

STOP! DON'T BURN THOSE LEAVES!

Leaves act as time-release capsules of nitrogen, calcium, magnesium, phosphorous, potassium and trace minerals. This treasure trove of essential elements falls on our lawns every autumn – free fertilizer provided by nature's largesse. Yet during the fall months, millions of homeowners let this bounty go up in smoke or be carried off by the garbage collector. What a waste! Instead, make beneficial use of the fallen leaves around your home or farmstead. Even apartment dwellers can reap the rich benefits of leaves. Collect fallen leaves in the fall, since it is best not to allow the leaves to overwinter on your lawn – layers of leaves can harbour pests and plant diseases.

You can bag leaves for later use. Dump them into a lightweight garbage can, place a garbage bag over the top, and upend the contents into the bag. To eliminate bagging of leaves lay a tarp or drop cloth on a cleared area and rake the leaves onto it. Bring together the four corners and carry the leaves to their destination.

There are several ways you can use leaves in your garden. Sheet mulching is the easiest. Simply spread the leaves over the garden beds and add some manure to feed the decay organisms, which are present in the soil. These organisms will break down the leaves to release their nutrients. Dig all of this into the soil and the decomposition will be complete by spring planting time.

If you would rather apply the leaves to your garden in the spring to avoid any leaching of nutrients over the winter, making compost out of them is the way to go. For this process, shredded leaves will

decompose faster, but whole leaves will work as well. A simple compost enclosure can be fashioned by shaping wire mesh into a circular bin. Fill your enclosure with about eight inches (20cm) of leaves and add a one-to-two inch (2-5cm) layer of garden soil. The soil provides decay organisms needed to break down the organic matter.

For most leaf uses, shredding is desirable because it speeds up the decay time. Leaf mold, the end product of decomposition, is an effective carrier for fertilizer when applied as mulch to your plants.

The leafy mulch will feed your plants gradually, as they can use the nutrients; it will also help avoid the burning of newly developing feeder roots.

Apartment dwellers may have a balcony for container gardening, or even window boxes, but the need to transport heavy bags of potting soil several stories up can be a problem. Use leaves

instead; they make an excellent growing medium – lightweight and economical. Leaves also eliminate a need for drainage in your pots as they act as a sponge to hold water so it doesn't pool in the bottom and kill the plant roots. The leafy medium allows for maximum root growth, as it will not harden in your pots the way that soil does. Just fill containers with leaves, topping them with about two inches (5cm) of potting soil. As you water your plants all the stored nutrients will slowly feed them.

Now that you know how valuable leaves can be, don't let this treasure go up in smoke.

Article courtesy of Joyce Tintjer and The Almanac for Farmers and City Folk.





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DEAR COMPOST CLUB MEMBERS:

In this issue of *The Latest Dirt* you will notice a few changes – in the way we present our content, and in the overall look and design of this quarterly newsletter. We’re looking to make at least one other important change, by providing you, our readers and Compost Club members, with an opportunity to contribute and participate in the content of *The Latest Dirt*.

Do you have a great composting tip? A better way of mulching? An organic alternative that you’d like to share with other readers? If so, we encourage you to submit your contribution by way of a letter or an E-mail, and we’ll publish it in a forthcoming edition of *The Latest Dirt*. Your voice is important to the cause of composting and we value the sharing of your thoughts and ideas with the rest of us.

Let’s make the Compost Club a real “family” of folks who believe that, through a simple act such as home composting, we can make a real difference to the world around us. Remember “think globally, act locally”? We look forward to hearing from you!

Steve Young
Coordinator

A WARM WELCOME TO NEW STAFF MEMBERS



Louise Ditmars is our new Elementary Schools Program Educator. It hasn't taken her long to “get down and dirty” with the kids. Her first experiences with children at the Compost Education Centre are detailed in her article *Kids and Worms* on page 3.



The friendly voice of **Pauline Brest van Kempen** is the one you hear when you call the Centre’s hotline or business numbers. Pauline is also taking over the management of our Compost Club membership database and other matters relating to Compost Club activities.

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.

