

THE LATEST DIRT

WINTER 2001



Water Catchment for Conservation and Self-Reliance (Part 2)

by Geoff Johnson

In the Fall issue of The Latest Dirt, Geoff talked about using rain tanks for storing water for times of drought. In this continuation, he looks at other options for retaining water.

Water can be seen as the life-blood of the ecosystems we live in. By developing storage systems such as rain tanks, ponds, and swales we can make the best use of the water that is naturally available to us.

Ponds

Thoughtfully located ponds with varying depths and irregular shapes (lots of edge) can mimic the abundance of natural wetlands to enrich our environment in many ways. They have the potential to provide wildlife habitat, produce fish and edible/useful plants, act as irrigation reservoirs, serve as firebreak, reflect light, moderate microclimate, and just be nice places to hang out. A particularly ingenious pond system is a series of

peninsulas called “chinampa” (see diagram) and was developed by Mexico’s indigenous people. By maximizing the interface (or “edge effect”) of land and water they harmonized fish culture with the production of annual and perennial crops in a highly self-regulating system that some modern permaculturalists have emulated.

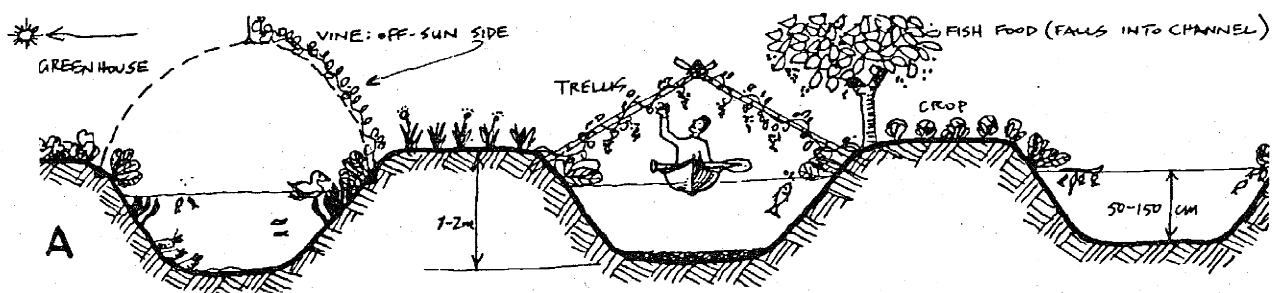
While urban tub ponds (i.e. used bath tubs) can avoid the question of leakage, there are several ways to seal dug ponds. A type of volcanic clay called bentonite, which expands when wet can be mixed into clay-loam soils to form an impermeable layer. A method called gleying can also be used by creating a 20cm thick layer of shredded green plant material, covering it with earth and letting it decompose anaerobically before filling with water. On very sandy or gravelly soils however, it is sometimes necessary to resort to either butyl rubber lining or

even a plastic sheet sandwiched between two old carpets.

Swales

Swales (or “absorption beds”) are a means of controlling rainy season runoff on sloped areas and storing it in the earth through dryer times. They are essentially ditches that are dug on contour, with the excavated earth placed to form a berm on the downhill side. The berm, which is planted with trees and other plants (to control erosion and provide for various local needs), retains the water so that it can soak into the ground. Water infiltration and retention can be improved with compost or by growing and mowing green manures before the larger plants fill out. Swale width and depth depends both on soil type and slope.

Geoff will be speaking at our upcoming AGM about permaculture and the principles of sustainable living. Please see the back page for more details.





Introductory Composting Course

This summer we will be offering a scaled-down version of our Master Composter Program. It is designed to introduce newcomers to the art and science of composting and we hope it will enable more folks to become avid backyard composters.

The course will be offered on the weekend of July 7th and 8th. Further details will be announced in the next edition of *The Latest Dirt*.

Master Composter Programme



Once again we are pleased to announce that we will be conducting our highly popular Master Composter Program.

The course commences on Wednesday, February 21st and concludes on Saturday, March 10th. Workshops take place on Wednesday evenings and all day on each Saturday for the duration of each course.

The cost is \$100. Upon successful completion of the course and the requisite volunteer hours participants may be eligible for a \$70 refund. When you graduate and become a Master Composter you will become a respected and reputable composter with all of the associated benefits.

The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary
presents the 6th annual

Gardening for Wildlife

A Native Plant Gardening Sale and Demonstration

Saturday and Sunday,
April 21 and 22, 2001
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Over 100 species of native plants, seeds, books, bird feeders, nesting boxes. Presentations on Gardening with Native plants, including a workshop by Bill Merilees, author of *The New Gardening for Wildlife*.

