Pacific Northwest

Trees, animals, birds, plants, forests, mountains, lakes and rivers — everything that exists in Nature are in desperate need of our kindness, of the compassionate care and protection of human beings. If we protect them, they in turn will protect us. - Amma

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GreenFriends is a global grassroots environmental movement which promotes environmental awareness and local participation in conservation efforts throughout the world.

GreenFriends is one of the projects of Embracing the World, a not-for-profit international collective of charities founded by internationally known spiritual and humanitarian leader, Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma)

To join the Pacific Northwest GreenFriends Litter Project, write Karuna at karunap108@comcast.net
PNW Gardening
Maltby Farm Photo by Emma S.
PNW Gardening
Maltby Farm Photos by Gopika

Pear Tree buds

Blossoming Red Plum

Rhubarb
A Quiet resting spot (after pulling many blackberry vines)

Bunnies on the lookout under a Japanese Maple (potted)

A Trio - rock, lupine, sage, yellow transparent plum tree
Before

PNW Gardening

Purple Grape Hyacinth

Sticks marking potato plantings

Yellow Epimedium
Before Oregon Junco whose home includes this tree.
Planting Seeds

You’ll need organic seedling mix, a seedling tray, and packets of seeds. You can also plant in small pots or any container you have.

Place the soil in the seedling tray or container.

Press the soil down over the seed so that when you get the little seedlings out to plant them, they will hold the soil.

Follow planting directions on the seed packages. I normally place 2-4 seeds in each section if the seeds are small. For bigger seeds like squash, I plant only one.
Sprinkle some soil on top and pack down lightly.

Label everything. I used some sticks and wrote names on them with a sharpie.

Water well. A spray bottle is handy to avoid disturbing the soil, especially when the seedlings have first come up.

Place the container near a window or under a growing light. It can take 1 week to 4 weeks for the seeds to sprout. Check the back of the seed package to find out the expected germination time.
Plants under my growing lights
PNW Gardening
Ken’s Bonsai Garden on Easter (Vaughn)
PNW Gardening
Shirley’s Container Garden (Renton)
As the first signs of spring started to show, I began preparing the seeds for my Container Veggie Garden. I chose to start all my veggie seeds inside, since the cold and frosty weather would prevent the seeds from sprouting outside.

Following the directions on the back of the package, I found that some seed varieties could get planted right into the soil. While other seeds needed to get soaked overnight or germinated beforehand. On the package I also noticed that each seed has its own unique planting depth. I measured and made markings on a pencil to help me plant each one to the correct depth. Each seed starts off in a way that will help them thrive.

Tomato seeds were especially fun to start. I removed the seeds from a store-bought tomato. First the seeds needed to be dried for 24 hours in the sun to remove the slimy outer layer that helps protect the seed from rotting when it is in the fruit.

Once the seeds were fully dried, I placed them on a damp paper towel in my makeshift Tupperware Greenhouse. I’ve found over the years that soaking the seeds in a paper cloth until sprouted helps to produce stronger tomato plants. I picked this Tupperware container to place the seeds in because it has a clear bottom that allows ample light to get through, but you can also place the cloth in a clear plastic bag to soak. As the seeds germinated, I always made sure to keep them in warm light and damp in the cloth. A week or so later, little sprouts began to appear and into the soil they went to continue growing!
Caring for seeds is like caring for babies. They need just the right amount of light, warmth, water and room to grow. I’ve learnt a great amount of patience caring for these little seeds as they mature. As the frost disappears and the warmer days near, the next adventure will be to transplant these veggie starts into their new home – outdoors in containers!
I learned at the Snoqualmie Seed Exchange that I could grow green onions by cutting the base off down to the white part, and that the onion would regenerate itself. They were out of onion seeds, and she made that suggestion. I bought some green onions so that I could try it. After looking up on the Internet how to do it, I tried it for myself. And it worked!

A friend suggested that I try lettuce as well. So, I chopped off all the lettuce down to about an inch at the base of the root/stem area. I put the bases in water and covered them with fresh water every day. It was amazing to see lettuce growing before my eyes.

I got creative, and tried this with celery, as an experiment, and found that little leaves are rising up from it too. Recently I also experimented with baby bok choy, and I was pleasantly surprised to see the little green leaves popping out.

