

THE LATEST DIRT

SUMMER 2006

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER VICTORIA COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE



WRIGGLERS, WRIGGLERS EVERYWHERE

By Chris Wells

Worms are an important part of our programs here at The Compost Education Centre. We use them for education purposes in our “Wigglers at Work” school program; we sell them as part of our worm bin package to the public, an important fundraiser; and we use them to help us with our composting here on site. And, of course, we cannot forget Dr. Wiggles - our dedicated ‘spokesworm’. But over the years there has been such a great demand for our worms that we have had a chronic shortage, with people patiently waiting up to six months for their worm bin!

So this year we have taken some steps to improve our worm breeding program and our preliminary results look promising. Due to our new breeding system, our surplus volunteer worm stewards, and some generous worm donations, we now have a healthy of worms, which means we have not only eliminated our waitlist, but we can now have bins ready for people when they call!

Here’s how we do it...

The first thing we have in mind is that our focus is now on producing worm *cocoons*, not just worms. This focus helps us make much better use of our space, and instead of just treating our worms as composting worms, we raise them as livestock (you know, like sheep) in a 3 part process described below:

Step 1: Breeding. The worms start off in what we call *propagation* or *breeding* bins. These are small wooden bins: 16” X 16” and 6 inches deep, that are easily stackable. We put about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 pound of worms in each bin to breed. This high density of worms ensures that they breed more rapidly (it’s easier to find a mate when they’re all so close!), but are not so overpopulated that they stop breeding. These worms live in a bedding that is mostly food scraps with a bit of leaf mould mixed in and on top to control smell. We water these bins very well before stacking the bins for the breeding period. The worms stay in these bins to breed for 5-6 weeks. We label each bin with the date when we start them so we know when to harvest the worms.

We can have up to 20 breeding bins in production at a time, meaning we can have from 15-20 lbs of worms in our stock that are strictly used for producing new worms! Furthermore, because the breeding bins are also stackable, they not only help us produce more worms, they also help save us space!

Step 2: Hatching. After the 5-6 week breeding period, the worms in the breeding bins are separated from the bedding (which is now mostly compost) and are returned to a new breeding bin to mate again. The bedding that is left over from the breeding bin is now full of cocoons. This cocoon rich bedding is transferred to a *hatching* bin, where the cocoons will begin to hatch after about thirty days. Once cocoons start to hatch, we begin feeding these bins food scraps to feed the quick growing young worms. We will feed the hatching bins for about 3 months before moving onto the next step in the process.

Each hatching bin can hold about three breeding bins. Since each breeding bin can produce from 1200-2000 cocoons (in 6 weeks) and each of these cocoons can contain from 2-20 worms (usually in the 2-5 week range), a full hatching bin can potentially produce up to 30,000 worms in three months!



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AGM Welcomes New Board Members

This year's Annual General Meeting on April 9th welcomed Dianne Dallas and Anke Bergner to the Board of Directors of the Victoria Compost and Conservation Education Society. They will join our dedicated volunteer team of directors, Janet Hockin, Katie Josephson, Angela Deering and Kathryn Cook. A special mention goes to both Angela and Kathy, now in their 7th year on the board!

Once again Neil Williams facilitated the election of officers, many thanks for his time and dedication.

This year's AGM was once again held in the strawbale building at the Compost Education Centre, an appropriate setting for the 'Greening Your Home' theme. Our thanks to Wendy Smith from City Green, who shared her wealth of knowledge on home energy efficiency. Thanks also to our sponsors; The Soap Exchange, the Capital Regional District and City Green who all provided green raffle items, and the Market on Yates for providing the tasty snacks.

The following is a list of Board of Directors for 2006 and their current positions:

- Kathryn Cook -President
- Angela Deering -Vice President and Acting Treasurer
- Anke Bergner -Director/CRD Representative
- Katie Josephson -Director
- Dianne Dallas- Director
- Janet Hockin- Secretary



**Our new board members
Janet Hockin,
Dianne Dallas and
Anke Bergner
hard at work**

COMPOST BIN SALE ~ One Day Only!

The Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre is pleased to offer in conjunction with the CRD, a subsidized compost bin truckload sale to support the implementation of the yard and garden waste ban.

Subsidized Earth Machine compost bins will be available to Capital Region residents on a first come, first serve basis for one day only, June 3rd from 9am– 4pm in the Hillside Mall parking lot. Come to the back parking lot close to the North Dairy and Shelbourne intersection to find your way to waste reduction!

The composters will sell for only \$35.00 plus tax, a significant savings from the regular \$63.95 retail price. The bins can be purchased by cash or cheque only. There is a limit of 2 bins per household.

To further help with composting their yard and garden waste, the bin sale will also feature a variety of composting supplies, free composting demonstrations and information materials. All bin purchasers will also receive a coupon to attend a free workshop.

So don't miss out, come early and take advantage of this one day sale and start composting in your own backyard!

Please call 386-WORM or visit our website at www.compost.bc.ca for full details.

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.

Wrigglers, Wrigglers Everywhere (continued from Page 1)

Separating cocoon filled bedding from worms



Step 3: Production and Sales. After about 3 months, (once the cocoons have hatched and the worms have put on some growth), we have three options with these new worms:

First, we can simply add them to our current stock of 15 worm *production* bins, including the famous worm benches in our straw bale building and our “Worm Pit” in the demonstration site. This helps ensure we always have a healthy stock of worms on site. This is especially important for winter production, since the cooler weather significantly slows down the breeding process.

Second, we can add the worms to a freshly made worm bin for sale

to the public. This helps reduce the amount of time we need to spend harvesting worms - since the hatching bins have such a high density of worms they are very easy to pick. These young worms are also very vigorous and are very efficient at consuming food scraps.

