

THE LATEST DIRT

WINTER
2005

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER VICTORIA COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE

BUILDING GARDENS, BUILDING COMMUNITY

By Natalie Cushing

(Homes and Habitat is a co-project of Victoria Habitat for Humanity (VHFH) and the Wild Garden Party. The Wild Garden Party is itself a collaboration, bringing together like minded community groups focused on sustainable landscaping. Homes and Habitats aims to reduce the environmental impact of landscaping, create a refuge for native plants and wild life, and introduce new homeowners to sustainable methods of landscaping. To this end, a VHFH site containing four homes was landscaped with the dedicated help of Wild Garden Party volunteers during 2004 and 2005.)



Natalie digs into helping during a Homes and Habitat work party

One Saturday this fall, during a Homes and Habitats work party, I was planting strawberries with an eleven-year-old girl and explaining how they propagate. “And each of those suckers will produce suckers,” I said. “So, soon this whole garden will be full of strawberries.” We chatted about soil, insects, berries and vegetables until we ran out of plants. It was a simple exchange, but it encapsulated the goals of the Wild Garden Party’s Homes and Habitat project: use donated plants and volunteer labour, mix in a little informal education, and create low maintenance, sustainable gardens for new homeowners. I have been fortunate to be the project’s coordinator for the last six months, and like all involved, I have learned a lot, met new people, and gotten my hands dirty.

Without the work of the Wild Garden Party, the four houses

at the Victoria Habitat for Humanity site in Sidney would have had plain turf yards with a few ornamental trees. Now they have native plant hedgerows along the fences, raised vegetable beds, herb gardens, fruit trees, and hardy kiwis. There are also two large native plant beds, one under an old Gary Oak tree, and one in the boulevard. Not only do the native plant beds reduce the amount of lawn to care for, but they are naturally suited to Victoria’s climate, and will thrive without irrigation, pesticides, or chemical fertilizers.

When go out to the site I almost invariably see some of the 14 children who live there playing outside. They all have questions, and they all want to know what we are doing next and why. Perhaps the biggest success of this project is that these kids will grow up surrounded by native plants, eating food they helped produce, and observing insects and animals pass through their yards.



Victoria Habitat for Humanity house

These children’s parents, too, have many questions. Many of them are new to gardening, at least in this climate, but all are eager to help their yards reach their full potential. All the houses have composters, which are in active use. Even better, many of the families have started mulching their gardens, some using the straw and manure from rabbit cages. The raised beds are also all in use, each family growing different crops.

The other garden residents, namely the insects and the birds, also seem to approve of our work. When I first joined the project, the gardens were mainly construction fill; worms were few and far between. Now, after mulching and amending, worms are common place. Equally exciting, every work party includes sightings of beneficial insects, butterflies, or native birds. The return of these residents is very important, and will have as much impact on the long-term success of the gardens as the efforts of the human residents.

Wild Garden Party Members

Habitat Acquisition Trust
Native Plant Study Group
Naturescape BC
Native Plant Society of BC
Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre
Lifecycles Project Society

...Continued on page 3



The Greater Victoria

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SEASONS GREETINGS COMPOST CLUB MEMBERS & VOLUNTEERS

Thank you for your continued support of our programming in 2005. Your membership, volunteer contributions and donations helped us to provide quality compost and organic gardening education programs to Greater Victoria residents. In this newsletter you will read about just some of the programs that the Centre was involved in this year and we look forward to sharing continued success with you in the New Year.

In 2006, we will be offering new topics for the Compost Club members and our Gardening without Pesticides series. Early March will bring our first Compost Educator Volunteer Training Session of the year, please pass the word to new recruits! In addition, due to the success of this year's Plant Sale, we will be holding another one in the Spring. Look for the 2006 schedule to be released in mid-January with these and other exciting events.

During the month of December, the demonstration site will be closed to visitors. We will re-open on Friday, January 6th. At that time, our hours will return to Wednesday to Saturday from 10-4. If you have a composting question during this time, please feel free to leave a message on the hotline: 386-WORM. We look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Happy Winter Gardening and Composting!

