



## AROUND THE BACKYARD BIN



On a recent Saturday our gardens were popping with Daisies, though not the kind you ordinarily think of. These Daisies were an unusual genus: hopping and giggling five year old Girl Scouts who had come to see how recycled and reused materials were incorporated into the Environmental

Discovery Center design. They enjoyed a recycling scavenger hunt – one of the self-guided garden hunts available to visitors. (Maps and clues are available at the entry kiosk.)

Also new for visitors are the root viewing boxes crafted by Master Composter **Fred Karr**. They're planted with carrots, onions, and chard. Visitors are invited to pull the door open and take a peek at what's happening underground.



Two new entrance signs for the Environmental Discovery Center were recently created and installed by the city's Parks department. Look for the one that hangs from the kiosk and the other that sits on the arbor marking the Butterfly Garden entrance. Walk around the compost play panels and you'll see the colorful, engaging signs created by the city's Publishing department and installed at child's eye view by **Roger Minehane**.



With the City Council's approval of the funds and Gary Olp as the architect, conceptual planning sessions will soon begin on the Environmental Education Building. Groundbreaking is expected in the summer.



## NEXT MEETING: JUST WHERE DOES COMPOSTING HAPPEN?

Our Compost Marketing Coordinator and Master Composter, **Roger Minehane**, will fill us in on what's happening to yard trimmings around the metroplex and explain the quarterly testing process for our *Texas Pure* compost. **Gayla Wright** from the city of Denton will also talk with us about their city's Dyno Dirt product and the additional precautions taken when using bio-solids as feedstock. Join us **Thursday, April 6** from **7:00-8:30pm** at the **Parkway Service Center, Training Room A, 4120 W. Plano Parkway**. This meeting includes our annual plant swap so pot up volunteer plants and those you are thinning in your gardens. There will also be a worm swapping table. Bring containers filled if you have 'em (worms) or empty if you need 'em.

## PICNIC AT ARBOR HILLS



This event includes great food, time to kick back and sit a spell with friends, and for those who just can't sit, there will be games and a nature hike. Bring your family and join us on **Saturday, May 13** at the **Arbor Hills Nature Preserve Pavilion** from **3:30-7:00pm** at 6701 West Parker Rd. (just west of Midway past the fire station). Bring a dish to share, your choice of beverage and an appetite. Please make your reservation by Thursday, May 11 with Deb Bliss at [debb@plano.gov](mailto:debb@plano.gov) or (972) 769-4313.

# From Deb's Desk



Master Composter gatherings have generated lots of “oohs” and “ahs” lately.

Witty, innovative, and visionary describes our “Make Every Drop Count” February speakers, Coppel Community Gardener **Tom Cook**, Master Gardener **Phil Shannon**, and Master Gardener and Master Composter **Lonna Jochetz**. They absolutely wowed us with their rain harvesting problem-solving skills. We left the meeting all the wiser for learning their tricks and mistakes and five trash cans became rain barrels before the clock struck ten that evening!

The fieldtrip to the Custer Road and Regional Compost Facilities drew 20 local volunteers and **Igor Yakushkin** from Uzbekistan (though he now lives in Friendswood and drove four hours Saturday morning to join our carpool caravan by 8:30am)! Grind Site Supervisor, **Ryan Andry**, explained the product retail program and yard trimmings collection process. We watched the front-end loader and grinder transform a pile of logs and branches into mulch in just minutes and saw hills of steaming, ground trimmings waiting for their ride to Melissa. Compost Operations Supervisor, **Rusty Thomas**, led us on a hike through windrows, static piles containing food waste from restaurants, schools and grocery stores, mountains of construction and demolition feed-stock and piles of finished mulch and compost. We saw the windrow turner, the screening machine and the bagging operation. We listened to Rusty's stories of challenges from fire, keeping the piles moist under drought conditions, and contamination with trash. We were amazed at the volume of material the partner cities of Allen, Frisco, Richardson, and Plano have diverted from the landfill. Inspired by Malcolm Beck's stories of baking his Thanksgiving meals in his windrows, we buried some foil packs of roasted potatoes and nuts in a hot compost pile to heat as we toured the operation and had a warm snack before making the drive home.



**Jan Eppard** and **Susan Whitaker** have joined **Brenda Steib**, **Erin Hoffer** and **Michelle Knoerzer** on the **Master Composter Advisory Board** and have already provided many great ideas for meeting topics and promotion of our program. (There are still vacant positions on the advisory board for people so inclined.)

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



There's a new awning at the Reuse Center! Not only does it add a touch of class to the entrance, but it keeps the rain from leaking in through the front door. We have Master Composter, **Grace Errington**, to thank for this donation. Grace has been a part-time employee at the Sam's Club at Coit and George Bush Tollway for a year. After volunteering 25 hours on Wednesday mornings with the Reuse Center, she submitted a request to the Sam's Club Foundation for a \$250 grant which she then passed along to the Household Chemical Collection Program.

