



# Compost Matters

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## Around the Backyard Bin

Over the next few months, you will begin to notice changes taking place in the Environmental Discovery Gardens. Our focus for the new year is to complete the remaining elements written into our grant application by the June deadline. Plans are now underway to construct an informational entry kiosk with additional



parking and restroom facilities to follow later. The kiosk will house educational posters, interactive brochures for children and informational exhibits. Discovery boxes will be created to provide self-guided learning opportunities for youth groups on the weekend and after office hours. Youth groups will have various discovery boxes to choose from, with each box containing lesson plans and

hands-on activities to aid in the learning experience. Our goal is to attract a broader audience to the gardens for learning experiences. New programs and events will be offered, with an "Evening in the Garden" series and special Saturday and Sunday activities occurring that will offer families opportunities to participate in garden activities together.

On your next visit to the Environmental Discovery Gardens please take a moment to notice the repair work that is currently being undertaken. Thanks to volunteers we can make great things happen! Volunteers who deserve recognition for their help at the January work day include: **Ramiro Ortiz, Dan McCarthy, Daryll McCarthy, Roger Minehane, Garvis Spain, and Brenda Steib.** Thank you for your dedication and a job well-done! A very special thanks goes to **Ramiro Ortiz and Brenda Steib** for spearheading the volunteer work day efforts in January.

Thanks also go to **Fran Bolin, Harry Casto, Garvis Spain, and Mai Tang** for their help mulching, planting and pruning at the work day in December and to our "special operations" team of **Dan McNeill and Garvis Spain** for raking leaves in the garden the following week.



## Master Composter Meeting

If you are interested in native plants and organic gardening practices, then you need to be at the next Master Composter meeting on **Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00pm in Training Room A at the Parkway Service Center, 4120 West Plano Parkway.** Ms. Carol Feldman, President of the Native Plant Society of Texas, Dallas Chapter, will be our guest speaker for the evening. Carol is the owner of Feldman Designs in Dallas and has extensive experience in organic gardening and working with native and drought tolerant plants. Mark your calendars now so you don't miss this fantastic opportunity! I look forward to seeing you all there.

## From the Compost Marketing and Education Coordinator



Winter is my favorite time of the year – a time for rest and storing up energy, a time for family and friends, a time for taking things slow, a time for planning ahead and for reflecting back on the previous year. Gardens are like people in many ways – they, too, need a time to rest – a time to curl up their blossoms and vegetate. Just imagine how sad our gardens would look this spring if they didn't have the winter to rest and nurture their roots! One of my favorite activities this time of the year is to settle down in a comfortable easy chair on a cold winter day with a good mystery book – I can lose myself for days at a time without ever going outdoors! That being said, I encourage each one of you to take some time for yourself this winter, to recharge your batteries and to prepare for the months ahead. We have a busy spring ahead with numerous opportunities for you, the volunteer, to share your knowledge, time and talents. Store up extra energy now and be prepared to burst into full bloom early this spring!

Darla Pearson

## UPCOMING EVENTS

(Unless otherwise noted, all programs take place at the Parkway Service Center, 4120 West Plano Parkway)

**Tuesday, February 1, 2005**  
Yardwise Series –  
Creating Healthy Soils/Composting  
7:00pm – 9:00pm

**Thursday, February 3, 2005**  
Master Composter Meeting  
7:00pm – 8:30pm

**Saturday, February 5, 2005**  
Work Day – Environmental  
Discovery Gardens  
9:00am – 12noon

**Tuesday, February 8, 2005**  
Yardwise Series –  
Green Landscape Design  
7:00pm – 9:00pm

**Tuesday, February 15, 2005**  
Yardwise Series –  
Texas Friendly Plants, Shrubs &  
Trees  
7:00pm – 9:00pm

**Saturday, February 19, 2005**  
Compost 101  
9:00am – 11:00am

**Tuesday, February 22, 2005**  
Yardwise Series –  
Environmentally Friendly Pest  
Control  
7:00pm – 9:00pm

**Friday, February 25 – Sunday,  
February 27, 2005**  
Neil Sperry's All Texas Garden Show  
Arlington Convention Center

**Saturday, March 5, 2005**  
Work Day – Environmental  
Discovery Gardens  
9:00am – 12noon

## New Year's Resolutions for the Landscape

*Adapted from the Dallas Morning News, Lone Star Gardening column by H.S. Stevens*

Each year, thousands of people make New Year's resolutions to lose weight, exercise regularly and stop smoking. Within weeks the resolutions waiver and what was thought to be an excellent resolution is now daily drudgery. Repeating the same resolutions every year can be boring. For 2005, why not try something fun and easier to achieve, such as resolving to improve your landscape. Not only will you be doing something beneficial, but you will also be discovering that gardening is a joy, not a job, that should involve as little work as possible!