KIDS AND WORMS MAKE PERFECT PARTNERS

What is more rewarding than to see the wonder on a child's face when a red wriggler is placed on his or her small palm? Until the end of November, I will be enjoying the enthusiasm of children while I promote the basics of composting with worms. Diverting organic waste from the landfill has never been more entertaining, and I don't know who's having a better time, me or the kids.



Kids and worms alike get hands-on experience

This fall, two programs were offered to school groups – kindergarten to grade six, preschools and after-school programs. Bookings filled up quickly for both one-hour programs presently costing \$25.00 for groups of up to twenty-five participants.

The ever-popular “Wrigglers at Work” takes kids from the care and feeding of *Eisenia foetida* (red wigglers), through the teamwork of shredding newspaper for worm bedding, and finishes with a review and song. Teachers come away not only with their finished worm bin, but also a trouble-shooting guide. The second program, the “Interactive Site Tour”, combines basic composting theory with “compost tag”, riddles, a garden tour and a song. The most intriguing part for most kids is the chance to smell and taste organic herbs, flowers, fruits and vegetables. So, composting is linked to intense activity and the delights of the garden. Teachers are given a colourful poster and a class set of Dr. Wiggles tattoos after each program.

I am looking forward to meeting even more school groups in 2002 so we can have fun and get dirty learning about the joys of compost. For more information call Pauline at the Centre, 386-9678.

Louise Ditmars

Elementary Schools Program Educator

ON THE AIR AND IN THE NEWS

TELEVISION The Centre was the backdrop for CH Television's noon weather forecast on Thursday, September 20th. Thanks to Gordie Tupper for giving us so much positive exposure.

The Compost Education Centre helped the New VI television station to become “compost friendly” when we were profiled on the Enviro Mental program with Briony Penn and Rick Searle

RADIO Geoff Johnson, our Permaculture specialist and Site Educator made an appearance on CFUV's “Open Line” show last month, resulting in lots of excellent responses from the listening audience.

More recently, Steve Young and Geoff Johnson were guests on the C-FAX Sunday Gardening Show with Jill Stewart Bowen and Neil Knowlton talking about a variety of composting issues on their “Open Line” program.

PRESS If you read the Times-Colonist or the News Group newspapers you may have spotted a couple of “Letters to the Editor”. One letter was in response to the implication of back yard compost bins being responsible for the invasion of rats in Fairfield, the other letter was in support of the banning of burning back yard “wastes” in Central Saanich.

RAIN DOES NOT DAMPEN SPIRITS AT FALL FESTIVAL

The clouds and rain didn't stop the crowds from showing up for our annual Fall Festival and Open House. Almost 100 people stopped in to take part in the various activities. Some purchased our famous “buck-a-bucket” compost, some enjoyed a fun-filled puppet show featuring the Worm Circus, put on by puppeteer Ray Turner, others sampled herbal teas from our own herb gardens or simply toured our demonstration gardens.

A number of people entered the free draw for door prizes and the winners were:

Marjory Blair – North West Garden Guide

Bud Randall – Worm Bin

Christian Beleznai –Kitchen Compost Bin

Grace Carey – Wing Digger

Margaret Lopatecki – Grow Brick

Congratulations to the winners and thanks to everyone who joined in the fun. See you at our next open house in the spring of 2002.

LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED FROM THAT SUMMER DROUGHT

The drought has hopefully had an impact on our attitude toward gardening, says Native Plant and Water Wise garden consultant, Patricia Johnston. She expects gardeners will have noticed the freedom from mowing the lawn, moving sprinklers about the yard, and weeding-and-feeding the lawn. A lawn is a lot of work. Pat suggests eliminating or reducing your lawn, replacing it with a thicket of native shrubs, such as Indian Plum, Mock Orange and Oceanspray, or an evergreen native ground cover, such as Kinnickinick, Oxalis and Wild Strawberry. You can also develop beds of native perennials and bulbs, such as Camas, Fawn Lily, Goldenrod, Lupines and Asters.

