Plants that require consistent moisture such as tomatoes, peas and squash will benefit from a SWC. Other advantages of SWCs include: reduction of time spent watering; conservation of water by limiting evaporation; and prevention of blossom end rot and other problems caused by irregular watering.

### How it works:

Two 5-gallon buckets are nestled inside one another—the inside bucket contains a wicking chamber of coconut coir or potting mix that absorbs water from a reservoir in the bottom bucket and delivers it to the dry soil above. In this way, SWCs use the principle of diffusion to deliver the perfect amount of water to your plant: water is sucked up from the bottom of the pot only when the soil above is dry. Once the soil is holding water, diffusion slows down and eventually stops as the soil becomes saturated. The process is maintained as water evaporates slowly from the top of the pot and dries the soil out.



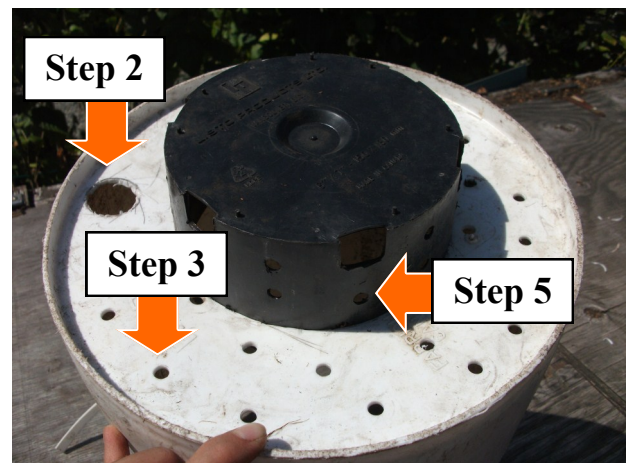
*All the things you need to create your very own self-watering container.*

### What you need:

- Two 5-gallon (gal.) buckets, 1 with a lid
- One 1-gal. pot/bucket (wicking chamber)
- Twist ties/zip ties
- 2 feet of 1-inch wide PVC pipe or bamboo (watering pipe)
- Coconut Coir (wicking material)
- Potting mix
- Drill with ¼ inch bit, ½ inch bit, 1 inch bit
- Box cutter knife or saber saw

### Method:

1. Trace the circumference of the 1-gal. bucket on the bottom of a 5-gal. bucket. Cut along this line with a box cutter knife or saber saw. This will be the hole for your wicking chamber.
2. Drill/cut a 1-inch hole between the hole from step 1 and the edge of the bucket (see picture). This is for your watering pipe.
3. Drill ¼ inch holes in the remaining area on the bottom of the 5-gal. bucket in a random fashion to allow for drainage.
4. Insert the 1-gal. bucket into the hole from step 1. It should stick out the bottom of the 5-gal. bucket approx. 2 inches. Cut off excess plastic from the top of the 1-gallon bucket.
5. Drill ½ inch holes along the sides of the 1-gallon bucket (not in the bottom). These will allow for water to be absorbed into the wicking chamber.



*Looking at the bottom of the interior of the self-watering container*



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We gratefully acknowledge the core funding support that we receive from the CRD and the City of Victoria. Additional support is provided by the Fernwood Community Association and through the generosity of our Compost Club Members and the residents of Greater Victoria.

# Join us for our GRAND REOPENING

Our new building is in the final stages of construction and we want you to come help us celebrate! It is hard to remember the old glass greenhouse attached to the trailer that we used for our sales space - steaming hot in the summer, frosty cold all winter, and never enough space for customers. Now we have built a real building over our office trailer which will give us more space for our ever-growing programs. Come to our Grand Reopening to see the new building, eat some delicious food, and enjoy wonderful music in our gardens. We will also be selling everything at the membership price and if you have a valid membership with us you will get \$10 off of any purchase over \$20. We'll see you then!



## Saturday, September 10

**10am to 4pm - Food, Music, and Sales!**

**Show your membership card and get \$10 off any purchase over \$20!**

## Grow a Row goal SURPASSED!



*We've met our goal and surpassed the amount of food donated last year!* There has been an amazing response from the community and we've not only met our goal we've blown it out of the water! There has been 250 kg of food donated to date—let's keep it coming!

Green beans and summer squash are coming in. Tomatoes are just starting to ripen on the vine. Winter squash and winter veggies are on their way. **There is still a need for your veggies!** Please drop off any surplus vegetables you have from your garden at one of our many food drop-off locations. Call the Centre (250-360-9678) or check out the Grow a Row website for more information (vicgrowarow.org). The collection tally continues until the

end of the calendar year so let's see how much we can collect!

It's not too late to get involved with the Grow a Row program. Join by sending an email to vicgrowarow@gmail.com or on our website at vicgrowarow.org. We still have plenty of workshops coming up and a big harvest celebration in October!

**Upcoming workshops include:** Getting Your Garden Ready for Winter (September 29th), Garlic! The Workshop (October 13th) and Seed Saving (Date TBA). We also have a Photo Contest running until October. Find out more about upcoming events on our website!



**Food Donations collected at the SunRiver Community Gardens in Sooke**

# Volunteer Spotlight



International  
PARK(ing) Day  
Sept 16<sup>th</sup>

It's shaping up to be a busy fall at the Centre with many exciting fairs, festivals and markets! For the first time ever we're having an outreach booth at the Saanich Fall Fair over the Labour Day weekend Sept 3-5 with an expected attendance of over 40,000 people! We will also be co-hosting the kids zone with LifeCycles at the Eat Here Now festival on Sept 11<sup>th</sup> and converting a city parking space into a mini urban homestead for international PARK(ing) day on Sept 16<sup>th</sup>. We need lots of volunteer help with these super cool events so look out for the Doodle sign-up emails!

