



CRC's GREEN SCENE

A bimonthly newsletter of the Sustainability Committee at Cosumnes River College

Confessions of a Recreational Vermiculturist

Sandra Carter, a.k.a. Suburban Gothic, reports...

“What? You want a worm farm for your 59th birthday gift?” my husband asked incredulously. I actually began to fantasize about a worm farm years ago when my old salty-dog friend Dan from Yosemite told me about the big worm berms he kept for supplying local bait and tackle stores. It wasn’t so much the money he made that interested me as the amazing garden his worms helped produce – the best I’d ever seen. As Dan says, “The work the worms do is as vital as the work the bees do, but we humans hardly notice.”



I’m a recreational gardener – God knows I would never survive on what I produce – so I look for every possible secret to increase my garden output. Thus, the worm farm....

December 2011

So my husband ordered a worm farm – from Australia! The cost? About \$100.00. We couldn’t imagine how living creatures could survive the trip, but by the end of December, two packages had arrived. First came a large cardboard box. Inside were two peat moss bricks (for soil and food) and a three-legged, circular plastic container with three layers of trays and a spigot at the bottom. We call this the ‘worm condo.’

Days later, a smaller box arrived – with the worms! Our apprehensions over the worms’ survival soon disappeared when I found a ‘worm advisory’ inside:

(SEE WORM, PAGE 2)

Worms – such lowly creatures, evoking images of icky, creepy, wriggly things. But when I consider their indispensable role to my sustenance, my attitude warms. They are the creatures that turn dirt into nutrient-rich soil, soil that fills my fruits and vegetables with vitamins and minerals.

And how do those slimy, writhing creatures manage that? Well, they increase the amount of air and water in the soil, break down organic matter into a form that plants can use, leave behind castings that are super-charged fertilizer, and help turn the soil over by bringing organic matter down from the top and mixing it with the soil below. Basically, they make fertilizer plus facilitate irrigation by functioning as drainage pipes.

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Worm Diary

FROM PAGE 1

“Your worms have been shipped in dry peat moss; the worms have lost up to 75% of their size due to lack of food and water in transit. If they appear small and scrawny, it is normal. It has been at least 4 days since they’ve had food or water. Shipping worms is unpredictable, but the goal isn’t for your worms to win next season’s beauty pageant, but to arrive ALIVE! Within 48 hours of moisture and food product, your worms will bounce back 100%!”

Carefully, I opened the paper cover, and there they were, like a writhing ball of rubber bands – very much alive! I broke open the bricks of peat moss and put them in the worm condo, placed the ball of wriggling scrawny worms inside, added water, paper, and food scraps, and replaced the circular cover. Throughout the following weeks, I added kitchen scraps and water to feed them. Because it was so cool during the holidays, I kept the condo in the garage. The instructions directed only to keep it out of the direct sun and to expect three to six months for each working tray to become full of worm castings.

Jan. 2012

I’ve been reading as much as I can about caring for and using worms as fertilizer-makers. It turns out there are thousands of species of earthworms; mine belong to the species called tigers, reds, and dendras. These

worms like to live in controlled, organic-rich environments like mulched gardens and worm farms.

We’ve been continuing to add water and kitchen scraps to the condo to add to the worms’ peat moss diet. We’ve also moved the condo out into the fresh air and opened the spigot – from which a weird-looking dark brown liquid drained out. This is worm poo, I guess. I have poured it out into the unplanted raised vegetable garden beds.



Feb. 2012

Because I haven’t planted my garden yet, I don’t want to introduce the worms into the dirt, so they will remain in the condo until March. They haven’t complained or shown any displeasure though. One thing I have noticed is the appearance of some smaller worms. In December, the worms were all large and about the same size, but now there are different sizes. I’m just guessing they’re babies.

Editor’s note: Tune in next time for the latest developments in the worm-o-sphere.