Admission: \$3/day, \$5/weekend pass
(price includes admission to all workshops and presentations)
Free to 'Friends of the Sanctuary'



Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary
3873 Swan Lake Road, Victoria, BC • 479-0211

Plant list available at our website: www.swanlake.bc.ca

Donations

The Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre needs your support. Please help us to continue our important programmes by sending us a donation today. Remember that your donation is tax-deductible. Please mail your donation to the Centre or stop by and drop it off.

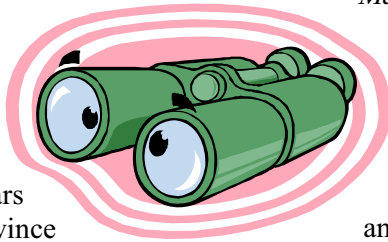
Also, we're always looking for donations of items such as office furnishings and supplies, gardening tools etc. Please contact us if you have any items you wish to donate. Thanks for your support.

Compost Store

Don't forget that the Compost Education Centre is your source for a wide range of composting supplies. We sell everything from Earth Machine backyard composters and the famous Windigger aerators to Kitchen Compost Containers, Grow Brix and Worm Bins. We also have a number of interesting and helpful books and special publications available for sale. If you know anyone who wants to start composting, or if you need composting supplies for yourself, please stop in.

Look for Us in Your Community

In our never-ending quest to spread the good word about composting we're embarking upon an ambitious outreach program this year. Starting in March we will be setting up displays, putting on workshops and information seminars in our quest to convince more people to start composting. We will be asking people to "give back to the earth" by supporting composting in their community. We will also be recruiting Compost Club members, selling composting products and taking donations in a push to top up our funding coffers.



Here is our proposed schedule for the coming year.

March – Western Communities

April – Saanich/Gordon head

May – Victoria

June – Oak Bay

July – Esquimalt

August – Sidney and the Saanich Peninsula.

We will be announcing specific dates and locations as they are confirmed so please keep your eyes and ears open for announcements in local media. We will be looking for volunteers to staff our displays too so, if you are interested, please give us a call to sign up.

Comings and Goings

We were all sad to say goodbye to Susannah Garrett who left us to take up a position with the Garth Homer Centre. Susannah was our Elementary Schools Educator and her creative energy and special rapport with the kids will be sorely missed. We wish her the very best in her new position and look forward to having her visit us from time to time.

Taking over our Elementary Schools Programme from Susannah is our very own Kristin Meissner, co-coordinator at the Centre. Kristin has always been very involved in the planning and development of the Schools programme and is

seizing this opportunity to apply her own skills to this very important part of our compost education programme.

There's a new face at the Centre these days. Lynn Marie is our new Secondary Schools Educator and she will be developing a totally new compost education curriculum directed at students in the secondary schools system. Like the rest of us, Lynn will also be answering phones, helping visitors, working with volunteers and pitching-in with the many different tasks that keep us all busy. Welcome Lynn! We're happy to have you with us.

Special Thanks

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Tim Frewer at **Shaw Cable Systems** for helping us to get connected to the Internet via cable. With our new high speed system we can free up a telephone line, increase our research capabilities, host our website, improve our E-mail, and reduce our costs all in one go.

Thanks also to Vicki and all the folks at the **Cook Street Do-It Centre** for giving us such great support and price discounts when we shop for needed materials at their store.

Thanks to Wendy at the Fort Street location of **Monk Office Supply** for setting up a special discount for our office supplies purchases.

Thanks to Kevin Hale at **The Home Depot** for partnering with us in our Western Communities outreach. Watch for our outreach team at The Home Depot on the weekend of March 24th.

Thanks to **Mayor Stew Young and Langford Council** for their generous support of our outreach into Langford. They have provided us with a \$1,000 service contract which will subsidize the sale of up to 100 composting starter kits for Langford residents.

Compost Club

Here's a sneak preview of our proposed Compost Club presentations for the year 2001. We hope that you will make a point of joining us at one or more of the workshops. They are always interesting and filled with valuable information for all of you gardening enthusiasts.

All lectures are held at the

Compost Centre, 7:00 pm in the Straw Bale building.

If you have not already renewed your membership in the Compost Club please do so soon. Renewal gets you access to all of these exciting workshops, a continued subscription to *The Latest Dirt* newsletter, as well as discounts from our retail sponsors.

