

THE LATEST DIRT

SUMMER
2003

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER VICTORIA COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE

WORM PIT GRAND OPENING

On May 10th at the Spring Open House at the Centre, ten pounds of red wiggler worms were added to their new home - a worm pit! Located 12 inches below ground and made from cinder blocks, the worm pit will help fill the need for worms for the Centre's schools program.

While the crowd looked on in eager anticipation, City of Victoria Councillor Dean Fortin cut the ribbon covering the worm pit, thanked contributors, and read the poem, "Ode to a Red Wiggler Worm". Guests were then invited to add worms, with Dr. Wiggles the composting worm giving them a hand.

Thank you to all the volunteers, staff, and supporters who contributed funds, supplies, time (and worms) to the project

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Above: Robin Gillmor and Chris Wells put the finishing touches on the worm pit.

Thank you very much to the following organizations for generously supplying food and equipment for our Worm Pit Grand Opening and Spring Open House:

Bubby Rose's Bakery

Cascadia Bakery

City of Victoria

Fernwood Community Centre

The Parsonage Café

Rising Star Bakery Whole Foods

Rocky Mountain Muffin Co.

Silk Road Aromatherapy & Tea Co.

Ode to a Red Wiggler Worm

by Chris Wells and Lynn Marie

Composting Worm, you wiggle so red
We will make sure that you are well fed
With kitchen scraps chopped up small
So that you have no trouble eating them all
O wonderful worm, you do us good will
By keeping our waste out of the Landfill
The castings you make are full of wealth
They give our plants magnificent health

Thank you, thank you little red one
Watching you work is always such fun



ROTARY CLUB FUNDS WHEELCHAIR RAMP

Thanks to a grant from the Rotary Club of Victoria, the Centre now has a new wheelchair ramp for the bathroom. Because of this funding, our site is now fully wheelchair accessible.

Thank you!



The Greater Victoria

**COMPOST
EDUCATION
CENTRE**

Staff

Louise Ditmars
Lynn Marie
Chris Wells

Contact us at

1216 North Park Street (at Chambers)
Victoria BC V8T 1C9

Hours of Operation

Wed. to Sat. 10 am to 4 pm
Closed on statutory holidays,
long weekends
and the month of December

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THE LATEST DIRT

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly Compost Club Workshops

Saturdays 2pm-4pm

Free for Compost Club members, \$5.00 for non-members

Call 386-9676 to register

Garden Soil Amendments July 12
Understanding Garden Soils Aug. 16
Seed Saving Sep. 13

Monthly Composting Basics Workshop

Saturdays 2pm-4pm

Free

July 5 Aug 9 Sep 6

Pesticide Free Naturally! Workshops

Wednesdays 7pm-9pm

Admission by donation. Call City Green to register: 381-9995

Intro to Organic Principles and Practices Sept 10
Fruit Tree Maintenance Sept 24

Compost Educator Volunteer Training Program

July 19 to 20 Saturday and Sunday

10 am-5 pm

Workshops and events take place at the Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre at 1216 North Park Street unless otherwise noted. This schedule may change without notice. Call 386-WORM for confirmation on dates and times.

VOLUNTEER UPDATE AND OPPORTUNITIES

Become a Compost Educator

Is it your dream to become an environmental educator? Then plan to take part in our Compost Educator Volunteer Training Program (C.E.P.) on July 19th and 20th. The C.E.P. will put you on the road to becoming a Master Composter and provide you with the skills and knowledge necessary to educate the public about composting. The two-day session will explore the various aspects of backyard composting, organic gardening, as well as the ever-more-popular worm composting. Another important topic will be outreach skills: how to inform and respond to queries from the public. After completing a 30-hour practicum, \$90 of your \$100 deposit will be refunded, and a manual is also provided for future reference. Call Louise at 386-WORM for more information and to register.

Garden Stewards Needed

The rainy season is over and the drought season has begun. If you are interested in gardening, we could really use your help with watering and garden maintenance at the Compost Education Centre and at Spring Ridge Commons. To become a garden steward, call Chris at 386-WORM.