Here are some suggestions:

- Resolve to **plan your landscape before you plant**. Carefully choose low-maintenance plants to create the effect you are trying to achieve.
- Resolve to **use native and adapted plants** when possible. They will require less care and have fewer insect and disease problems.
- Resolve to **put the right plants in the right places** and space them according to their mature size. Pay attention to their sunlight, hardiness and drainage requirements.
- Resolve to **sow seeds and set out spring transplants at the right time** and at the right soil temperature.
- Resolve to **apply mulch and not to overdo it**. Mulch should not touch the plant trunk or large stems.
- Resolve to **water plants based on need, not based on a regular schedule**. Grass needs water when it loses its sheen and refuses to pop back up quickly when walked on. Other plants need water if the root zone is dry 2- or 3-inches below the surface of the ground.
- Resolve to **put out birdbaths and feeders** because birds help control insects and add beauty to the yard.
- Resolve to **share your love of gardening with children**. Gardening is fun and educational and kids love to get their hands dirty helping others.
- Resolve to **plant more perennials**. They require less care than annuals and are great to share with neighbors and friends.
- Resolve to **stop and smell the roses**. Create a spot to relax and enjoy nature – admire the flowers and vegetables instead of always looking for problems to fix!

# VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Please contact Darla Benson at (972) 769-4313 or [darlab@plano.gov](mailto:darlab@plano.gov) if you are interested in volunteering for any of the following opportunities:

- Help at the Environmental Discovery Gardens work day –Saturday, February 5<sup>th</sup> and March 5<sup>th</sup>, 9:00am - 12noon
- Assist to teach YardWise principles this spring Tuesday evenings: February 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> from 7:00 – 9:00pm
- Assist to teach the Compost 101 class Saturday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 – 11:00am
- Assist with *Plano Pure* Information Booth at Neil Sperry's All Texas Garden Show, February 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>, Arlington Convention Center
- Make plant part props and costumes for children's programs
- Design and adapt the Sand/Water table into a compost experiment and planting table
- Help teach afternoon children's and scout programs at the Environmental Discovery Gardens

## Seattle's Zoo Doo Fecal Fest Canceled

*Article adapted from Composting News, August 2004*

Clopyralid has shown up in Zoo Doo, a compost made in Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, canceling the park's 2004 Zoo Doo Fecal Fest. The Zoo has been testing its animal manure-based compost for clopyralid since the herbicide was detected several years ago in Washington State compost.

Zoo Doo is a fully composted blend of animal manures mixed with straw bedding, grass, leaves and wood chips from the grounds of the Woodland Park Zoo. The manure comes from a variety of animals, including elephants, hippos, zebras, giraffes, gazelles, oryx, ponies and others.

The herbicide, clopyralid is commonly used on hay and wheat fields in eastern Washington for the control of broadleaf weeds. According to the zoo and some researchers, clopyralid does not break down in the heat of the composting process. Recent research, however, has shown that clopyralid does break down under good compost management.

On average, Woodland Park Zoo creates a million pounds of compost each year, saving \$60,000 per year in disposal costs. The zoo makes bulk amounts of Zoo Doo available twice a year to the public during the annual spring and fall Fecal Fests. The popularity of the compost is so great that there is a lottery for appointments to purchase Zoo Doo during the Fecal Fests.

In response to the positive testing last summer, the zoo negotiated with its hay and straw suppliers to assure a clopyralid-free product. The zoo expects a new crop to be ready for the 2005 Spring Fecal Fest.

## SPOTLIGHT ON VOLUNTEERS



At the Master Composter Reunion on December 9, 2004, volunteers were recognized for their dedication and hard work during the year. The following volunteers received their Master Composter Certificates for completing 20 hours of volunteer service: **Fernando Aragon, Susan Ashley, Jeffrey Dickerson, Ramiro Ortiz and Kate Whidden.** Compost thermometers were awarded to **Susan Ashley, Fran Bolin, Judi Gradt, Pamela Hecht, Susan Hughes, Daniela Pezzo, Jeri Serafin Smith and Kate Whidden** for completion of 40 hours of volunteer service. Master Composter hats were presented to **Fran Bolin, Pam Farmer, Flo Giske, Paige Koch, Judi Gradt and Dell Perry** for completion of 60 hours of volunteer service. **Sarah Cox-Davis, Tom Tangney and Erin Hoffer** all completed at least 80 hours of volunteer service and were eligible to receive either a compost bucket or a lawn bag. Volunteers who accumulate 100 hours of service are eligible to receive a free delivery certificate to use on their next delivery of *Plano Pure* products. **Harry Casto, Erin Hoffer, Denisa Moore, Grace Errington and Brenda Steib** were eligible for this award. Two volunteers were recognized for going beyond the call of duty and for dedicating more than 300 hours to the Master Composter Program – **Janet Hurley** and **Dan McNeill** were the recipients of this award and received their choice of either 1 cubic yard of compost or 2 cubic yards of mulch. Thanks to everyone for all your hard work this past year!

# Plano Programs Receive National Recognition

*Nancy Nevil, Environmental Waste Services Manager*



I am very pleased to announce Heather Merchant as the award winner for the United States Composting Council H. Clark Gregory Award for Outstanding Grassroots Efforts to Promote Composting. Heather won

this award for her excellent work in planning and promoting the backyard demonstration site, building a successful Master Composter Program and other educational programming, development of the Environmental Discovery Gardens, her innovative ideas for creating the Children's Discovery Gardens, and organizing the Texas SmartScape Showcase and Kids in the Garden Fallfest.

The City of Plano's compost education program is uniquely qualified for this award for several reasons. It is comprehensive in scope, innovative in its approach, offers consistently high quality programs, uses evaluative tracking measures, regularly establishes partnerships, and seeks to serve as a model for others. The program has benefited from a carefully thought-out and implemented approach to reaching its targeted audiences and from the consistent, dedicated guidance of Heather Merchant over the years.



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