Compost Club Workshops for 2001

Wednesday, March 14

Ready, Set, Grow! with Geoff Johnson

Learn what you can do to get your garden ready for the new season. Geoff will focus on practical tips for improving soil and other suggestions for getting your beds in ship shape in order to maximize the growing season.

Wednesday, April 11

The Soul of Soil with Angela Kalbun

Is your soil too heavy? Does water drain right through? Are your plants just generally miserable and you don't know why? Then come to this informative workshop on soil health and learn some practical tips to improving your soil's fertility. Bring along a soil sample and Angela will help refine your observation skills for determining what your soil needs. (Registration is required, as space is limited.)

May 9 (TBA)

Wednesday, June 13

Hot Composting with John Stonehouse

Not enough compost? If you are looking for a way to speed up nature's process to yield more compost in less time, then hot composting is for you. Join John Stonehouse in this informative talk on building a hot compost pile and producing compost in five weeks!

Wednesday, August 8

Winter Veggie Gardening with Gillian Elcock

Yes, it is possible! Don't let this season go to waste. Learn the basics of starting your own winter veggie garden and extend your gardening season by producing healthy yummy vegetables.

Support these retailers who support composting in our community. Show your membership card and receive a discount on your purchases.

Dig This

Bastion Square,
Broadmead Village, and
Sidney

Big Barn Garden Centre

Borden Mercantile

Danica Nurseries

GardenWorks

Blenkinsop, Oak Bay, and
Old Island Highway

Hooked On Water Gardens

The Garden Path Organic Plant Nursery

Lynne's Little Elf Garden Centre

Meadow Oak Nursery

Thanks to these merchants
for their support.
Some restrictions may apply.

**We would like
to thank the
Fernwood
Community
Association for
their support.**

Victoria Compost and Conservation Education Society

Board of Directors

Angela Deering
Diane Lefebvre
Maria Miller
Donna Sanford
Tom Watkins

Staff

Susannah Garrett
Geoff Johnson
Lynn Marie
Kristin Meissner
Steve Young

Newsletter Layout

Alex Ball

Contributors This Issue

Kathryn Campbell
Geoff Johnson
Lynn Marie
Kristin Meissner
Steve Young

Published four times annually in winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Submissions to the newsletter can be brought in person or mailed to the Compost Education Centre, 1216 North Park Street (at Chambers), Victoria, BC V8T 1C9; by fax at 386-9678; or e-mail to info@compost.bc.ca. Our website is www.compost.bc.ca. Our telephone number is 386-WORM.

Deadline for submissions for the spring issue is May 11, 2001.

Unless otherwise noted, articles appearing in this newsletter may be reprinted only in other not-for-profit publications, with credit given to the author (when named) and *The Latest Dirt*.

A Whole New Look

You may have noticed a few changes to the look of *The Latest Dirt* and we hope you like what you see. Most important is our new logo and the change in our name to *The Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre*. Our mandate requires us to serve all area residents and we wanted our name to reflect the broader community that we serve. You will also notice that we have included our favourite worm as part of our new look and we hope to increase its profile as time goes by. With that in mind, it is time to announce the *Name That Worm Contest*. We would like to give our wriggling friend

a true identity so we are asking you, our readers, to come up with a name. We will choose the best name from all of those we receive and we will award one Grand Prize to the person who submitted it. The prize will be a worm bin complete with everything needed to get the winner on the road to worm composting with a whole bunch of writhing red wigglers all of their own.

Send your entries to *Name That Worm Contest*, Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre, 1216 North Park Street, Victoria, B.C. V8T 1C9. Or you can E-mail us at info@compost.bc.ca. Good luck!

Other Changes

We have been working on our website! It is going to be more fun, more interactive and more informative. We hope to have it in full operation by early spring and hope that you will visit at www.compost.bc.ca.

We have also changed our E-mail address. Now you can reach us at info@compost.bc.ca.

If you would like to be added to our electronic mailing list please send us an E-mail request to do so.

We would like to extend our very special thanks to Tom Spetter of Cyan Design for volunteering his time to rebuild and revitalize our website. You can contact Tom at Cyan Design 885-9070 or cyandesign@mac.com.

Cash for Composting Classes

A huge *thank you* to VanCity Savings Credit Union for once again providing us with a \$5,000 grant towards our Elementary Schools Programme. VanCity has been an on-going supporter of the Centre and we deeply appreciate their financial assistance. Without it we would be unable to offer this programme. Teaching young children about composting is one of the most important things we can do. The seeds that we plant today will one day take root and grow, giving us new generations of environmentally conscious citizens who recognize the importance of composting.