PLANTS FOR SALE

New to the compost store this season- plants for sale! We currently have several different varieties of squash plants for \$1.00 each, and also have some willow cuttings ready for planting. We will also be starting some winter veggies such as Brussels sprouts and purple sprouting broccoli. Call the Centre at 386-WORM or visit us at 1216 North Park from 10-4 Wednesday to Saturday.

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.

DESIGNING A GARDEN TO ATTRACT BIRDS

By Angela Deering, Naturescape, B.C.



Image courtesy of Naturescape BC

Birds are one of the easiest kinds of wildlife to attract in an urban area. With some planning and some planting, you can create a garden that birds will use.

Before you begin designing your bird garden, be sure to visit several nearby natural areas, such as Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary or Goldstream Park. A visit to these areas will give you a sense of what kinds of plants and plant communities make up the natural bird habitat.

The next step is to make a drawing of your property and its perimeter, and sketch in all of your existing plants, especially trees and shrubs. With this map in hand, you'll be able to identify the resources you already have for attracting birds. This sketch will also help you to plan additional plantings for your yard.

Below are 12 general guidelines on how to design a garden that appeals to both birds and people.

1. Re-create the layers of plant growth found in local natural areas.

All natural areas are composed of various layers of plant growth. Birds use most or all of these various layers for a multitude of purposes. The key is to plant tall forest-interior trees along the periphery of your property; a bit closer to the house, plant under story trees, then large shrubs, small shrubs, and, closer still, groundcovers such as bunch grasses and wildflowers. If your garden already has large trees, establish islands of variable-height plantings around them.

2. Select plants with an eye to providing nutritional foods during different seasons.

Different birds require different kinds of foods in different seasons. Be sure to include a variety of plants that can help sustain the various birds that visit your garden year round. Plants such as *Vaccinium* species (Blueberry and huckleberry), *Arbutus*, *Cascara*, Mock Orange, Western red cedar, Hazelnut, *Ribes* Species (Currants and Gooseberries), Bee Balm, Blue elderberry, and stonecrop have excellent food value for birds. As well, remember that insects are also important to the diet of many birds.

3. Plant small trees and shrubs in same-species clumps.

This is necessary for pollination of dioecious shrubs such as Indian Plum, with separate male and female plants. Even for species with flowers of both sexes on the same plant, planting in clumps can boost fruit yields. Clumps also benefit birds by providing highly visible, massed displays of flowers and fruit. To create a natural look, avoid planting trees and shrubs in rows, and for aesthetic reasons, plant odd numbers of specimens in rounded patches.

4. Provide at least one clump of conifers.

Birds find shelter in evergreen conifers during storms and winter weather and prefer these clumps for roosting (sleeping) and nesting sites.

5. Spare a dead tree (snag) for the birds.

Birds tend to perch in dead trees, which they use as singing posts to defend their territories. It's also a good idea to leave a few dead branches on live trees for perches. Dead and dying trees are vital habitat elements and if you do not have one you can always plant an old log (upright) in your garden to act as one.

6. Leave vines or plant them.

Vines such as clematis or western trumpet honey-suckle provide birds with perches, nesting places, and leaf surfaces from which insect-eaters such as warblers and kinglets can glean good, abundant fruit crops.

7. Limit the size of your lawn.

A manicured lawn doesn't provide much in the way of food or habitat for birds. You can reduce the area dedicated to grass, replacing it with other low-maintenance plants, including native wildflowers and grasses, shrubs and woodland groundcovers.

8. Avoid invasive non-native plants.

Invasive non-native plants are still commonly available through many nurseries, in part because some provide food and cover for wildlife. However, these plants can rapidly invade natural areas, crowding out diverse mixes of native plants that are much more valuable to wildlife.

9. Supply a source of water.

Birds get much of the water they need from foods, but they will readily use open water sources for drinking and bathing. Birds need water not only for drinking but also to cool themselves in the heat of the summer. Hummingbirds sometimes bathe in a few drops of water that collect in the midribs of large leaves, but most land birds prefer to drink and bathe in shallow puddles and pools, and will readily use birdbaths.

