

THE LATEST DIRT

Fall
2006

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER VICTORIA COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE

LOVE YOUR LEAVES!



By Fern Wager

With fall just around the corner, now is the time to start thinking about a storage system for one of your greatest resources as an urban gardener: leaves. Instead of piling your leaves to burn or to be collected by the city, you can reduce your carbon emissions and utilize this great resource right in your own backyard.

Leaves have many uses for the home gardener and when used properly can greatly improve a garden's soil. Leaves can be used for composting, mulch, soil building, worm bedding, and chicken coop bedding.

Leaves are included in the materials banned from the landfill with the CRD's recent yard and garden waste ban. This means that leaves as well as other garden and yard waste materials can no longer be sent to the landfill mixed with household garbage. Instead these materials can be dropped off separately at the composting area of the Hartland Landfill or at municipal public works yards to be composted. Better yet, all of these materials can be composted right in your own backyard.



Hoop Bin

Home gardeners can simply collect the leaves and store them in strong plastic garbage bags or in a homemade hoop bin. This helps ensure gardeners will have a supply that will last them the full year.

A hoop bin is a wire mesh cylindrical storage container with a plywood lid that can be built in about an hour. The upcoming September 30th workshop "Building a Hoop Bin for Yard Waste Storage" will teach you how to build your own bin. The workshop is from 2-4pm at a cost of \$13.50 for members and \$15 for non-members.

Composting is an effective way of utilizing the nutrients and qualities of leaves. The composting process is also good for neutralizing the acidic nature of leaves, raising their pH as they are broken down into humus. Maple, alder, oak, poplar, and fruit tree leaves, all common in the Capital Regional District, are great for use in the home composter.

Composting with leaves is quick and easy. Leaves, which are rich in carbon, are one of our primary "brown" materials and should be mixed with a high nitrogen material like fresh manure or grass clippings ("greens"). To compost leaves, use 1 part of high nitrogen materials for every five parts of leaves. If you are doing your composting in a backyard bin, be sure to mix the leaves thoroughly with any food scraps and other materials in the bin. Shredding the leaves will accelerate the process. This can be done with a leaf shredder or a common rotary lawnmower.

For the busy gardener, leaf mold can be a very handy resource. By simply keeping leaves in a plastic bag, a covered pile, or a hoop bin, they will slowly break down over the course of a year or two, resulting in leaf mold. Leaf mold is a great soil amendment, helping to hold water in light sandy soils and promote drainage in heavy clay soils. Use leaf mold wherever you would use compost or use as a fine mulch.

Mulching with leaves also protects your soil from the impact of winter rain and provides a perfect environment for earthworms to thrive. However, most leaves are slightly acidic so keep this in mind when using them. Your soil pH may need to be raised by applying lime.

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Constantly Growing and Changing at the COMPOST CENTRE

This past year has seen a variety of changes at the Centre. We've seen the development of new school programs, the wrapping up of past projects, the beginning of new ones and saw the arrival of new staff and board members. This month, we are saying a heartfelt good-bye to Chris Wells, as our Site Manager, Natalie Cushing, as the Homes and Habitats Project Coordinator, and Fern Wager, as our Compost Educator & Program Assistant, as they all continue to pursue their university education. We are thrilled to welcome Analisa Blake to our team as the Project Coordinator for our new Climate Change & Composting program, and to Karen Hawbolt as our new Site Manager. At the same time, we have also welcomed back Tom Watkins to our board as our CRD representative. And finally, the Centre also extends a fond farewell to Lynn Elliot who has decided not to return after her maternity leave. We wish her and her family well. I am delighted to be staying on as the Executive Director of the Centre and look forward to more exciting changes in this year to follow. We welcome you to stop by and meet the new faces at the Centre!

