

THE LATEST DIRT

Fall
2007

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER VICTORIA COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE

Seeds of Security

By Maurita Prato

Seed saving is an essential step in the movement towards food security. In a world where genetic engineering and corporate seed ownership is on the rise, having a basic understanding of how to save seed helps strengthen self-reliance.

This article will outline some of the basics around small-scale seed saving. It is important to realize that in order to have 'true' genetic seed, a large area of monocrop or otherwise isolated plant varieties are necessary. However, even with a small amount of genetic drift seeds are still viable and vigorous if you understand some of the basics around how plants make seed, and how to best go about collecting and storing seed.

In setting up the seed garden, we must first understand how different plants create seed. The self-pollinators such as tomatoes, beans, lettuce, peas and amaranth, have 'perfect flowers' or flowers that hold both male and female parts. In self-pollinating varieties the female stigma (pollen tube and ovules) and the male anther (bearing pollen) are naturally in contact with each other within the flower. Because of this, these plants seldom cross-pollinate, so you can grow several varieties side by side, and collect seed that are relatively genetically 'true'.

The cross-pollinators such as chard, spinach, squash, cucumbers, basil, cabbage and other brassicas have imperfect flowers, or separate male and female flowers that need pollen carriers such as insects, wind or humans. Because of this, cross-pollination often occurs. When cross-pollination occurs the seed is genetically altered from the parent and may be unviable or simply undesirable when planted. In order to avoid cross-pollination of crop varieties with imperfect flowers, the seed grower must isolate the desired crop variety. One way to do this is by growing only one variety of each plant subspecies. For example, if you want to save seed from the cucurbit family (cucumbers/squash/melons) you should choose one variety of cucumber, one melon, one summer squash and one pumpkin, etc. You might even try to synchronize variety choices with your neighbours. Otherwise you can use isolation methods such as caging, or hand pollination. Although these methods are too detailed for the scope of this article, information for such methods can be found in the cited information at the end of this article.



Maurita gathers seed in the garden at the Centre

Choosing seed plants:

When you are looking for the best plants to harvest seed from, choose the healthiest plants with the biggest fruits or leaves (edible part of the plant). Tag those plants in the garden so that you do not harvest from them for eating. Let these plants live out their lifecycle. Flowers will turn brown and appear dried out, lettuces will bolt and produce 'puffs' of seed (like dandelions), brassicas will develop brown pods full of small round dark seeds, tomatoes will become very ripe, and squashes, cucumbers and melons will be large and very ripe. Try to harvest seed before it drops or is blown to the ground. For lighter, fruitless seeds, use a bucket and clip off seed heads, clusters or pods. Find a protected location to dry the seed heads where they will be out of the elements.

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THE LATEST DIRT

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A Fond Farewell from Sonya



Just over 8 months ago, I began on a new “project” which has had fruitful results – my husband and I are thrilled to be welcoming a new baby to our household shortly. After 2 years of working with our dynamic and dedicated team of staff, board, volunteers and community partners, I will be taking a one year maternity leave from my position as Executive Director. Most of you know me as being tied to my computer, immersed in planning and reports, so I am looking forward to getting my hands in the dirt again come spring with baby in tow! I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Centre and look forward to hearing about the exciting endeavours it embarks upon over this next year. I will miss you all, happy composting and gardening!

New Staff Member!

In late June, Gregory Smythe joined the Compost Education Centre as the new Office Administrator & Communications Assistant. Possessing a background in education, community development and sociology, Greg is passionate about community driven sustainability initiatives. His work experiences in Canada, United States, The Gambia (West Africa) and South Korea have taught him that the most sustainable community projects are immediately relative, inclusive, contextually appropriate and based on participatory education. With recent earthen masonry experience in Portland Oregon and locally on Mayne Island, Greg loves to chat about earthen building with cob and alternative building materials. He’s equally excited by inspirational films and performance poetry that emphasise the positive choices we can make to nurture a green and ecologically integrated relationship with our neighbours and world around us. He looks forward to greeting you at the centre to discuss the wonderful world of composting and sustainable living. Welcome Greg!



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.

Black Gold Rush Sponsor Profile



The Black Gold Rush program is supported by many wonderful sponsors who have generously donated their products and services. This season we would like to recognize the Victoria Car Share Co-operative whose vehicles have faithfully delivered us to our many outreach and education events throughout the CRD. The Victoria Car Share Co-operative is Victoria's provider of transportation choice and mobility without car ownership. Located in the municipalities of Victoria, Oak Bay, Saanich and Central Saanich their fleet of 11 vehicles is shared by 172 members. As the membership grows, cars will be added to more neighbourhoods. Car sharing contributes to urban health by reducing traffic congestion and noise, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, and contributing to a more vibrant cityscape with people, rather than cars at the core. For more information about Victoria Car Share Cooperative, they can be reached at (250) 995-0265.



Black Gold Rush Challenge

Ready, Set, Schooooo!

Sign Your Class up for the Black Gold Rush Challenge!