This is a picture of my window hydroponic garden.

I am trying several things to reduce my need for shopping. I have outdoor gardens that have re-seeded themselves from last year (volunteers). The volunteer plants include kale, arugula, chives, swiss chard, parsley, several different kinds of mint, oregano, sorrel, lettuce, broccoli raab, and calendula. I planted mustard greens and rocket arugula, and plan to plant more greens soon. I have a mini (unheated) outdoor greenhouse. And I have planted peas (coming up), and several other seeds which are not yet sprouting due to cold temperatures outdoors.
I often gather herbs, including dandelion greens. I am planning to go foraging for nettles soon. Nettle pesto is high on my list of foods that I enjoy making. And there is no sting to the nettles after they are pulverized in a food processor.

I also weekly place an order with Imperfect Produce, which got re-named as Imperfect Foods. Not only does Imperfect Produce save vegetables that would never leave the farm because of their imperfect shape, it saves money for consumers like me. So, it is a win-win situation. Mother Nature is happy with not wasting nonstandard produce, and groceries that might not otherwise sell because of the short-coded date, change of packaging, etc. And I am happy that I was able to save some money, have my groceries delivered, and live a bit more lightly on the planet.

I am also planning to sprout again. My favorite things to sprout are red lentils and radish greens. I have my micro green kits ready to grow; I just need to get myself to do it.

I try to wait until I am out of a whole lot of things before I make a trip to a store, given the restrictions. I try to shop only when necessary, and buy enough to last at least a week.

My goal is to reduce my reliance on going shopping at this time where it is best for us to remain at home. Once the time is announced that we can leave our homes again, I am happy to give plant starts of chives and calendula in exchange for a donation to the MA Center or the Amma Program.

I learned about Farmer Frog, how they deliver produce to people who cannot leave their homes due to illness or age in this Covid virus situation. It is inspiring to me to see them do this. They do not charge the people they serve. Normally, what Farmer Frog does is teach school children farming and, now that children are not in school, they are continuing to serve the community.

One other thing that I am trying to do is be really conscious of how my actions affect Mother Earth. For example, I am refinishing an old dresser and am planning to use paint that we already have.

I am looking forward to thinking up more sustainable coping strategies and am hoping you will also share yours.
PNW Gardening
Prarthana’s Raised Bed Garden (Bainbridge Island)
PNW Gardening
Photos from Tirtha M’s Garden (Maltby)
PNW Gardening
For decades Amma has stressed the necessity of mankind changing its lifestyle to be more harmonious with Nature and warning that failure to do so would result in increased natural disasters and disease. “The selfish things man has done to Nature are now coming back in the form of such epidemics,” Amma said. “We need to develop the attitude that we are nothing but Nature’s servants. We should practice humility, servitude and respect. At least now let us stop throwing our arrogance in Nature’s face. The time has come to bow down before the forces of Nature. The time has come to beg Nature to forgive all our trespasses. The time has come to abandon the lackadaisical attitude that Nature will just forbear, suffer and forgive all the indignities we keep heaping on her. Nature is commanding us to wake up and look around. To awaken humankind, Nature is sounding a loud alarm in the form of COVID-19.”

Amritavani: issue 371, April 13, 2020
Around 8:45 on Easter morning, I decided to take a walk on my block and look for dew drops to photograph. I was surprised to find that I was too late. For the most part there were no dew drops. I did see some tiny ones on grass, but they didn’t show up on the photos I took. Just as I was about to give up, I saw some in an area that had weeds mixed with grass. Can you see the three dew drops in this picture?
Later in the day, I photographed the beautiful magnolia tree in my backyard.
Nature
Prarthana’s Easter Photos

Pollution-less photo of Mt. Rainier from South Beach, Bainbridge Island

Camellia flower
This is the path to our back yard and beach.
Nature
La Conner Tulip Fields in 2015 by Eric (Redmond)

This year, Eric's 2015 photos can help us remember what the fields are like in early spring.
Nature
Pollen Anyone? by Lin (Bellevue)

Shelter at Home happens to me every year.

Stay inside.
Get out the eyedrops.
Stock up on Kleenex.
Wash down everything in sight.

