

THE LATEST DIRT

SPRING
2003

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER VICTORIA COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE

SPRING RIDGE COMMONS WANTS YOU!

By Geoff Johnson

Imagine a green space in the heart of your neighbourhood designed to provide fresh organic food, conserve and recycle resources, create native bird/insect habitat, and generally improve the local quality of life. If you live in the Fernwood area, you may be aware that the development of such a “community habitat park” is already well underway at Spring Ridge Commons (S.R.C.) at the corner of Chambers St and Gladstone Ave. Indeed you may be one of many volunteers (working through the Compost Education Centre or the Fernwood Community Association) who have helped to build up the soil, plant fruit trees, construct traditional rock walls, or install orchard mason bee boxes in this once barren gravel lot.

The site has certainly come a long way over the last 4 years, having been literally transformed through the will and vision of local folks into the young forest of useful plants that is now found there. In order to provide enough fertility and moisture retention to support these plantings a composting method called sheet mulching was utilized throughout the commons to enrich and enliven its soil. Volunteers layered cardboard, produce waste from local grocery stores, leaves, okara (tofu by-product), yard waste and other materials to produce several new inches of biologically active humus on each of the beds. Although we never measured exactly how much garbage we diverted from the waste stream, it must have been at least several tonnes.

I've been coordinating S.R.C. for the past 4 years, but am now moving away to participate in a long-term permaculture training program. The entire site has been mulched, designed and planted, but believe me, there is still much to do in terms of establishing, maintaining, and further developing the system. If you want to see this amazing and unique community project continue, and are interested in gaining experience in organic gardening, community development, and/or volunteer coordination, there are three main ways you can contribute.

First, you can phone the Compost Education Centre and sign up to volunteer regularly at the commons. We'll let you know about upcoming work parties, which are awesome opportunities not only to contribute, but also to learn about organic gardening and permaculture design.

The second way is to become a Spring Ridge steward by temporarily “adopting” a bed. This involves signing on to a weekly weeding and watering schedule for a part of the site from May through Sept.

Finally, you can take on an aspect of coordinating the project by joining the freshly formed S.R.C. coordination group. This could involve anything from phoning a list of volunteers once a month to planning work parties or designing educational signs for the site. This tends to be a really rewarding area to work in, and it's actually where we need the most help right now.

In addition to being great in and of itself, Spring Ridge Commons has the vital potential to demonstrate how people can cooperate to cultivate common abundance right in their own neighbourhoods. If it continues to be successful, the project will serve as a model for how many other public urban spaces can be more effectively used to foster food security, a sense of place/ community, and overall sustainability. It will take the sustained effort of many volunteers to help effect this kind of paradigm shift. When people lead, leaders follow. Imagine a community habitat park, supported by both the city and local folks, in every neighbourhood.





Staff

Louise Ditmars
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Lynn Marie
Chris Wells

Contact us at

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

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Native Plant Study Group -
Pam Sinclair and Jean Forrest

Naturescape B.C.

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature
Sanctuary

Geoff Johnson

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Newsletter Formatting

Colleen Loader

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, March 27, 7-9 pm
Fernwood Community Association

PAUL WEST TO SPEAK ABOUT PESTICIDES AT AGM

The Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre (Victoria Compost and Conservation Education Society) will be holding its Annual General Meeting on Thursday March 27, from 7pm-9pm at the Fernwood Community Association (1923 Fernwood Road). Doors open at 7:00, with the meeting portion commencing at 7:15. Refreshments will be provided.

At 8:15, guest speaker Paul West will be talking about the urban cosmetic use of pesticides, their health and environmental consequences, and their alternatives. This event is free to both members and nonmembers.

If you have been a Compost Club member for a month or longer, you are eligible to vote for the Board of Directors. If you would like to nominate someone for the Board, please contact Lynn at 386-9676. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly Compost Club Workshops

*Free for Compost Club members, \$5.00 for non-members
Call 386-9676 to register*

Naturescaping Your Yard	Apr. 12
Winter Gardening	May 10
Winter Gardening	June 14

Monthly Composting Basics Workshop

Free

Saturdays 2pm-4pm

Apr. 5 May 3 June 7

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.

