



THE LATEST DIRT Summer 2007

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER VICTORIA COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE

Waterwise Gardening for Food Security

By Caitlyn Vernon

Summer droughts are becoming commonplace here in Victoria, and the accompanying water restrictions will only become more severe as climate change results in drier summers. How do we keep our plants alive to nourish ourselves and sustain our environment when we no longer have abundant sources of fresh water? The Compost Education Centre offers tips for water conservation in your yard and garden that will save you money and supply you with food through the dry summer months.

The first step in water conservation is to reduce the size of your lawn, since turf grass requires more water than many other plants. Set aside an area for recreation, water it sparingly, and convert the rest of your lawn into a waterwise garden by planting drought tolerant plants. This doesn't mean that you will have only rock and cactus – in our climate there are many lush and beautiful plants that need little or no irrigation once they are established in your garden.

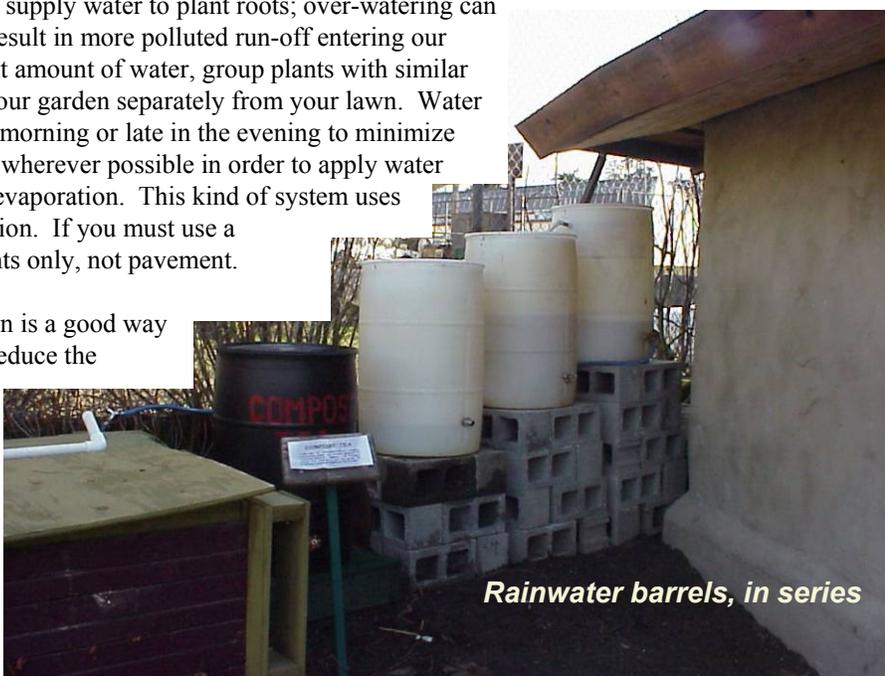
The second step to using less water is to ensure that your soil has the capability to retain moisture. Water applied to sandy soil runs off immediately, whereas if you have added organic material (such as compost) to your soil it will absorb and store the water, making it available to plants when they need it. Mulching is another technique to conserve soil moisture: by applying organic material to the top of the soil you can reduce water demand by as much as 40 percent by keeping the soil cooler, eliminating weed competition, and reducing evaporation from the soil surface.

The most important aspect of waterwise gardening is to water effectively. Careless irrigation wastes as much as one-half of the water applied to gardens, with much of it ending up on driveways and sidewalks. To water effectively, it is important to water only when plants are thirsty, make sure water gets to the plant roots, and provide the right amount of water. As a general rule, water established trees and shrubs only if they are showing signs of drought stress such as leaf wilting or yellowing. Annual and perennial plants should be watered before they show signs of stress – you can determine if they need water by checking the soil moisture. It is time to irrigate when the top 2-3 inches of soil are dry.