Sonya Sundberg
Executive Director



FAREWELL SEAN!

On November 19th The Compost Education Centre said goodbye to Sean Lansdell. Emotions ran high as the final hours of Sean's employment as a Compost Educator ticked away. Amid rumours that he would refuse to go quietly, the day came and went without incident. The Centre won't soon forget Sean's unique wingdigging and worm picking skills: "I've never seen anyone aerate a compost pile so gracefully," commented one observer, speaking on conditions of anonymity. During his 8 ½ month tenure at the Centre, Sean contributed to our newsletters, worked closely with Chris Wells in preparing the site's new signs, wrote media communications, worked on quarterly reports, and drank 65 litres of coffee. Sean would like to thank the staff and volunteers of the CEC for the opportunity they gave him and for making the experience memorable. He leaves us with these parting words: "farewell, sweet compost."

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.

BUILDING GARDENS, BUILDING COMMUNITY

(continued from Page 1)

Right now many of the plants are dormant, but the oregon grape, nootka rose, ferns, and snow berry add winter interest. In the spring there will be a progression of colour: flowering red current, camus, shooting star, ocean spray, honey suckle, and yarrow. Each year the trees will grow taller, until there is an over-story of dogwood, douglas maple, apple, and plum. Inevitably more insects will come, and leaf litter will increase. The soil will improve, and the plants will grow larger still. The homeowners will add new plants, and make the gardens uniquely their own.

The landscaping is done, but the results of the project on the people involved are just beginning to materialize. Victoria Habitat for Humanity has asked the Wild Garden Party to help them landscape their next site. Many volunteers have made new contacts in the organic gardening community. The homeowners have been salvaging plants, and passing on gardening tips. It is exciting to see the effects of this project spreading and ultimately encouraging more people to adopt sustainable landscaping.

Homes & Habitats kindly thanks our donors for their support:

Vancity



The Wild Garden Party gratefully acknowledges donations from:

Oak Bay Parks
Eljay Irrigation,
Garden Path Nursery
Integrity Sales
Peninsula Landscaping
Michigan Street Community Garden
Do-It Center
Dean Rebneris
Alcinia Hofmann
Victoria Habitat for Humanity
CRD Water Division
Trio Gravel Mart
University of Victoria SLIP Co-op program
Copley Bros. Construction
L & E Sawmills
Mitchell Excavating
Capital Iron

CONGRATULATIONS Lynn and Scott!



We would like to congratulate Lynn Elliott, currently on maternity leave as Director of the Compost Education Centre, and her husband Scott on the arrival of their beautiful baby girl. **Renee Marie Elliott**, was born on Saturday September

10, at 2:37 in the afternoon, weighing in at 7lbs, 12 oz. We are confident that as soon as Renee is walking she will be learning to gracefully yield a wingdigger, following in her mother's footsteps!



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Janet Hockin

"I'll work wherever I'm needed" is Janet Hockin's philosophy of volunteering. Since 2003 she has taken on a wide variety of tasks that have ranged from the mundane to the masterful. From stuffing envelopes for the newsletter to advising the public on conservation

issues at outreach events to collaborating on the creation of a new backyard composting program for young children, Janet's willingness to plunge in wherever necessary has benefited the Centre immensely.

As a retired special-education teacher, Janet is accustomed to giving back to the community, and this is reflected in her work for the Centre. She trained as a Compost Educator in 2003, and received her certificate later that year, having completed her 30 hours of community outreach. Since then, Janet has volunteered to educate the public at an enormous number of outreach venues including Moss Street Market, Swan Lake Native Plant Sale and the Flower and Garden Show. More recently, she has coordinated outreach events such as Cedar Hill Winterfest, and used her educational background to help facilitate a focus group for teachers. Lately, her skills have been invaluable in co-creating a red wiggles colouring book with artist Peter Allen, and providing leadership in the creation of a new puppet show. Her assistance doesn't end there, however, as we are delighted to welcome her as a new board member.