GEOFF JOHNSON OFF ON PERMACULTURE ADVENTURE

Geoff Johnson has been the site educator at the Centre for three and a half years and has become well known for his organic gardening workshops and his annual permaculture course. He has also been very involved in redesigning and managing the demonstration gardens and coordinating the Spring Ridge Commons edible food park on Gladstone and Chambers. To continue his professional development, he will be taking a 6-month leave of absence to participate in a permaculture training program on Orcas Island. We look forward to his return in October and wish him good luck.

In Geoff's absence, Chris Wells will be filling the position of site educator. Chris Wells is an experienced organic gardener who graduated from the Master Composter Program at the Centre in 2001. He has since been an active volunteer on site and at community outreach events. Welcome aboard, Chris.

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.

So, you've made the decision -- it's time to incorporate native plants into your landscape and convert your yard into what Nature originally intended. Native plants not only attract beneficial insects and other native wildlife, but also conserve water and require little maintenance. Here are a few ways to acquire native plant species.

Buy from local nurseries

Supporting local nurseries that sell native plants means that the nurseries will continue to thrive and be a source of native species as more people realize their benefits and choose to garden with them. Some local nurseries are:

Fraser's Thimble Farms, Saltspring Island
250-537-5788

Natural Resource Native Plant Nursery, Duncan
250-748-0684

Woodland Native Plant Nursery, Metchosin
250-812-5930
(They propagate all their own plants, from local stock)

Russell Nursery, North Saanich
250-656-0384

Streamside Native Plants, Courtenay
250-388-7509

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary
also holds an annual native plant sale.
See page 4 in this newsletter for more information

Join a native plant salvage or rescue program

There are two organizations in the C.R.D. that operate plant salvage programs to rescue plants on sites destined for development. They are the Native Plant Salvage Program offered by the Municipality of Saanich, and the Plant Rescue Program coordinated by the Native Plant Study Group. It is important to stress that both these organizations salvage native plants only from sites where development is inevitable, using it as a last resort when conservation of these species is not an option. Here are a few details on each of these programs

Native Plant Salvage Program- Saanich Municipality

This salvage program is coordinated through the Environmental Services section of the Planning Department in the Municipality of Saanich. When developers and/or landowners offer a salvage opportunity on their development site, these are then offered to the members of the Native Plant Salvage Program. All salvage members are volunteers. They sign an agreement/ waiver form to abide by certain regulations and also attend an orientation session. When a salvage opportunity arises, salvagers are contacted with details on the site as well as any special conditions the developer may have for salvaging. Salvaged plants are used by participants for restoration in their own yards or for other restoration projects. They cannot be sold. There is no fee to become a member of the Native Plant Salvage Program and members do not have to live in Saanich to participate.

For more information on joining the Native Plant Salvage Program contact:

Carolyn MacDonald, 475-5494 local 3477

Plant Rescue Program -Native Plant Study Group

The Native Plant Study Group (NPSG) is a sub group of the Victoria Horticultural Society. Its goals are to share information on native plants and to support the protection of native plants through lectures, workshops, presentations and fieldtrips. The Plant Rescue Committee of the NPSG arranges opportunities to salvage plants on construction sites. Once permission has been received from a developer, and the site has been toured and conditions of salvage agreed upon, the salvaging can begin. All salvagers must sign a waiver and an agreement to follow certain regulations when salvaging, and salvagers must be members of the NPSG to salvage. The fee to become a member is \$15.00. Salvaged plants cannot be sold, and plants salvaged are used for restoration projects in private gardens and also for a garden at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific, the Oak Bay Native Plant Garden, and a private garden on Kings Road in Fernwood.