Earth Week 2012

CRC will celebrate Earth Week 2012 April 23-27. A variety of activities will take place throughout the week, with the main events held on Tuesday, April 24 from 10:00 am – 1:00 pm when you will find on the quad a wide variety of displays provided by governmental agencies, non-profit groups, CRC students and clubs, and faculty committees, along with musical entertainment and art displays. Also on the 24th, at 1:30 pm, Dr. Stephen Cunha – former CRC geography professor now at Humboldt State University – will deliver the keynote address, “From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe: Why flatlanders should care about mountains.”

Other events during the week include the films “The Last Mountain” (Wednesday at 3pm) and “Green Fire” (Thursday at 3:30pm, followed by a jobs panel with resource management agencies).

Check the posters and future emails for specific times and places of these and other Earth Week 2012 events.





Composting Demo Site and Campus Community Garden Coming to CRC

Dave Andrews reports...

Horticulture students and staff are anxiously anticipating completion of the new instructional greenhouse and outdoor facilities. In addition to the nearly 5700-square-foot commercial greenhouse and one-acre outdoor instructional space, we will develop a 10,000-square-foot fenced area as a composting demonstration site and campus community garden.

The horticulture and geosciences programs plan to provide several examples of composting methods and to demonstrate the composting process as well as the value and various uses of compost.

Thanks to a variety of funding sources, including department funds and grant monies, we have been able to purchase two 96-gallon, rapid-composting tumblers, two vermiculture (worm) towers, two traditional compost bins, and enough construction materials to build a 20-cubic-yard passive composting structure. The rapid-composting tumblers will be fitted with an electric motor and a timer (powered by a solar panel and 12 volt auto battery) that will perform the tumbling action automatically.

Raw materials for composting will come from the CRC campus, with an eventual goal of composting all campus greenwaste and some pre-consumer food scraps from the cafeteria. As the project progresses, we hope to add more composting equipment and to experiment with different composting methods.



The site will also have room for as many as a hundred 60-square-foot plots for use by staff and students in the production of garden crops. The campus community garden idea is still in its infancy, and many logistic, liability, and policy issues need to be settled before the garden is open for use; however, we remain optimistic and excited about the prospect of having a garden for the CRC community.

The greenhouse and the installation of fencing are in progress and scheduled to be finished this semester. Once we get the green light (likely next fall), we will begin construction of the compost demonstration site and installation of the community garden fencing. Operations can then start in Spring 2013.

Take a Deep Breath!

Lisa Marchand reports...

I'm breathing more easily these days – thanks to the change in campus smoking policy. The newly created smoking zones have almost

entirely cleared the smokers away from the main areas of campus. A few, however, are still unaware of the policy change, in spite of the smoking zone maps available around campus – in division offices, the cafeteria check-out stands, the Police and Health Services foyer, and the Print Shop.

I've found that these small maps are just the right size to fold in half and carry in my pocket. When I meet out-of-bounds puffers, I stop and inform them about the new policy and hand over a map. Most politely put out

their smokes and say they weren't aware of the new rules. Just yesterday, a smoker thanked me for the map, introduced himself, and shook my hand.

A couple of times non-smoking students have seen me do this and have come to thank me, so I've started carrying maps to give to them too. If we all spread the word and encourage others to do likewise, maybe we'll also begin to see fewer and fewer accumulations of smoke *and* cigarette butts in places where they shouldn't be.

2700+ cigarette butts, picked up on campus in December 2010.



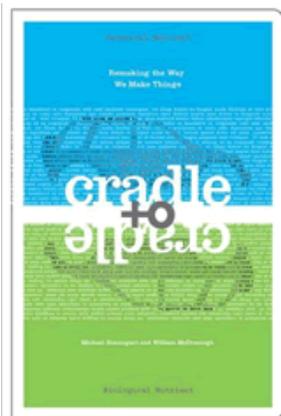
Reader Review

Book review: *Cradle to Cradle*, William McDonough & Michael Brungart, North Point Press, New York, 2002.