Native plants are drought resistant. Once established in your garden they are low maintenance. Native plants are also chemical-free, says Pat. Fertilizers and pesticides are not needed. An annual mulch of compost and leaves is enough to keep them healthy. Another benefit of native plants is their provision of food, shelter and nesting sites which attract birds and butterflies to your yard. A garden of native plants brings a bit of "nature" into our sterile, urban neighbourhoods. Native plants are beautiful, adds Pat Johnston. They feed our souls.



THANKS FOR YOUR DONATIONS

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to the following people for their generosity in donating to the Centre.

Bob Harry

Terry and Petra Gerard

Robin Grant

Tom Richards

Deborah Beldoray

Lynn Marie

Camosun ESL

Gordon Head Allotment Gardens Assn.

THANKS!

Our thanks to Gord Nickel at Cannor Nursery for, once again, supplying us with hand cultivators for our worm bins "at cost" thus enabling us to keep the price of worm bins affordable.

A special thanks to Chris Coleman and Milestones Restaurant for donating two \$20 gift certificates for our volunteer appreciation picnic. Those lucky winners will enjoy some great food and a great view of the Inner Harbour. Thanks again Chris.

We also wish to thank Tom Spetter of Cyan Design for donating two wonderful original prints as prizes for our volunteer appreciation picnic". These prints were created by Tom and won a certificate of merit for computer-aided design at the Canadian Graphic Designers show last year. Tom has also generously donated his time in creating and maintaining our website (www.compost.bc.ca). We are deeply grateful for all your support Tom.

Thanks to Integrity Sales for giving us a BIG discount on soil tests for the Spring Ridge Commons project. Your support goes a long way towards making this community food park a success.

A thank you note to Colleen Gibbons for her helpful contributions to the latest edition of The Latest Dirt. Colleen is the former publisher of the Bermuda Botanical Society's newsletter and her input and comments are deeply appreciated.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU!

We were all sad to hear of the demise of the Gordon Head Allotment Gardens Association, an organization that has provided a source of food, friendship and enjoyment to many residents of the Gordon Head area for over 25 years. We're happy to report that, out of this unfortunate circumstance, came a distinct benefit to the Compost Education Centre as the GHAGA, as part of their dissolution disbursements, donated \$420.44 to us. Our thanks to Colin Reid and all the folks of the GHAGA, we wish them well and hope they will visit us here at the Centre where they will always be welcome.

Here's a riddle from
Doctor Wiggles ...



Why did the worm cross the playground?

To get to the other slide!

SOILS WORKSHOPS FIRST CHOICE IN OUR SURVEY

Thanks to all those who responded to our Compost Club survey, which was sent out with our last edition of *The Latest Dirt*. The purpose of the survey was to discover which topics are of most interest for our Compost Club Workshops, and what days and times are most convenient for members to attend.

The results show that, of those responding, most of you would attend workshops held on Saturday afternoons or Saturday evenings. Next in popularity were Sunday afternoons/evenings, followed by Tuesday evening or Friday evening.

As far as topics were concerned, the responses ranked them in popularity according to the following order:

1. Soils Workshop
2. Composting Toilets & Grey Water Systems
3. Integrated Pest Management
4. Basic Composting Techniques
 - Canning Summer Fruits & Vegetables
 - Hot Composting
 - Naturescaping Your Garden
 - Water Catchment and Distribution
5. Worm Composting
 - Sheet Mulching
 - Organic Food Gardening
 - Advanced Composting Techniques
 - Edible Flowers & Medicinal Plants
6. Xeriscaping (Garden designs that conserve water)
 - Introduction to Permaculture
 - Getting Your Garden Ready For The New Season
 - Planning Your Winter Garden

Other workshops you'd like to see include:

- Meeting the challenge of an old, overgrown garden.
- Blue orchard mason bees
- Native plant gardening
- Perennial veggie & fruits maintenance
- Seed saving

Over the next two months we'll be planning our schedule of workshops and topics for the year 2002 and this, along with other information we collected from our survey, will help ensure that next seasons Compost Club events will be "just what our members ordered".