Thanks so much, Janet, for your enthusiasm and continuing support to the Compost Education Centre!

CRD Yard and Garden Materials Landfill Disposal Ban

The Capital Regional District (CRD) Board has approved banning yard and garden materials from disposal as garbage at Hartland landfill, effective April 2006. The ban will extend the life of the landfill and save a resource that can be beneficially used for composting, topsoil production and farming.

The CRD wants your input to identify issues and develop solutions prior to implementation of the scheduled ban. If you missed the three drop-in Open Houses during November, written comments are being accepted until December 10, 2005.

For more information on the ban and alternatives visit the CRD website at www.crd.bc.ca/es or contact the CRD Hotline at (250) 360-3030 or

1-800-663-4425 local 3030, or hotline@crd.bc.ca



A SMASHING SUCCESS! Pumpkin Smash attracts over 1400 people

For the second year in a row, the Compost Education Centre launched its seasonal campaign asking residents to keep their Halloween pumpkins out of the garbage and into the compost instead. We estimate that approximately 12 garbage truck loads of pumpkins go into the Hartland landfill after Halloween, taking up valuable landfill space.

This year, we partnered with Thrifty Foods, the Capital Regional District and the A-Channel to ask residents to “*Do the Pumpkin Smash*” and compost their pumpkins. To launch the campaign, all Thrifty Foods stores across the Capital region had a composting display, where pumpkins had stickers that read “Carve me, then Compost me” and people could enter to win their own composter. Recognizing not everyone has access to a backyard composter, we organized a 2-day community called the *Pumpkin Smash* on Nov. 5th & 6th. Families

were invited to join us with their jack-o-lanterns at our giant Smash compost bin at the Cloverdale Thrifty Foods where they could smash them through a variety of means, including pumpkin smash bowling, the smash tire toss, and the stairmaster smash. For the 3 weeks leading up to the event, the A-Channel helped us to promote the event through a variety of means, including the Community Calendar and the Morning Show. The Capital Regional District provided further support with graphic design for our Fall Home Show display and promotional materials, in addition to supplying the funds to raffle off 20 backyard composting kits throughout the campaign.

Despite the rain and wind, over 1400 people attended the Pumpkin Smash, the community support was absolutely outstanding. While the adults realized the importance of the initiative in keeping organic waste out of the Hartland landfill, the children were ecstatic to actually be given permission to smash away! One 4 year old exclaimed, “this is the best day of my life!”.

Many families didn’t just bring one pumpkin, they brought multiple. We had a woman from a senior’s home in Sidney drop off all their pumpkins, others brought several 60-80lb whoppers of jack-o-lanterns, and there was even a man who brought a couple of his own bins so that he could take some home to use in his own compost! Several people also came by to take uncarved pumpkins home to cook and eat.

Of course, this event could not have been possible without the incredible support of the CRD, Thrifty Foods, and the A-Channel whom all sponsored in the event. Not to mention the dedication of staff, board members and volunteers of the Compost Education Centre. We also had the gracious support from Island Displays who donated the use of the stairs.



Pumpkin Smash Bowling



Overflowing bins at the Pumpkin Smash

Thanks to everyone for making it such a *smashing* compost success!

The media was outstanding in promoting the event, which included the Times Colonist, Newsgroup, Monday Magazine, Saanich News Daily, A-Channel, CH 6 with Gordie Tupper, Shaw Daily, The Ocean, The Zone, Jack FM and Village 900. There were also countless numbers of community groups and associations who either advertised the event in their local newsletter, through their listserve or posted Flyers on-site. Due to the success, we received a record number of calls to our compost hotline and were able to offer two composting basics workshops during November.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

Garden Works

T. Cotey

C. Loader

Mitchell Excavating

R. Gillmor

J. Austin

THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the Spring issue is Feb. 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**.