In *Cradle to Cradle*, McDonough and Brungart introduce us to a new way of thinking about how we design processes for everyday functions, such as growing food, disposing of waste, and building shelter. The book's seven short chapters cover topics from design to eco-efficiency.

The ideas are presented in simple yet interesting language, sometimes even with a

little humor. For example, if the Industrial Revolution had been designed with the same efficiency as a cherry tree, it would apparently have had an entirely different outcome.



Required reading for all CalRecycle

(California Dept. of Resources, Recovery, and Recycling) employees, this book will benefit anyone who reads it.

While I don't agree with the authors on every point, I welcome their fresh point of view. I especially like the way they present the doom and gloom information with which we are all familiar but with practical and attainable solutions. *Cradle to Cradle* is available from Amazon.com in paperback (be sure to read the chapter that explains how the book is not made from a tree) or for Kindle. I plan to donate a copy to the CRC Library, so look for it there also. Enjoy!

-- Donna Leiva, student

Students Study Energy Efficiency

Debra Sharkey reports...

During the fall semester, students in my Environmental Studies and Sustainability class worked on projects that would promote more sustainable practices on the CRC campus.

While some groups focused their efforts on the cafeteria composting operation (see *Green Scene*, Nov/Dec 2011), others conducted a survey comparing student and staff awareness of – and attitudes towards –



sustainable practices.

Another group purchased energy conservation stickers to remind staff and students to turn out the lights in unoccupied rooms. In late January, student Ashleigh Stanford and I placed 124 stickers near light switches around campus – in all classrooms and some workrooms.

Ashleigh Stanford positions an energy conservation reminder near a set of light switches in a campus classroom.





CDC Children Add to Campus Compost Efforts

Lora Wardlaw reports...

CRC's Child Development Center has joined campus efforts to actively teach sustainable living.

The school-age children were recently asked what their friends and families do to help conserve our earth's resources. Amaya (5) replied, "I have boxes. We put cans and bottles in there." Keilaea (5) said, "We pick up trash so it doesn't blow around and make it dirty." Jayda (8) said, "People can help by not dropping litter on the ground and by recycling too." When the Red Room children were asked what the world would look like in the future, Isaiah (6) replied, "It is so dirty we have to stand on trash and bottles instead of the ground. We might have to move to another planet."

The children were then introduced to the compost and food-waste program recently implemented at CRC. "Hey, why can't we do that too?" said Isaiah. Why not indeed? Atlas Disposal has provided the center with a small food-waste bin and has shared information with us about how what they are doing makes a difference in our school, in our community, and on our earth. Each day the children collect the food waste from CDC classrooms, weigh the

food, and document each day's amount. (To date, we have collected just over 34 pounds of waste – and that's in only three days!)



Next, we will investigate what happens to the food after it is taken to the compost site. We also hope to get samples of the compost we have helped to produce and to add it to our own outdoor gardens.

Watch for future articles in the Green Scene about the children's ongoing lesson in sustainability.



CDC children learn to weigh food scraps, convert from ounces to pounds, and record the data for their compost learning project.

CRC Holds District's First Zero-Waste Event

Debra Sharkey reports...

Thanks to the efforts of many staff members, seven current students, and one recent graduate, CRC held Los Rios's first known zero-waste event (ZWE) at our January convocation.

The goal of a ZWE is to divert as much waste as possible from landfills. The ability to compost food and paper products is essential for a successful ZWE involving

food and beverage service because, with careful pre-event planning, most of these items are compostable. Because CRC now has a cafeteria composting operation in place (see *Green Scene*, Nov/Dec 2011), we were able to attempt the ZWE.

The results? We diverted 95% of our convocation's post-consumer food and beverage waste – saving space in already overcrowded dumps

and reducing the likelihood of anaerobic decomposition that produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Instead, nearly 99% of the diverted material (all but the recyclables) will be composted into ultra-rich organic material that will be returned to Central Valley farms to enrich their soil, thus reducing the need to apply artificial, expensive petrochemical-based fertilizers. It's a win-win for all!



Green Scene Awards:

Kudos to...