School is back in session and we'd like to encourage classrooms to kick off the year by getting involved in the Black Gold Rush Challenge. If your class is already composting they can register for the challenge online and get started tracking how much goes into the compost bin. Everyone who is registered for the challenge is eligible to win quarterly draw prizes and classrooms and clubs that excel in the challenge will be recognized at an awards ceremony at the end of the school year. To learn more about the connections between composting and climate change and how composting can reduce green house gas emissions, call us to book your class for one of our Black Gold workshops.



Sustainable Earthen Masonry: Cob at the Compost Ed. Center



Stephanie and Kathy complete final application of the natural plaster finish

C – O – B. Cob. No, it's not the type that corn comes on but it's still Deee-licious (in a muddy kind of way). Consisting of clay, sand, straw, water and a whole lot of community sprit, cob is a sustainable earthen masonry technique that originated in Europe around 800 years ago and has been recently revived by building enthusiasts throughout North America. A cousin to adobe, cob is an incredibly versatile and sculptable building medium that can be used to construct gorgeous all-natural walls, benches, sheds and entire homes! Best of all are its dirt cheap material costs and the fact that it's completely recyclable!

In June, we stomped some cob of our own to refurbish the cob bathtub ponds at the Centre. With the expert guidance of local cobber, Stephanie Enevoldsen, workshop participants and volunteers built upon a rock foundation to sculpt in our garden display. After replacing the water plants a

final, smooth, natural plaster finish was added this September. Good times and good cob-versations were had by all. To the many participants involved – you've left us with a beautiful, sustainable and educational perma-sculptured garden display to share with our visitors. Thank you!

THANKS VOLUNTEERS!

The Compost Education Centre would not continue to thrive if not for the committed and wonderful efforts of our volunteers. As a way of saying "Thank-You" to our volunteers, we will be offering a free tour and lunch at O.U.R. Ecovillage in Shawnigan Lake, this October 14th. O.U.R. Ecovillage is a place of "Community with Earth in Mind", full of wonderful gardens, natural buildings, and inspiring ideas. If you haven't yet been up to the Ecovillage, you will not want to miss this opportunity. For more info visit their website at: www.ourecovillage.org. To participate in this tour, you should be an active volunteer at the centre. All interested participants are required to register by e-mailing Maurita at outreach@compost.bc.ca or by calling the centre.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Topic	Time	Cost
Sept 14-16	Compost Educator Volunteer Training	Fri eve, Sat, Sun	\$100, \$85 refundable after practicum
Sept 22	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	FREE
Sept 22	Seed Saving	2-4pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
Oct. 13	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	FREE
Oct. 13	Rainwater Harvesting	2-4 pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
Oct. 20	Key Permaculture Plants	2-4 pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
Nov. 3-4	PUMPKIN SMASH	10am-3pm	By Donation – See website for details.
Nov.10	Composting Basics	11am-1pm	FREE
Nov. 10	Native Plants	2-4 pm	\$15 (Members refer to new policy)
DECEMBER	CENTRE CLOSED TILL JANUARY		

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

Seeds of Security *(continued from page 1)*

Cleaning Seed- Dry Cleaning method:

After the seeds have dried out you will want to separate the seed from the chaff. Chaff is the part of the seed head or pod that held the seed onto the plant and protects the seed, but is not part of the viable seed itself. There are a few different methods of cleaning dry seed. One is a screening method. Screening is done by crushing seeds and chaff and then pouring them through a screen or a series of screens. The small heavy seed will fall through but the lighter larger chaff will not. A more common folk method is winnowing. Winnowing involves blowing away the larger and lighter particles. You can use either the wind or a fan to actively clean your seed. If using the wind, you may want to use a large, shallow bowl shaped container to throw and catch the crushed seed. While in the air the chaff will blow off and the heavier seed will fall to the bottom. Alternatively the fan method works well, with a 3 speed fan working the best. Start with the fan on a low setting aimed at the crushed seed and chaff. By experimenting with fan speeds you can get a relatively accurate separation of seed and chaff. The heavier and darker seed that remains closest to the fan is the most vigorous.

Wet Cleaning:

Many seeds found within fruits need to ferment in their own juices for 24-96 hours before being dried. Fermentation mimics a natural over-ripening process, which eliminates viruses and separates fertile from infertile seeds. Seeds such as tomatoes and cucumbers should be scooped out and placed in a jar or container with a small amount of water and a screen or cheesecloth lid, and left in the sun. The water should be around 60-75 degrees. In this process fertile seeds will sink to the bottom, while infertile seeds and pulp will float to the top. After fermentation, pour off pulp and infertile seeds. Rinse fertile seeds with fresh water and spread out on a screen until completely dry.

Storing Seed:

If stored properly most seeds will remain viable for at least 3 years. Always remember to clearly label your seed varieties, to avoid any confusion in the spring. Proper seed storage means that seeds are stored in cool, dry and dark conditions at all times. In fact, the cooler the storage the longer the seed will last (provided it stays dry).

Additional information can be found in: “Gone To Seed” by Richard Pecorro and “Seed growing for the gardener and small farmer” by Douglas Miller.

Survey Results

We'd like to thank all people that responded to our recent “new products” feasibility survey. Your answers will assist our Board of Directors to guide the Compost Ed. Centre in new and sustainable directions. Stay tuned to future email and newsletter updates for further announcements on this topic as they develop.

THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the winter issue is January 15th, 2008. 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.