And finally, the worms can be used for our Wriggler’s at Work school program, helping us increase the number of programs we can deliver each month.

In the beginning stages of this project, it took many hours to develop this system and troubleshoot the process. But now that things are rolling, and with some great help from our volunteer worm stewards Francine, Karyn, and Patrick, the new system is now almost as efficient as our old system, but with much more production. This should help us keep on top of our worm bin demand all summer and right through the winter. This helps ensure that we can get apartment and condo dwellers, offices, and schools composting with worms almost immediately, thus helping even more to prevent the valuable resource we call food waste from ending up in the landfill!

Worms Stewards hard at work



SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT: The Garden Path

The Garden Path Changes Direction

By Carolyn Herriot

Take a trip to West Saanich to find The Garden Path, B.C.'s only certified organic plant nursery, set in a beautiful 2.5 acre display garden, full of vegetables, fruit, herbs, flowers, and ornamental shrubs and trees. The nursery has become well known for a unique selection of heritage plants, heirloom tomatoes, winter vegetables and organic seeds.

This season, after 17 successful years in business, the nursery is selling off its entire inventory in order to become The Garden Path Centre for Organic Gardening. The focus will change from growing plants to education. Experts will share their knowledge on many subjects, ranging from soil science to plant maintenance to gardening with wildlife.

The Garden Path is open daily from 10 am to 5.30pm until Monday July 3rd, 2006. Don't miss lots of good deals as the nursery goes out of business. For more details visit www.earthfuture.com/gardenpath

Our thanks to the Garden Path Centre for continuing to support our Compost Club by giving members a 10% discount. Please remember to show your compost club card when asking for discounts at all our partners' stores.

WELCOME NEW VOLUNTEERS

by Louise Ditmars

Twenty keen participants enjoyed the recent Compost Educator Volunteer Training Program intensive weekend. From 7pm Friday night to 5pm Sunday, March 10-12th, they delved into the finer points of composting, worm composting, mulching methods, organic gardening and outreach methods. Now they are busy donating thirty volunteer hours in order to complete the practicum.

Two out-of-towners will be “spreading the dirt” elsewhere, but the others have shown amazing enthusiasm as they develop new skills both on and off the Compost Education site. Thanks to the dedication of the new Worm Stewards- the worms are fed, their bins aerated, and worm populations are soaring. This means that our wormbin waitlist, formerly months long, has been dramatically reduced. I am personally very grateful to the number of volunteers who have, or will be assisting with school programs. This is the season for the “Interactive Garden Tour”, which requires a second person to take young children through the gardens. Also, we are grateful for the amazing response to calls for outreach volunteers. For example, many of the new recruits took on positions at the highly-successful Organic Plant Sale on May 13th. Many more volunteers will be needed at the One-Day Compost Bin Sale, Saturday, June 3rd at Hillside Mall parking lot.

Thanks so much to all new volunteers. Remember that it would be absolutely impossible for the Centre to take on the work that it does without your generous support, in addition to that of the other dedicated volunteers.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Topic	Time	Cost
June 3	Compost Bin Sale *see article for complete details: held at Hillside Mall	9am-4pm	\$35.00 plus tax
June 10	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
June 10	Anyone can Grow Greens!	2:30-4:30pm	\$15/free for members
June 17	Controlling Problem Weeds	2-4pm	\$15/\$13.50 for members
June 24	Mulching, Sheet Mulching, and Soil Building	2-4pm	\$15/\$13.50 for members
July 8	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
July 8	Urban Chickens	2-4pm	\$15/free for members
July 15	Organic Lawn Care	2-4pm	\$15/\$13.50 for members
Aug. 5	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Aug. 12	Composting Pet Waste	2-4pm	\$15/free for members
Aug. 19	Organic Landscape Design	2-4pm	\$15/\$13.50 for members
Aug. 26	Prevention & Control of Diseased Plants	2-4pm	\$15/\$13.50 for members
Sep. 9	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Sep. 9	Beginner's Plant Propagation	2-4pm	\$15/free for members
Sep. 23	Building a Hoop Bin for Yard Waste Storage	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

SEEDS FOR SALE

The Compost Centre is happy to continue to supply a wide selection of locally grown, organic vegetable and flower seeds for sale. We have varieties from Two Wings Farm (Metchosin); Stellar Seeds (Salmon Arm); and Rebecca's Garden (Saanich). To purchase your seeds, drop by the Centre from Wed-Sat from 10am-4pm (cash or cheque accepted). For more information, drop by or give us a call: 386-WORM.

Organic Plant Sale an Enormous Success

On Saturday May 13th, over 600 people attended the Compost Education's Centre's 3rd Annual Organic Plant Sale!



This market style event featured a variety of hard to find, organically grown annual and perennial veggie starts, seeds, natives and ornamentals, and gave visitors an opportunity to support local growers while providing the Centre with a valuable fundraising opportunity and increasing our exposure.

This year we offered site tours and many visitors learned more about the demonstration site, composting and organic gardening. Other visitors chose to take self guided tours through the Compost Education Centre's gardens, finding ideas for their home landscapes and enjoying the natural beauty.



Thank you to the following for their support and assistance with the plant sale:

- Local Organic Growers
- North Park Street Neighbours
- Victoria High School
- City of Victoria

A special thanks to all of our volunteers who worked quickly to get everything set up and ready for the many eager early birds. Dedicated volunteers made the event run smoothly all day long and their assistance throughout the event was much appreciated.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

K. Cook	C. Engram	R. George
F. Hall	O. Lum	T. Mellor
L. Liborron	E. & P. Mulvey	D. Parker
M. Walmsley	B. Wilson	H. Wolf

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