



COMPOST MATTERS

VOLUME 13, No. 4

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2005

Around the Backyard Bin

GEOCACHING

Plano Master Composters know there's a treasure of black gold in the compost bins at the Environmental Discovery Center, but now another group has designated our grounds a treasure hunt site. In the spirit of getting couch potatoes to release their remotes and step outside, Geocaching has become the latest adult and family outdoor adventure. With a global positioning system (GPS) in hand and coordinates from the official web site, explorers accept the challenge of finding a "cache" or hidden treasure. In this era of Nature Deficit Disorder, Geocachers are out in the backwoods and urban jungles exploring their world. While finding an object and recording the success is the goal, the biggest reward is often the thrill of the search and discovery of a place they have never been before. To learn more about the rules and hunt procedures, go to www.geocaching.com.

KIOSK

On your next visit to the gardens, you will see that the future entrance for the Environmental Discovery Center now stands on solid ground. This grant-funded kiosk will serve as an introduction to the five focal points of the site: the compost demonstration area, native plant gardens, wildlife habitat, making use of reusable and recycled materials and the children's discovery area. Master Composter and graphic artist, **John Evans** is designing the display. Before another year has passed, this kiosk will become the official entrance from the parking area that is planned.

RAIN BARREL REPORT

After two heavy June storms that delivered a total of 3 inches of rain, the rain barrel at the Environmental Discovery Center is now 2/3rds of the way full of chlorine-free water! Rain water storage is a great way to water your landscape and save on your water bill.

EYE ON WILDLIFE

Diversity of plant life invites diversity of animals. Spotting the native critters among our native plants is just one advantage of spending time at the Environmental Discovery Center. Many of you have seen our five inch long resident bunny and the white egrets that fish along the creek. A dozen juvenile mallards have also made the creek their feeding place. Watching them waddle and swim together is a treat. A killdeer and I have kept our eyes on one another as she guards her nest of four green speckled eggs in a patch of rocks in our field. One Friday June morning, a hawk perched in the top branches of a cottonwood tree for nearly half an hour overseeing the garden work. Dan McNeill has reported two snakes passing through and we see on-going evidence of squirrels and armadillos as they dig in our garden beds. As the creek becomes a designated riparian preservation area, we expect to see more wildlife stop by or take up residence.

NEXT MEETING:

Do you know what makes your soil crumbly and what holds it together? What does the pH of your soil have to do with your landscape? Learn about the total exchange capacity of your soil and why it's the most critical aspect of your soil's health. **Michael Bosco of Soils Alive** will be our guest at the next **Master Composter Meeting** on **Thursday, August 4th**. The meeting will be held from **7:00-8:30pm** in the **Parkway Service Center Training Room A/B at 4120 W. Plano Parkway**. Michael founded *Soils Alive* in 1995 to provide an organic soil treatment program that would result in healthy lawns and landscapes. Michael will also address organic weed control and uses of compost tea in your landscape.

We'll begin with an iced tea tasting at 7pm. Come visit with friends, sign up for volunteer opportunities and learn more about making the most of your landscape. Supplies will also be available for making a compost tea bag to take home.



FROM DEB'S DESK



After two months of working in disorganized, temporary quarters, I am beginning to settle into my office at the Equipment Services Building at 4200 W. Plano Parkway. You will now find all of the Environmental Waste Services Environmental Education Coordinators on the second floor of this building: Alison Babb, Casey Eckert-Luker, Glenna Brown, Lori Walton, Roger Minehane, our Administrative Assistant, Rita Keys, our Supervisor, Heather Merchant, and me. To find these offices, turn right at the stop sign at the campus stop sign on Commerce and follow the winding drive over three speed humps to our parking lot.

I've been enjoying the time spent with you at the work parties, the June meeting, picnic and the MC Advisory Board meeting. I've learned a lot from listening to presentations by our community partners on the "In the Garden" walks: **Master Gardeners Ramiro Ortiz and Dorothy Ingram, and native plant landscape designers, Dave Ilfrey and Christy Tinsley-Ilfrey, Lynda Strain and Carol Feldman. Master Composter, and Master Gardeners, Erin Hoffer and Nancy Furth** have just completed three Yardwise classes and provided a great deal of information on composting, successful landscape design and plants. **Master Composter and IPM Specialist, Janet Hurley**, taught the fourth class on controlling pests. Working in the gardens, seeing the changes in the plants and learning about their needs and maintenance has been a bonus for me.