Warm wishes,

Sonya



NEW STAFF AT THE CENTRE

In August, the Centre welcomed Analisa Blake to the team. Analisa comes fresh from her graduate studies in Geography at UVic where she implemented and studied an alternative community gardening pilot project designed to connect senior homeowners with people who lack gardening space. During her time at UVic she was also involved with VIPIRG's Urban Agriculture Committee and the Campus Community Garden. She will be coordinating the Centre's new Black Gold Rush program that will raise awareness of the link between composting and climate change. Look out for more information on the project and how to become involved in the coming months.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

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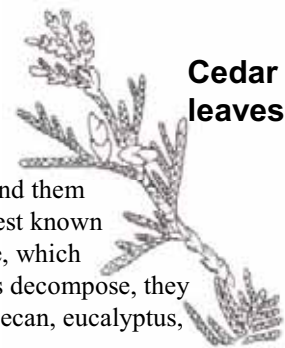
We gratefully acknowledge the core funding support that we receive from the CRD and the City of Victoria. Additional support is provided by the Fernwood Community Association and through the generosity of our Compost Club Members and the residents of Greater Victoria.

Love your Leaves (continued from Page 1)



Black Walnut

Though most leaves are fine for use in the home garden, there are a few that should be avoided. Through a unique process call allelopathy, these plants, through their roots and their leaves, suppress the growth of other plants. **Cedar leaves** are known to prevent the germination and growth of plants cultivated around them and should not be used as a mulch. **Black Walnut** (*Juglans nigra*) is one of the best known allelopathic plants. The tree's roots and leaves produce a substance called juglone, which inhibits plant growth. Although juglone levels decrease significantly when leaves decompose, they are best left out of the garden and the compost. Some other tree leaves to avoid: pecan, eucalyptus, arbutus, and holly as their waxy outer leaf cause them to break down slowly.



Cedar leaves

So don't get annoyed as the leaves fall from trees and into your yard this autumn, cherish this valuable resource and collect them for use throughout the year.

David Suzuki Visits Compost Centre

In May 2006 the Compost Centre was honoured to



host Dr. David Suzuki for an interview with Focus magazine (June 2006 issue). The Centre, recognized as one of the few places in Victoria that utilize sustainable technologies, seemed an appropriate location for the interview with the Sustainability Guru who was in town to give an Urban Sustainability talk at the Fernwood Cornerstone fundraiser event. Our urban oasis provided a calm and casual atmosphere allowing for our Executive Director, Sonya Sundberg, and Suzuki to converse about the practices at the Centre. Suzuki was excited to see a practice he had observed in Cuba in use at the Centre, the collection and use of worm droppings to water plants.

With increasing population pressures and dwindling natural resources it is increasingly important for us to recognize and utilize sustainable practices such as this. To learn more about other sustainable practices at the Centre drop by our call the hotline.



FAREWELL TO CHRIS

After 5 years of volunteering and working with us as our Site Educator, Chris Wells is moving on. He is going back to school full-time to pursue a degree in Agro-ecology. Chris started volunteering here at the Centre in 2001 after arriving in Victoria from Vancouver. Soon after getting established in Victoria, Chris acquired a piece of land to farm, educated himself on growing food (much of which happened at Compost Centre Workshops), and quickly became one of our local resources for food growing and composting information. He is now known around town as Compost Chris.



Chris has spear-headed many projects during his time here at the Centre. These projects include: renovating the straw bale building; designing and installing educational signs throughout the site; installing an automatic irrigation system,; and developing a more advanced worm breeding system (he now fancies himself a Master Worm Breeder). All of these projects have greatly enhanced our demonstration site and have received much positive feedback from the public.



While we are happy that Chris is moving on to pursue his education (and staying in the field of agriculture), he will be greatly missed. Good Luck Chris!

FAREWELL FERN!

On August 19th The Compost Education Centre said goodbye to Fern Wager.