For further information on the Plant Rescue Program, contact:

Pam Sinclair, 382-0032
David Cohen, 592-5484,
dgcohen@telus.net

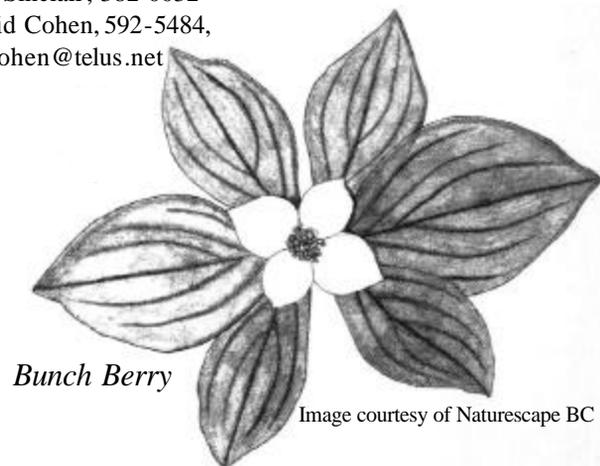
Gardening with native plants

For more information on how to garden with native plants, contact the following organizations:

Naturescape B.C.
250-387-9769 or www.hctf.ca/nature.htm

Native Plant Study Group- Susan Bastin
250-361-3122

Native Plant Society of B.C.
www.npsbc.org



Bunch Berry

Image courtesy of Naturescape BC

NATIVE PLANT GARDENING SALE

The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary
presents the 8th annual
Gardening for Wildlife:



A Native Plant Gardening Sale and Demonstration

Saturday and Sunday
April 26 and 27, 2003
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Over 100 species of Native Plants will be for sale, as well as Seeds, Books, Bird Feeders, and Nesting Boxes.

Presentations on gardening with native plants will include Attracting Beneficial Insects, Native Plant Garden Tours and much more.

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

Plant list and presentation schedule available at:

www.swanlake.bc.ca
or 479-0211

WHAT'S IN THE STORE FOR YOU?

In Victoria, every season is garden season. However, you may be especially keen for the coming Spring gardening season. To help you with planning your garden, the store at the Compost Education Centre now has in stock the Maritime Northwest Garden Guide from Seattle Tilth. This guide provides a month by month guide of "gardening activities to take full advantage of our year round gardening climate", including what to sow when, recipes for sowing mixes, and a great illustration on crop rotation (not to mention a good section on composting). The Compost Education Centre is open from Wed- Sat from 10-4 and the cost for the Guide is \$16.20 for Compost Club members and \$18.00 for non-members.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

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

C.A. Browning
Lesley Wicks
Marlene Lovell
Eithne Hogan

VOLUNTEER UPDATE AND OPPORTUNITIES

On February 22 and 23, seventeen participants took part in our Compost Educator Volunteer Training Program (formerly the Master Composter Program). Now fully informed on composting methods, they have already begun to spread the composting word to C.R.D. communities at outreach events. Welcome aboard Composter Educators!

If you missed the volunteer training, there will be another session held in July. Call for more information, or become involved with the following volunteer opportunities:

Are you computer savvy and wish to share those skills with us? Here are two available volunteer positions:

1. **Compost Club Manager:** Managing the Compost Club data-base (in Microsoft Access). This position requires a few hours a month at the Centre to enter in new members, send out renewal notices and print out labels for the newsletter. If you are familiar with Access, we need you!
2. **Website Manager:** Updating our website, www.compost.bc.ca. We are looking for someone who has the program Dreamweaver MX and knows how to use it. For a few hours a month, the manager will be update the website with new information (example: posting our upcoming events schedule)

Call Lynn at 386-9676 for more information on either of these positions

VMD CONTRIBUTES TO WORM PIT

Thank you to Victoria Materials Depot (VMD) for their donation of gravel for our worm pit. The worm pit, in the composting demonstration area, will be a 32 inch deep square partially dug into the earth. Its purpose will be to produce red wiggler worms. Thank you VMD for making the worm pit possible.

THE LATEST DIRT is published quarterly. The deadline for submissions for the spring issue is May 15, 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**.