Follow the pollen count on www.NWasthma.com.
I’m trying hard not to sniffle and sneeze in public!
Walking through a forest is a relaxing experience and can feel magical. This feeling seems to come from the stillness and clarity, from the peaceful atmosphere in the woods. Although it seems still, walking through the same forest, day after day, reveals its dynamic and changing nature. Things are happening all the time. Some of those events are invisible to our eyes but have a deep effect on us. Diana Beresford-Kroeger, a scientist in Canada with a deep knowledge of forests and trees, describes some of these effects in her documentary Call of the Forest: The Forgotten Wisdom of Trees.

Diana lives and works in Ontario but grew up in Ireland where her Celtic relatives taught her about the ways of the woods. As she describes it, she is the last of a very ancient family in Ireland, and they shared the ancient druid knowledge with her. When she grew up, she moved on and trained as a biologist and worked as a research scientist, but later returned to the natural world and brought her scientific training with her.

Her documentary describes the many chemicals that trees make and then release into the air. Some of them are relaxants, which is why that walk through the woods is so relaxing. Trees can produce chemicals like alpha-pinene and beta-pinene (antibiotics), borneol acetate, camphor, limonene (anti-cancer compound) and release them as aerosols. We inhale these aerosols that float in the air of a forest and they give our brains the message to relax and they help our immune systems. In these ways, the trees interact with us as we walk past them, affecting our moods, and improving our health.

Trees also interact with each other, and Suzanne Simard has spent decades learning how. Suzanne is a scientist from British Columbia who first stumbled across the underworld of the forest as a child with her grandfather. The time she spent in the forest with her grandfather let her see that the foundation of the forest lay beneath the ground and set the stage for her future career.

She showed that trees in the forest send nutrients to each other. In her first experiment, she grew three types of tree seedlings deep in the forest: paper birch, Douglas fir, and western red cedar. She showed that the birch turned carbon dioxide from the air into sugars which were sent down to the tree roots, then shuttled underground to its
neighbors, but only to the fir trees, not to the cedars! She also showed that the firs could send sugar back to the birch, and that paper birch and Douglas fir were in a lively two-way conversation underground. The direction of the flow of carbon between the two types of trees depended on which species was doing better at the time. The trees talk not only in the language of carbon but also nitrogen and phosphorus and water and defense signals and allele chemicals and hormones. The two are involved in a massive belowground communications network, while the cedar trees just do their own thing. There is definitely much more to a forest than meets the eye.

Not only are trees connected to each other underground and in communication, it turns out that they need this communication in order to thrive. Suzanne was able to connect the dots between the way forests were treated and their health. The trees that are the busiest at sending chemicals to other trees are called mother trees, because it turns out that those trees nurture their young, the little trees growing in the understory. In a single forest, a mother tree can be connected to hundreds of other trees. Mother trees will send their extra carbon through the network to the seedlings, and this increases seedling survival by a factor of four.

Does a Douglas fir recognize its own offspring? Yes! Mother trees develop bigger mycorrhizal networks with their own offspring and send them more carbon. They reduce their own root competition to make room for their offspring. When mother trees are injured or dying, they also send carbon from the injured mother tree into her neighboring seedlings, not only carbon but also defense signals. These two things improve the resistance of those seedlings to future stresses. Through this underground communication, the mother trees increase the resilience of the whole tree community.

Forests aren’t simply collections of trees, they’re complex systems with networks that overlap and connect trees and allow them to communicate, and they provide avenues for feedbacks and adaptation, and this makes the forest resilient. That’s because there are many mother trees and many overlapping networks. You can take out one or two mother trees, but there comes a tipping point, and if you remove too many trees the system starts to collapse and
the forest becomes vulnerable.

Unfortunately, the demonstration of the relationships between trees has not helped to reform the way commercial forestry is done. Historically, clear-cutting became the main way of harvesting trees, and led to homogenization of the forests. The original forests with many diverse species of trees and other plant life were cut down, and monocultures of one or two commercially valuable types of trees were planted as a replacement in the clear-cut areas. Other plants were also removed during clear-cutting, and the resulting stands of planted trees looked like a farm crop rather than a forest.