## THE GREEN FIELDS OF FRITO LAY



For those of us who balk that practicing organic lawn and garden care is too complicated and confusing, Frito Lay groundskeeper **Jay Newland** will tell us how he manages the 275 acres of this Plano campus organically. Come smell the wildflowers with us on **April 27th, 11:30am – 12:30pm**. You will have the option of purchasing your lunch at the Frito Lay dining room after the walk. Take Legacy west across the North Dallas Tollway, and turn left at the Frito Lay sign just before Hwy 121. Park at the visitor parking lot on the hill and meet at the building entrance. Wear long pants, walking shoes and socks, take your allergy medicine before leaving home, and register with Deb Bliss at [debb@plano.gov](mailto:debb@plano.gov) or (972) 769-4313 by April 25.

## Welcome to Our Newest Staff Member



**Lauren Ice** accepted an internship position for Spring 2006 with the Environmental Education & Community Outreach department and started in late January. She is a graduate of Austin College with a double major in Environmental Studies and Art. She is working full-time with our department

through May 10. Her primary responsibilities include: helping with the Great American Cleanup™ as the education activities and volunteer coordinator; researching the market and promoting presentations to civic organizations; providing support help with presentations and puppet shows; and helping research and establish the framework for a Green Living Volunteer Corps. Lauren swam competitively in high school and college and continues to teach swimming. When asked what she does with her free time, she replied: "I love art and I love sewing. I usually combine the two and produce mixed-media work with fabric, recycled or found objects, and painting. But I also sew clothes and bags which I wear and give to friends. My mom, aunt, and grandma have taught me how to quilt and I really enjoy that and getting together with them anytime to sew." Introduce yourself if you are lucky enough to meet her before she leaves us!

### *Rabbit-Proofing Your Gardens*



Have you ever wandered out to check on new plants only to find nothing there? After the first few moments of self-doubt wondering whether you just imagined that you'd planted something, you find evidence of rabbits. Try these tips this spring to protect your new plants:

- Lay chicken wire over a bed that's been planted with seeds. The plants will grow through the spaces and the rabbits won't step on the wire. (from Heather Merchant)
- Shake baby powder or flour on young seedlings and garlic powder on mature plants to make them unpalatable. Repeat after each rain.
- Encircle plants with small branches of spiny holly leaves or large, dried, prickly sweet gum pods. (Save the pods in a dry place till spring.) (from gardening author, Sharon Lovejoy)
- Use wire mesh around your vegetables.
- Control rabbit habitat by clearing your yard of plant debris, heavy vegetation and brush, and anything else that provides rabbit cover.
- Spray with Ropel and be sure you are upwind! (from Integrated Pest Manager and owner of The Pest Shop, Michael Bowdan)



## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Assistants are needed for the following events and classes. Contact Deb Bliss at [debb@plano.gov](mailto:debb@plano.gov) or (972) 769-4313 to volunteer.

**Garden Work Days, Saturdays, April 8, 9:00am – 12:00noon and May 6, 8:00am – 11:00am**  
Environmental Discovery Center.

**Help at the Custer Road Facility with brush drop-off and customer information, Saturdays: April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 8:00am – 4:30 pm** Choose the day and customize the shift to fit your schedule. This job will take place at our Custer Road Facility. (Custer and Ridgeview Dr. – one mile north of McDermott). You will be directing people where to drop-off their brush, filling in a chart with their information and answering customer questions about our products. (1 or 2 people are needed per session)

**It's a Natural, April 22, 8:00am – 12:00noon and 12:00noon – 3:00pm.** We'll run a Yardwise Fair for Earth Day at Arbor Hills Nature Preserve, 6701 West Parker (west of Midway just past the fire station).

**Blackland Prairie Festival, Sunday, April 30, 10:00am - 2:30pm & 2:00pm - 6:30pm.** Several volunteers are needed for each shift and several days before to build a compost pile at Haggard Park. On April 30, help is needed to: set up the exhibit at 10am, tell visitors about building compost piles, its uses and benefits, to explain and demonstrate vermi-composting and take down exhibit at 6:30pm. **Early 1900's period costumes are required.**



***The Name's the Same (almost)***

Plano Pure products has become a familiar name in the area. Long known for its quality soil amendment products, it has been run by the city of Plano for over 12 years. Times change and Allen, Frisco and Richardson now participate. To acknowledge the regional nature of the effort, we needed a new name. The name finally selected was *Texas Pure*. The bag design will remain similar with the same colors, same logo, and same high quality products inside.

# THE FATHER OF TEXAS COMPOSTING



Malcolm Beck, the father of Texas composting, was in Plano in February to share stories and slides of his compost studies. Over his many years in the compost business, he has worked closely with Texas A&M and the Texas Cooperative Extension to understand the reasons behind the seemingly magical effects of compost. Through their labs, he learned that 28% of the microbes found in finished compost prey on pest insects and 18% can metabolize oil and toxins protecting plant health in unseen ways.

When local school districts balked at using compost on their football fields, he had it analyzed and challenged the administration on the safety of their players practicing on fields treated with synthetic fertilizer and pesticides. Malcolm convinced them of the beneficial effects of compost, and claims that after the first year of using compost on their football fields, both districts won division championships! A local soccer coach was so impressed with the lush quality of the field turf that he began using compost on his field and reported that for the first time in his 20 year career, his players had no severe injuries during the season! Imagine what compost miracles could happen in your own yard!

Go to [www.malcolmbeck.com](http://www.malcolmbeck.com) for more information on this living legend and the chemistry of compost.



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