- Lora Wardlaw for instigating a composting operation at the Children's Center and beginning a composting project for the CDC children.
- all those who worked to make the January Zero-Waste Event possible: Debbie Travis, Kathy McLain, Carol Bernardo, Nancy Edmonson, Cynthia Torres, Jeff Caponera, and students who served as bin monitors: Donna Leiva (who also made the bin signage), Chloe Rice, Trista Dowdy, Rubina Ahmad, Victoria Allen, Nick Fox, Anachristina Shavers, Lizz Gaylord and her niece, Amy.
- students and staff who worked on the energy conservation sticker project: Ashleigh Stanford, Rubina Ahmad, Cassandra Nobida, and Michelle Russell, Cory Wathen, Brenda Buckner, and Grace Corpuz.
- those working to bring the innovative and well-respected Green Campus student intern program to the CRC campus: Debbie Travis, Torence Powell, Judy Beachler, Don Wallace, John Ellis, Andi Salmi, Ryan Connally, Debra Sharkey, and Mike Goodrich (from D.O.).

Valley Hi Community Garden Now Open

Torence Powell reports...

Valley Hi residents have a new resource, the Valley Hi Community Garden, one of eleven community gardens operated by the City of Sacramento. The garden opened in November 2011 after nearly two years of advocacy work by neighborhood activists and Valley Hi youth and is one of several concerted efforts throughout Valley Hi to increase access to healthy foods and to encourage active lifestyles.



"There are about 20 plots available," said Bill Maynard, Master Gardener and program coordinator for Sacramento community gardens. "The yearly plot fee is \$25, plus a one-time \$25 cleaning deposit."

The annual fee includes access to water and use of tools, compost, and some seeds to get crops going. Becoming a registered user of the garden is fairly straightforward.

"All gardeners need to go through a short orientation,

sign forms, and pay the fees," Maynard explained. "The best time to get a plot is before May 1st, to get the summer crops in."

Courses and resources are available for inexperienced gardeners, and first-time gardeners are encouraged to sign up. The park is located in Valley Hi Park, about a mile from CRC, on the 8100 block of Center Parkway.

For more information on the Sacramento Community Gardens, or to sign up for the Valley Hi garden, contact Bill Maynard at (916) 808-4939 or wmaynard@cityofsacramento.org.

News In Brief...

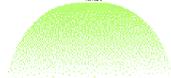
Sustainability Conference Coming in June to UCD

Consider attending the California Higher Education Sustainability Conference at UC Davis June 18-21.

Registration should open soon at

<http://www.cahigheredusustainability.org>

Note: registration cost can be substantially reduced by volunteering to work a few hours at the conference.



Cosumnes River College Sustainability Committee

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John Ellis
Cindy Erickson
Cath Hooper
Julie Oliver
Torence Powell
Andrea Salmi (Chair)
Susan Scott
Debra Sharkey
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Student Members:

Elizabeth Gaylord
Donna Leiva

Newsletter:

Cindy Erickson
Cath Hooper

The Pear Orchard, in Memoriam

While we recognize that the cost of preserving the trees would have been prohibitive – even should they have survived the disturbance – the Sustainability Committee joins many others at CRC, we are sure, in mourning the loss of these beautiful, ornamental trees, torn down even as in full bloom. Of course, we are also encouraged to hear that, as partial mitigation for this and other construction projects on campus, another 175 trees will be planted.

Epitaph for the Pear Trees

Dear ornamental pear trees,

Thank you

- ... for the joy you gave us as we gazed upon your beautiful blossoms every spring;
- ... for the brief sanctuary from stress you provided us as we purposely diverted our walks beneath your cool, shady canopy;
- ... for silently removing carbon dioxide from the air and giving us oxygen in return;
- ... for providing a home to countless insects and birds;
- ... for your sacrifice so a new energy-efficient instructional building can be erected where you once stood.

-- Anonymous



We're on the Web!

*Look for archived issues
of the
GREEN SCENE
on the CRC homepage.*