10. Provide nest boxes.

The simplest way to increase the variety of birds nesting on your property is to provide nest boxes, which substitute for natural tree cavities. Birds that nest in tree cavities often lack suitable nesting places in urban areas.

11. Leave some leaf litter for the birds.

Rather than raking leaves into a pile for roadside pick-up, use them to create feeding places for ground-feeding birds. Rake the leaves in the fall, creating beds 5-6" inches thick; by spring, they will have decomposed just enough to attract a good supply of earthworms, insects, and other animals on which the birds feed.

12. Avoid the use of pesticides

Some pesticides harm birds directly. Others kill or contaminate insects and other creatures on which many birds feed. Please think twice about applying these chemicals to your yard. Indeed, the more insects you provide the more food you will have for your birds to enjoy.

SOW BUGS IN THE COMPOST AND GARDEN

Sow bugs, also referred to as pill bugs and wood bugs, are a beneficial and natural part of the decomposition process in a compost pile. They have a gray/brown armoured body, and feed on decaying vegetation (first-level consumers).

Although high numbers of sow bugs in the composter are not a cause for concern, in the garden they can damage young seedlings.

If you do end up with an abundance of sow bugs in your garden, try this trap suggested by Carolyn Herriot, owner and operator of the Garden Path Organic Plant Nursery.

Sow bug Traps

- 1 small plastic (margarine) container w/ lid
- 2 Tbsp. cornmeal
- Scissors

Cut small hole at the base of container, large enough and close enough to the bottom to allow bugs to climb in. Place corn meal into container. Place container into area infested with sow bugs. After feeding on the cornmeal the bugs will drink and explode! Empty frequently.

COMPOST TIP



Here is a tip from Susan Underwood, a creative composter from the Fraser Valley:

I turned the 'kitchen' compost yesterday – for the first time in quite a while, admittedly, and with some trepidation as it hadn't been turned for such a long time, and I thought it might just be a sludgy mess. First fork-over and my apprehension disappeared. It is the most exquisite compost ever and I think we can attribute it to our present practice of dumping coffee grounds into newspaper and wrapping it up in a little bundle before putting it into the kitchen bucket. That means there is a fair amount of newspaper interspersed through out the compost and the worms just love it!

Additional note: Susan's tip incorporates "brown" material into the composter and creates a nice balance with the "green" coffee grounds. This technique would probably work well with other kinds of wet, "green" kitchen scraps such as the pulp from a melon.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ELECTS NEW BOARD MEMBER

At the AGM on March 27, Hilary Duinker was the newest member elected to the Board of Directors. Hilary graduated from the Master Composter Volunteer Training Program in 2001 and has been involved in outreach and site work at the Centre. We welcome back 2002 board members Colleen Loader, Pam Dinn, Tom Watkins, Kathy Cook, and Angela Deering.

Thank you to University of Victoria's Paul West for his very informative presentation on pesticides and the "precautionary principle". Thank you also to Neil Williams for facilitating the election of board members.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

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

Pat McMahon	Kathryn Cook
Angela Deering	Elizabeth Garrett
Elly Molnar	David Greig

Thank you also to the following organizations who generously donated supplies and services to the Compost Education Centre:

Cook Street Do-It Centre	Quick Haul
Wes-Tech Irrigation	Victoria High School
Solstice Café	Share Organics

UPCOMING COB WORKSHOP

Interested in learning more about Cob? Cob is a building material that has been used for centuries by people all over the world. It is a mixture of earth, sand, clay, and water and is an efficient, cheap, and environmentally friendly building material.

On August 23 from 10:00 to 4:00, the Centre will be holding a free "working workshop" to rebuild the cob around our tiered bathtub water garden. These



Creating Cob:
Many feet make light work!

bathtubs fill with water funnelled by rain barrels and are ideal for growing various types of water loving plants. At the workshop, the cob will be removed, wet down, amended with sand, and then re-applied. To register, or for more information, call Chris at 386-WORM.

THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the fall issue is August 26, 2003. 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**.