\$2500 GRANT FOR SPRING RIDGE COMMONS

Imagine a park in the heart of your neighbourhood designed to conserve resources, create native habitat, and educate the public while providing fresh organic food and improving the local quality of life. If you live in the Fernwood area, you may know that the development of such a community food park is already well under way at the corner of Chambers Street and Gladstone Avenue. Indeed, you may be one of many volunteers (working through the GVCEC or the Fernwood Community Association) who have helped to build up the soil, plant fruit shrubs, construct traditional rock walls, or install orchard mason bee boxes in this once barren gravel lot.

We've come a long way over the last two years, especially since this summer, when two enthusiastic local youths were hired on an E-team grant. Sheet mulching, a method of recycling organic waste to enrich and enliven the soil, has been applied to the entire site, and much of this area has already been planted. We've also installed a water-wise irrigation system in one of the beds, and built an arbor for kiwi vines, which will eventually provide shade for a picnic table underneath. A shallow pond and swale has been constructed in one of the beds, and there is even talk of constructing a ferro-cement rain tank to store run-off from an adjacent roof. The momentum of this inspiring project has definitely been building, and building ...

The most exciting new development is that we just received a grant from VanCity for \$2500 to conduct soil testing and to purchase plants for the rest of the site. Yahoo! And an overall design for Spring Ridge Commons should be completed by the end of the year, at which time we will present it at a community meeting. If all goes well, the early spring will find neighbours planting for the future, and what better way is there to build a sense of community than that. Keep an eye on the notice board in the commons for up-coming events, and contact Geoff at the Compost Education Centre if you want to get involved.

SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO LEARN ABOUT COMPOSTING

Our new secondary schools program is now on its way! The Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre is teaming up with students and teachers from Victoria High School to promote composting. After their training, students will complete 30 hours of work experience by volunteering at the Centre and spreading the compost (word, that is). This program fits in with the Grade 11/12 curriculum of the Career and Personal Planning Program (CAPP).

Thank you to the teachers and students who have expressed interest in this program. We are looking forward to working with you!

THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the winter issue is January 15, 2002. 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 credit given to the author (when named) and

THE LATEST DIRT.

VOLUNTEER UPDATE

As the gardens at the Compost Education Centre are put to bed for the winter, it is time to thank those volunteers who worked on site. Without you, the gardens wouldn't have been as healthy!

Our volunteer hike and barbecue on September 16th celebrated the efforts of all the Centre's volunteers. It was great to see so many volunteers out having fun. The location at the South Island Park Headquarters was ideal for the celebration and we hope to make this an annual event. Thank you volunteers for all the time you contributed this year.

Congratulations to Carly Mattes for completing her volunteer hours! Carly showed great self-initiative by setting up a workshop for visiting high school students. Thank you! We are also excited to welcome a new volunteer to the Centre, Nia. Her background in education has been an asset to the elementary schools program.

John Lee is famous! As well as being a very dedicated volunteer, he also had an article published in the October 11th issue of the Globe and Mail. His article, "One-Eyed Jack with Snails in My Ear" humorously detailed his struggle with increasing deafness and vision loss. A very entertaining read! Congratulations, John!



Ready to Renew or Join the Compost Club?

- BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP**
- 10% discount on purchases at participating nurseries and garden centres
 - 10% discount on purchases at the Compost Education Centre
 - Access to resource library at the Compost Education Centre
 - Free admission to Compost Club lectures
 - Free subscription to our newsletter The Latest Dirt

Date		MEMBERSHIP FORM			
Name					
Address			City	Province	Code
Phone (home)	Phone (work)		E-mail		

- New member Renewal
 Senior/Student/Unwaged \$8 Individual \$10 Family \$12 Group/Corporate \$30
 Please send me THE LATEST DIRT via E-mail Please add me to your E-mail Update List
 I would prefer to read THE LATEST DIRT "on-line" at www.compost.bc.ca.
 I would like to increase my support for the Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre's work.
 Enclosed is my **tax deductible donation** for: \$20 \$35 \$50 \$100 \$_____

Total amount enclosed \$ _____

All memberships run one year from date of purchase. Receipts for donations under \$20 will only be issued upon request. Drop off or mail completed forms to the Compost Education Centre, 1216 North Park Street, Victoria, BC V8T 1C9