Under-watering wets the surface soil but doesn't supply water to plant roots; over-watering can inhibit nutrient availability, rot plant roots, and result in more polluted run-off entering our ocean. To ensure that you are providing the right amount of water, group plants with similar water needs together in garden beds and water your garden separately from your lawn. Water slowly to prevent run-off, and water early in the morning or late in the evening to minimize evaporation. Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation wherever possible in order to apply water directly to plants and minimize water wasted to evaporation. This kind of system uses as much as 60% less water than sprinkler irrigation. If you must use a sprinkler, set it on a timer and set it to water plants only, not pavement.

Finally, collecting rainwater to use in your garden is a good way to make your garden more self-sustainable and reduce the demand of water from Victoria's reservoirs. Collecting rainwater is a cheap and easy way to harvest the abundance of water in the winter and save it for a sunny day when the garden needs it most.

Become a waterwise gardener by attending our upcoming workshops on waterwise gardening, building healthy soils, and rainwater harvesting.



Rainwater barrels, in series



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

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Natalie Cushing
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**Contributors to this issue of
THE LATEST DIRT**

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Newsletter Formatting

Colleen Loader

AGM Welcomes New Board Members

In April, we held our Annual General Meeting which saw the election of Beverley Cattrall and Natalie Cushing as new board members. We also welcomed back Kathryn Cook, Janet Hockin, Anke Bergner and Katie Josephson. A huge thanks goes to Angela Deering who stepped down from the board after 8 years of service, we were proud to provide her with an honorary lifetime membership for her dedication and commitment.

Our special thanks as well to Neil Williams, who facilitated the election of the officers for the eighth year in row.

Our Board of Directors for 2007 is:

- Janet Hockin – President
- Kathryn Cook – Vice-President
- Natalie Cushing – Secretary
- Beverley Cattrall – Treasurer
- Katie Josephson – Member at Large
- Anke Bergner – Member at Large & CRD Representative

Member Survey

Dear Compost Club members,

Thank you for your ongoing support of the Compost Education Centre. As you know, one of the ways in which we implement our mandate of composting and conservation is by selling composting and organic gardening supplies. By doing so we are promoting composting and organic gardening within the region, and the proceeds from the sales support our educational programs. We are considering carrying a wider variety of composting and gardening supplies for sale here at the Centre. Samples are on display – please come by and take a look! We will be conducting a customer survey to help us determine which additional composting and gardening supplies to begin selling. The survey will be online soon – we will contact you once it is ready and would really appreciate any feedback you can provide on the value of these new products.

Thanks in advance for taking the time to fill out the survey. We value your input.

Warm Regards,

*Sonya Sundberg
Executive Director*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

G. Leekha	R. Gillmor	B. Derrier	E. Watanabe
P. & E. Mulvey	A. Langlois	E. Noel	G. Sanderson
T. Mellor	K. Cook	S. Jordon	

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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Topic	Time	Cost
July 7	Waterwise Gardening	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
July 7	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
July 14	Building Healthy Soils	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
Aug 11	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Sept 8	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	Free
Sept 14-16	Compost Educator	Fri eve,	
	Volunteer Training	Sat, Sun	\$100, \$85 refundable after practicum
Sept 22	Seed Saving	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)

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

Organic Plant Sale a Success!

The 4th Annual Organic Plant Sale at the Compost Education Centre was a huge success! On May 12th, close to 600 people visited the Centre to purchase perennial and annual plants from local organic growers, including rare and heirloom varieties. This market style event was a great opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of locally grown, pesticide-free plant propagation and production.

Visitors to the Centre enjoyed the chance to visit the gardens and take site tours – gaining new ideas for their home gardens and learning about the importance of gardening without pesticides, composting and biodiversity approaches to gardening. A special thank you to all of our volunteers who offered site tours and helped make the event run smoothly.



Fact Sheet Series Now Available!

Our new fact sheets contain useful information that will help you get started composting and answer many of your composting questions. From what you can and can't put into a compost bin, to how to use a digester or compost your pet waste, these fact sheets are full of easy to understand composting tips. Learn about collecting leaves in the fall, how to build your own hot compost, and the science of compost ecology. These fact sheets can be downloaded for free on our website! Paper copies are available, by donation, at the Centre.