Fern fit right into the Compost Centre, not only because of her name (as many visitors told her) but her enjoyment in getting her hands dirty and her interest in waste reduction. During her 8 month UVic Co-operative Education term at the Centre, Fern developed the new Sustainability Tour, worked closely with Louise Ditmars to create the props and puppet show for the new school program, Corey's Story, wrote communications and reports, contributed to our newsletters and any other job that was thrown her way. If you happened to be at the native plant garden while Fern was giving the Sustainability Tour you might have heard stories of the historic uses of her favorite plant. Fern would like to thank the staff and volunteers of the CEC for the many learning opportunities they provided. Fern assures us she'll continue to be involved with the Centre in the future.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Topic	Time	Cost
Sep. 9	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Sep. 9	Beginner's Plant Propagation	2-4pm	\$15/free for members
Sep.22- 24	Compost Educator Volunteer Training Program	Fri 6-9pm 10am-5pm	\$100 deposit, \$85 returned after 30hr practicum
Sep. 30	Building a Hoop Bin for Yard Waste Storage	2-4pm	\$15/\$13.50 for members
Oct. 14	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Oct. 21	Greywater Systems	2-4pm	\$15/free for members
Nov. 4	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Nov. 4 & 5	Pumpkin Smash	10am-3pm	By donation. Call for details.
Nov. 18	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Nov. 18	Native Plant Gardening	2-4pm	\$15/\$13.50 for members

Full Events Schedule can be found on our website at www.compost.bc.ca

MUST PRE-REGISTER FOR WORKSHOPS BY CALLING 386-WORM OR EMAILING info@compost.bc.ca

New Tour Highlights Sustainable Techniques ...by Fern Wager

Sustainability has become a buzz word that weaves its way into all sorts of conversations. It is a word that is losing its potency with its overuse, yet it remains important in our society and critical for us to understand.

So what does sustainability mean anyway? Simply put, to sustain something is to enable it to continue for a long time. As we have come to realize that the Earth is finite, there has been a growing awareness that there must be limits to our activities if life on the planet is to survive indefinitely. Sustainable human activities are those which meet human needs while functioning to protect, conserve and nurture the biodiversity and life-sustaining natural cycles of the planet. This involves rediscovering practices which minimize our ecological footprint and which foster the equitable distribution of natural resources for all peoples.

So where does the Compost Education Centre fit into all of this? The demonstration site at the Compost Centre is a prime example of sustainable practices and building design. Thus a sustainability tour was born at the Centre to create awareness about the benefits of composting and how composting is a part of sustainable communities through issues such as solid waste reduction, food miles, greenhouse gas and organic gardening. The tour also aims to provoke thought on how participants can individually take responsibility for sustainable decisions and how awareness can be created in communities both locally and on a global scale.

The tour highlights the many sustainable practices at the Centre and through observation, discussion and participatory learning activities encourages students to factor ecological, social, and economic consequences into their daily decisions.



Living Green Roof at the Compost Centre

Composting, as a self sustaining mini system is at the centre of the tour with other practices such as organic gardening feeding into it. Within the tour students learn about the many benefits and positive spin-offs of composting and how it is at the heart of sustainable food systems. The benefits of native, herbal, and medicinal plants are discussed linking biodiversity and local food sources to sustainability. Through a visualization exercise students consider the many things that we take for granted in our society and discover the larger implications. The centre's rain water catchment and water saving irrigation systems are used to demonstrate more sustainable watering systems for the garden and home. The strawbale building and living green roof are highlighted as alternative sustainable building design.

The tour concludes with students creating the life story of a vegetable, considering the distances our food travels and the implications of the water, fertilizers and energy used in its production and transportation. Students then discuss more sustainable food systems bearing in mind the practices and techniques they have just learned through the tour.

The new sustainability tour has been piloted with UVIC Students, Dreamseed (a youth organization), and ESL groups. It is targeted at youth and adults above age 13 and is available for booking by calling 386-WORM.

THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the Winter issue is Nov 15th, 2006. Submissions to the newsletter can be sent to the Compost Education Centre. Unless otherwise noted, articles appearing in this newsletter may be reprinted only in other not-for-profit publications, with the credit given to the author (when named) and **THE LATEST DIRT**.