I am continually amazed at the processes and plans Heather has put into place: the demonstration gardens, the series of classes and events, the ways in which the public is engaged with the gardens and the many ways the program is communicated. There are many facets to this position and opportunities for learning and growth!

Now that we have a beautiful native plant demonstration garden, we need to use it effectively to make a difference in the way Plano residents think about landscaping. We are looking for ways to draw the public into the gardens and encourage you to share your thoughts on this.

Don't underestimate the role each of you can play in making a difference in the environmental health of this region. You lead by example. Show off your backyard compost piles whenever you receive a compliment about your landscape. Invite friends and family to picnic under the pavilion and learn about xeriscaping while touring the Environmental Discovery Center. Keep them updated on opportunities to learn about environmentally safe yard care through our programs and special events. Whenever the teachable moment presents itself, share the advantages of using compost. We will all reap the benefits of better water quality and water conservation as more of our neighbors practice these principles.



Walking the Talk: In the Garden Series

Groups of inquisitive gardeners eagerly listened to our guest hosts as they strolled among the colorful blooms at the Environmental Discovery Center. Master Gardeners Ramiro Ortiz and Dorothy Ingram explained the theory and process of establishing butterfly gardens. Dorothy returned a week later to instruct residents on implementing a Texas SmartScape garden. Dave Ilfrey and Christy Tinsley-Ilfrey and Lynda Strain used the gardens to show the ins and outs of native plant landscape design. Carol Feldman used our plants to show how to make the most of the blooming season with basic maintenance tips. Getting the public out to learn about the benefits and beauty of native plants with an up-close and personal experience is our goal.

Of Wickets and Mallets



What game involves whacking a wooden ball and can be played by 3 year olds, grandparents and everyone in between? Those that attended the Master Composter Reunion Picnic at Bob Woodruff Park proved croquet could be quite entertaining on a summer afternoon. "I haven't played this since I was a kid at my grandparents' house" was the most frequent quote of the afternoon as we reached into deep corners of our minds to remember the rules. Three and a half year old Emily Yu (with assistance from her father, Wilson) beat the nine competitors of the first match. Her 6 year old brother, Matthew, came in third. Dan's grandson, novice Tormey McNeill, won the second match later that day. After the cookout and picnic, another group rolled bocci balls along the lake as the sun set. It was great fun to meet families, hear some new stories and see one another without thinking about mulch to move and weeds to pull. Thank you to Master Composter Advisory Board members, **Janet Hurley, Erin Hoffer and Brenda Steib**, for bringing games, water, ice, condiments and organizing this social and to **Tiffany Stephens** for the eye-catching invitations!

Upcoming Events and Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers are needed for the following events and classes. Contact Deb Bliss at debb@plano.gov or 972.769.4313 to sign up.

Garden Work Days, Saturdays, Aug. 6th and Sept. 10th, 7:00am – 10:00am. Environmental Discovery Center

Texas Nurseryman and Landscape Association Trade Fair, Friday and Saturday August 19th and 20th 9:00am - 1:00pm and 1:00pm - 5:00 pm and Sunday, August 21st 9:00am - 12 noon and 12 noon - 3:00pm. Dallas Convention Center, DART Rail Passes available.

Kids in the Garden, Tuesdays, September 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th and October 11th, 18th, 3:30pm – 5:00pm. Environmental Discovery Center

Worm Composting 101, Thursday, September 15th, 7:00pm – 9:00pm. Training Room A, 4120 W. Plano Parkway

Compost 101, Saturday, September 17th, 9:00am – 11:00am. Training Room A, 4120 W. Plano Parkway

Scarecrow Building Workshop, Saturday, September 17th, 2:00pm - 4:00pm Environmental Discovery Center

Kids Fallfest, Saturday, September 24th, 9:00am – 12 noon. Environmental Discovery Center

Junior Girl Scout Badge Workshop, Wednesday, October 5th, 9:00am – 1:00pm Environmental Discovery Center

Yardwise Series, Tuesdays 7:00 – 9:00pm. Training Room A, 4120 West Plano Parkway