Fact Sheet Topics:

- #1 Backyard Composting
- #2 Vermicomposting:
Composting indoors with worms
- #3 Backyard Food Digesters
- #4 Hot Composting
- #5 Trench Composting
- #6 Urban Leaves
- #7 Mulching
- #8 Compost Ecology

2007 Subsidized Bin Sale Draws a Huge Crowd!

A total of 1,350 backyard compost bins were sold within just a few hours on Saturday June 2nd, evidence that interest in backyard composting continues to grow! This one-day event was a great opportunity to provide tips and techniques for effective composting and to let the public know about the services provided by the Compost Education Centre. Purchasers also learned how composting reduces greenhouse gas emissions and were invited to learn more about waste reduction strategies in the Capital Regional District.

Many thanks to all of our sponsors who made this day possible. In particular, to the Capital Regional District for sponsoring the event and to Pearkes Recreation Centre for hosting the event. As well, the success of the bin sale depended on the help of a very large and dedicated team of more than 20 volunteers! A huge thank you to each and every one of you for helping out, we couldn't have done it without you.



Black Gold Rush Award Prizes

The Black Gold Rush Challenge is well underway as we move into the summer composting season. We held our first prize draw for challenge participants in the first week of June. Prizes were given out from The Good Planet Company, Lush, Sage Creek, and Silk Road. Prize details and winner profiles are now posted on our website (www.compost.bc.ca). The next prize draw will be in the first week of September – for more information on how to join the challenge visit our website or call 386-WORM.



Black Gold Rush Sponsor Profile: City Green Solutions



In June we unveiled the Black Gold Express Mobile Garden Trailer at the subsidized bin sale. This trailer was graciously donated by our partner organization City Green Solutions (City Green). City Green is a non-profit organization whose mission is to empower people and organizations to make lifestyle changes that will enhance their health and save them money by reducing their environmental impact. City Green's Certified Energy Advisors help homeowners access up to \$5000 in ecoENERGY grants for upgrades to home insulation, heating systems, windows, hot water heating and more! City Green staff consistently choose to engage with projects, partners and activities that reflect these values through social responsibility and community outreach. They have contributed to the Black Gold Rush program through a variety of in-kind donations and cross promotions. For more information please visit: <http://www.citygreen.ca/community/responsibility.aspx>

NEW EDUCATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR!

In February, the Centre welcomed **Maurita Prato** as the new Education Program Coordinator. Maurita brings her extensive knowledge in organic farming and years of teaching experience. For the past 3 years she has run her own small farming business and she recently completed a degree at UVic in Political Science and Environmental Studies as well as an Environmental Restoration Diploma. Maurita's passion for teaching stems from her 10 years of work in outdoor education with various camps and as a guide for Outward Bound in South Africa and the USA. Here at the Centre she is combining her teaching and farming knowledge to deliver educational and inspiring programs to schools and community groups. She is also coordinating our network of volunteers who provide so much assistance to all aspects of the Centre. If you haven't already been introduced, please say hi to Maurita when you stop by. Welcome Maurita!

NEW SITE MANAGER!

Angela Moran joined the Compost Education Centre team in January as the new Site Manager, taking over from Karen Hawbolt who returned to farming on Salt Spring Island. Angela brings with her a wide range of experience in gardening and farming. It was during her degree in Environmental Policy and Sociology that Angela was first introduced to permaculture, and the desire for practical experience led her on a three year Wwoofing adventure through the Yukon, BC, Costa Rica and Panama. In 2005, Angela completed the Linnaea Ecological Gardening Program. In 2006, Angela took over the lease of Up From the Ashes: City Farm where she and her farm partner grow fresh, organic veggies in Fernwood for Fernwood families and Mo:Le restaurant. At the Compost Ed Centre, Angela will be teaching workshops, managing the worm breeding program, and looking after the gardens and demonstration site. She is overjoyed at the opportunity to be part of such a great team working so hard to educate the public. Come and admire the beautiful gardens that are the fruit of Angela's hard work!

Angela Moran, Site Manager
&
Maurita Prato, Education Program Coordinator



THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the Fall issue is August 15th, 2007. 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**.