Although we have learned that a monoculture is not a healthy way to support a group of trees, the commercial practices have not changed much in recent years. The trees do not thrive, and climate change has led to the spread of disease. The result is that half of the planted commercial trees do not grow to adulthood.

You can get a sense of the impact of clear-cutting by looking at aerial photos. The following google map picture reveals the patchwork of clear cutting in British Columbia.

The lighter patches of clear-cutting around Adams Lake can be seen in this image taken from Google Maps in April, 2020. (West of Banff National Park in British Columbia)

If you watch Diana’s documentary Call of the Forest, you will see a section about the glorious Redwood trees in California. You will learn that when lumberjacks discovered these immense forests and decided to harvest the trees for wood, they cut down all the oldest and largest trees first. Trees that were 2000 to 4000 years old. The mother trees.
About 96% of the redwoods were logged. This is a constant theme in the history of man's relationship with forests. Man has cut down the biggest and best trees, and gradually destroyed the ability of forests to grow properly and to fend off disease and pests.

If we ask ourselves what we can do to help preserve the remaining old forests on the planet, we can make more conscious decisions about what we use. The large Boreal Forest across northern Canada is the largest functioning forest remaining on the planet and provides an amazing source of diversity. However, the trees in the Boreal Forest are being cut down, much of them to provide virgin pulp for the soft, luxury toilet paper that North Americans have become used to. The toilet paper manufacturers refuse to change to a more sustainable material. As consumers we have the power to affect that market for fancy toilet paper by using less toilet paper or switching to more environmentally friendly brands, and we can also push the manufacturers to change by demanding that they use more sustainable materials.

The knowledge that Suzanne and Diana have shared with us gives an idea of how a forest really works. Their lives also hint at how to develop our own knowledge of the woods: by spending time in them and getting to know them gradually and deeply. No book can replace the wisdom we get by walking among the trees, especially if we do it with someone who can initiate us into the stories of the woods.

Resources:
Diana Beresford-Kroeger’s documentary Call of the Forest: https://www.tvo.org/video/documentaries/call-of-the-forest-the-forgotten-wisdom-of-trees
Suzanne Simard’s presentation at the Nobel Conference: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_QFDB8Zffq
Nature
Sarah’s Spring Photos (Eugene)
Nature
Nature
Connie Hansen Gardens Photo by Allison (Lincoln City, OR)
PNW Litter Project

Litter Stats

In March 2020, 20 Litter Project members and their families and friends picked up litter for 59 hours. (Average 2.95 hours; Median 1 hour; Range 2 minute to 10 hours).

In April 2020, 15 Litter Project members and their families and friends picked up litter for 40.6 hours. (Average 2.7 hours; Median 2 hours; Range 10 minutes to 10 hours).

We have picked up litter for 11,351 hours since the project began in July of 2011.

TerraCycle Stats

We have sent TerraCycle 355,724 cigarette butts, 394 drink pouches, 1,748 cereal bag liners, and 6,747 energy bar wrappers since we started sending items to them in 2013. [TerraCycle is an organization that recycles items which are normally considered unrecyclable.]

Litter Pickup Stories

From Ken in Vaughn, WA:

The road that goes up the hill where I do my afternoon walk with the dogs can get trashy fast. Mostly small empty liquor containers of booze, wine, beer and, of course, high octane energy drinks tossed on the side of the road or in the ditch, along with fast food wrappings and cups.

Since we began living here, we have been picking up the litter. For some years I would quietly grouse and grumble to myself as I picked up the roadside trash and put it in a bag. You know, “Really? You have to throw each 5-hour energy drink you finish out the window???? What slobs! What’s wrong with you people???”

Then I heard a satsang story from one of the Swamis. Who knows how accurate my memory is, but it was about a monk who walked to the Ganges each morning to bathe. It was the highlight of his day. One day, as he was walking back, he passed under a bridge and a man on the bridge spit beetle nut juice on his head. The monk then turned around, saying nothing to the man, and walked back to the Ganges for another bath. On his way back, he was spit on again, and again he returned to the Ganges to bathe.

This happened another dozen times until the man on the bridge finally yelled, “Why do you not get angry with me for spitting on your head each time you return from bathing in the Ganges? You have passed under me more than a doz-
en times, and each time I spit on your head. You say nothing. You just turn around and go back to the river to bathe again.”