I would also like to recognize two outstanding volunteers for their dedication and continuous support and involvement. Loucas Raptis has spent many hours this summer spreading the good word of compost at community events as well as harvesting our worm benches to give our worms happy new beds. Karen Martin has been a weekly superstar in the office and has done a wonderful job maintaining the Compost Club membership program. Thank you Loucas and Karen!

Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers who contribute their passion to the Centre!  
Stay tuned for details about our Fall Volunteer Appreciation Party! ~ Marika

# Pumpkin Smash 2011

## Smash your jack o' lantern at Pumpkin Smash this Halloween!

This year will be our 7th year of Pumpkin Smash! Since we started we have diverted almost 100 tonnes of pumpkins from the landfill and we hope to add to that again this year. This year's event will be held on November 5th and 6th at various Thrifty Foods locations from 10am - 3pm and we will continue to have family friendly games, a raffle for Green Cone digesters, and lots of knowledgeable staff and volunteers to answer your questions or give you advice on the best smashing techniques. So start planning your pumpkin design and dreaming of pumpkin soup!



# Kid's Compost Corner

## The Stone Soup Story

Once upon a time three travellers came upon a village. The travellers were very hungry, but the villagers, not having much food themselves, did not want to share their food with the travellers. So the travellers told the villagers, "We have travelled to many lands, and in those lands we have learned to make soup from stones." The villagers were very curious how this could be.

They built a cooking fire and brought the travellers a big pot of water and a stone. The travellers boiled the stone in the water, tasted it, and said, "It is almost perfect. It just needs a little garnish." One of the villagers said, "I have some parsley!" So the villager ran home and brought her parsley back for the soup. The travellers stirred in the parsley, tasted the soup, and said, "It is almost perfect. It just needs a carrot." A villager called out, "I have a carrot!" The villager brought his carrot, and added it to the soup. The travellers stirred in the carrot, tasted the soup and said, "It is almost perfect. I just needs a couple potatoes." Another villager ran home and brought some potatoes for the soup. This continued until each villager had brought one small morsel of food from home and added it to the soup. Soon the bubbling soup pot was full to the brim and the smell filled the whole village, so that even the dogs, and cows, and goats, and sheep followed their noses to find the soup. That day, the travellers, and everyone in the village ate and ate and ate, until they all had bellies full of the soup they had created together.

## Make Your Own Stone Soup:

1. Go out on a stone hunt. Find a smooth stone that is as big as your hand.
2. Fry up some onions and garlic. Add water or soup stock, and then all the vegetable odds and ends from your fridge or garden. Add the stone. Add spices and herbs to taste.
3. You could also invite your friends to come and each bring one soup ingredient like in the story.

Magic  
Stone  
Soup



# Upcoming Events

Date	Event	Time	Cost
September 10	GRAND REOPENING!	10am until 4pm	FREE
September 10	Composting Basics	10am until 12pm	FREE
September 17	Seed Saving	2pm until 4pm	\$15 (members refer to policy)
September 22 - 24	Compost Educator Program	Thurs & Fri 6:30-9pm Sat 9am - 4pm	\$100 (\$85 refund once 30 hours of volunteering complete)
October 1	Composting Basics	10am until 12pm	FREE
October 15	Worm Composting	10am until 12pm	FREE
October 15	Grow the Best Mushrooms	2pm until 4pm	\$15 (members refer to policy)
October 22	Grow the Best Garlic	2pm until 4pm	\$15 (members refer to policy)
November 5 & 6	PUMPKIN SMASH!	10am - 3pm	FREE - Locations TBA
November 12	Composting Basics	10am until 12pm	FREE
November 12	Mason Bees (Part 2)	2pm until 4pm	\$15 (members refer to policy)
November 19	Plant Propagation - Fall	2pm until 4pm	\$15 (members refer to policy)
December 4	HOLIDAY SALE	10am - 4pm	FREE - 10% discount and free gifts for members!

**MUST PRE-REGISTER FOR WORKSHOPS BY CALLING 386-WORM OR EMAILING [info@compost.bc.ca](mailto:info@compost.bc.ca)**

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6. Secure the 1-gal. pot in the 5-gal. bucket with twist ties or zip ties.
7. Place the 5-gal. bucket you have been working on into the other 5-gal. bucket.
8. Cut one end of the PVC pipe or bamboo on an angle and fit down into the watering hole. The angle breaks the surface tension of the water and allows it to flow freely into the reservoir.
9. Drill a ½ inch hole into the outside bucket 2-inches above its base. This is for overflow in case you over-fill the reservoir.
10. In the lid, cut out a large hole for your plant and another 1-inch hole to fit the watering pipe through. This should be a mirror image of the holes you cut in step 1 and 2.

Once you have potted up your plant, fit the lid onto the bucket and presto! You have yourself a worry-free self-watering container! Check pots regularly in the first couple weeks so you get a sense of how often you need to fill the reservoir. Generally you can get away with at least a week between waterings.



*View from the top of a completed Self-watering Container!*

## Giving Goes Green!

Giving to the Compost Ed. Centre is easy! Save time and paper by offering your donations on-line through Canada Helps.org. Simply surf over to [www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org) and type in "Compost". Our name is on the top of the search results. Or, visit our website and click the Canada Helps link. And of course, donations are still happily accepted at our office.



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

**A. Langois**      **F. Hamersley**      **D. Stevenson**  
**C. Ince**          **Chambers**          **N. Turner**

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