October 4th Class 1: Creating and Maintaining Healthy Soils

October 11th Class 2: Green Landscaping Design Using "Texas Friendly" Plants

October 18th Class 3: Texas Friendly Plants, Shrubs and Trees

October 25th Class 4: Environmentally Friendly Pest Control Practices

Master Composter Training, Thursday, November 3rd and Friday, November 4th 6:00pm – 9:00pm and Saturday, November 5th 9:00am – 5:00pm. Training Room A, 4120 W. Plano Parkway and Environmental Discovery Center

INTRODUCING CARMELA JAGOURS

The next time you volunteer or buy a *Plano Pure* product at the Custer Road Facility, introduce yourself to Carmela Jagours, our newest employee to the Compost Department. She joined the team in April of this year after working as an administrative assistant for Blockbuster in McKinney. Carmela completes sales transactions at the Custer Road Facility on Friday, Saturday and Monday from 8:00am – 4:30pm. And before you leave, ask her about the Rhythm and Blues music she loves to play at the piano.



In the Gardens



Rubbing the leaves of Aromatic Sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) gives off a delicious fragrance. This little shrub has a charming scalloped leaflet and will naturalize (produces suckers and thickets). The leaves are not poisonous. It is covered with tiny yellow flowers

before leaves appear in early spring, small red bird-attracting berries in April and orange and scarlet leaves in fall. You'll find it on the berm behind the sheds at the Environmental Discovery Center. It will reach a height of 4', spread 6', and needs full sun to partial shade. It attracts butterflies as well. Remember to check www.txsmartscape.com when you are looking for information on plants that are adapted or native to North Central Texas.



NEED HOURS?



Here's a flexible volunteer opportunity! If you find you have some Saturday hours to volunteer now and then, sign up to help Compost Staff at the Custer Road Retail Facility. Carmela Jagours and Roberto Garcia service the public between 8:00am and 4:30pm. "Some days we can have as many as 500 cars come through with yard trimmings or to purchase *Plano Pure* products," reports Roberto. "It would really help to have another person to answer questions and counsel citizens about which product will meet their needs." Roberto has set up two shade umbrellas for times where he can sit for a spell between customers and he has a second chair ready for a volunteer assistant. "Volunteering at the Custer Road Retail Facility is a great opportunity to interact with the community and promote the *Plano Pure* products," says Master Composter Brenda Steib. The site is located at Custer and Ridgeview, one mile north of McDermott. **Call Deb Bliss at 972.769.4313 if you can help.**

Sun Tea, Garden Style

excerpted from *The Invisible Gardeners* by Andy Lopez www.invisiblegardener.com



Tonics of the 1800's touted to "cure-whatever-ails-you" come to mind when looking at the list of benefits of using compost tea. The proof will be in the results you reap.

Procedure: Place a cup of compost in an old stocking or cheesecloth, tie it into a ball and hang it in a gallon of filtered city water, spring or rain water or water that has been solarized (left in the sun and

turned 1-2 days). Glass bottles, even those that are tinted, work well in absorbing the sun's energy. For any mixture over 1 hour, hourly aeration by stirring is recommended.

Soaking Time:

1 HOUR: Encourages beneficial bacteria to grow and crowd out harmful bacterial diseases and pests.

4 HOURS: Makes a mixture that controls most bacterial diseases: leaf spot, curly top, mildew.

24 HOURS: Controls rust diseases, most wilts, rots and repels insects especially ants.

48 HOURS: Works on bad blights, wilts and virus-related diseases. It will smell strong but not bad.

1 WEEK: Controls heavy-duty diseases such as bacterial blight, damping off, mildew, black rot, wilts and anthracnose.

To increase the effectiveness of the tea, try adding one of these items:

1. Add 5 T. of natural soap per one gallon of tea as a wetting agent.
 2. Add 1/3 C. of molasses per one gallon of tea and allow it to sit in the sun for several days to increase the bacterial content.
 3. Add 1 oz. of vinegar per one gallon of tea to increase the vigor of the plant.
 4. Add coffee grinds to increase the acidity of the tea.
- Send notes on your results and/or testimonials to Deb Bliss at debb@plano.gov. Safe gardening!



City of Plano
Environmental Waste Services Division
P. O. Box 860358
Plano, Tx 75086-0358