The monk replied, “Your observation is correct, but there was no reason to be angry. I usually get to bathe in the Ganges only once a day, but thanks to you spitting on me from the bridge I have been able to bathe in this sacred river more than a dozen times. I do not know how to thank you.”

One day out picking up litter, this story came to mind and it shifted the activity from one of irritation at those who toss the trash on the road to one of being thankful that I have some litter to pick up. Without the trash I would not have this seva.

From Donna in Kirkland:

For a while, I was picking up litter on a regular basis. I grew to love picking up litter. And I got out of the habit of it. I had prayed about it, wanting to pick up litter again, and having trouble motivating myself. Then I found a bunch of black plastic bags. I took this as a sign that it was time for me to put them in my coat pocket so that I could pick up litter again. And so I did. I think this was in October. And shortly after that, my old car bit the dust. I was bussing everywhere I needed to go, with long walks in between buses. So this was more opportunity to pick up litter.

On my street I was picking up litter when a neighbor started talking to me. He was noticing that I was picking up litter, something that he usually does, too. And when he learned that I was without a car, he offered to lend me his old car. I felt that the fairies and nature spirits were watching after me and rewarding me for picking up litter. I feel that it makes the nature spirits very happy when I pick up litter.

I am wanting to start picking up litter again, at least once a week, so I can go for a walk and get some exercise at the same time.

These stories come from our second newsletter (September 2011):

From Walter:
I love to be part of a community doing this and a simple shift of an idea from resenting garbage cleanup to looking at it like community service and service to others has been a mental shift for me. Thank you.

From Geoff:
A little side story. We were waiting for the Edmonds ferry 2 weeks ago and it was a Friday. There was a big line way up the hill. So, while we were waiting, we got out to pick blackberries. We ate a lot of nice blackberries and after a while Lucia, who is 4 years old, and whose face and hands were now stained purple, switched to trash pick-up completely on her own and started pulling cans and other trash out of the bushes. After she had accumulated a good
PNW Litter Project

pile, we loaded it in the car and the ferry line finally began to move. I was surprised, and then impressed, by herself directed clean-up effort!

From Madhavi:
Since I signed up (for the project).....I am finding so many things to be picked up around the house and in my life!!

From Tasha:
As I took a walk in my neighborhood, I picked up a plastic bottle so that I could recycle it. It felt like I was picking up after my child. Like a mom picks up after her child. A mom goes around the house and picks after her child. She picks up the toys left over, the laundry strewn about, the blankets and pillows from the fort that her kids just made. Moms go around all the time and pick up after their children. Dad’s do too. Amma spends Her time traveling the world to help her children. Amma has started a program in India to help clean up India. We, as the most sentient beings of this earth, are, in a sense, entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of the earth. In a way we have been given the duty of being parents to the earth, and family to each other, our community. As a way of picking up litter, and cans, I might just be picking up after my own child or my sister’s child. Who’s to say that the piece of trash on the side of the road wasn’t accidentally dropped by someone I know? Who’s to say that the location the litter was found on wasn’t in my own driveway or the street that I live on. And then wouldn’t it be my job to pick it up? Had they known that they had dropped it, might they be sad that they littered? The challenge, it seems, is that we claim other streets and neighborhoods as our own.

From Karuna:
I’ve been walking on a path that has blackberries on each side. A week or so ago someone dumped furniture in the blackberries. I’ve been irritated and judgmental about the dump. Then a few days ago a glint of metal near the furniture caught my eye. I looked closer and saw that underneath the furniture and into the blackberries were LOTS of soda and beer cans. Some of them were near the path and many were buried deep into the blackberry vines. Later I realized what a good metaphor that was. We see the negative aspects of people that are on the surface but if we look deeper, we may find the gold that is inside each of us (for me right now, aluminum cans are gold!)

From Upasana:
My awareness to litter is getting more & more keen; I’ve put gloves and plastic bags in the trunk of my car, and I picked up a stray beer can at a park and some tin foil from a hiking trail over the weekend. But in August, I was still just adjusting my awareness! This is a great project! I’ll have hours to report in September