



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

Contents

PNW Gardening

[Stock Tanks Revisited](#)

Tree Planting

[Amma's Birthday Gift- Update](#)

[Why Trees Matter- A Lot](#)

[Portland Satsang Tree Planting](#)

[Tree Planting at Maltby Farm](#)

[Free Trees](#)

[GreenFriends Without Borders](#)

Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration

[A Morning With The Greenbelt Crew](#)

[Greenbelt Restoration Work Parties:](#)

[Sept 30, Oct 6, Oct 14](#)

Nature

[Fall and Winter Trees](#)

Source Reduction

[Woman In The Arena](#)

PNW Litter Project

[Litter Project and TerraCycle Stats](#)

Amritapuri Projects

[Swachhata Hi Seva- Litter Pickup](#)



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

Stock Tanks Revisited by Lin Rose

Two years ago, the PNW GreenFriends Newsletter ([October 2016 page 26](#)) published an article on my newly-acquired stock tanks. I was thrilled when they were delivered, set in place, and duly filled with pea gravel and composted topsoil.

I'd chosen tanks instead of having a big raised bed built against my neighbor's block wall because I was in my 70s with advanced arthritis and bending over and moving around had gotten painfully difficult. I liked that the stock tanks were waist level and that I could walk around them to do my gardening and harvesting. Also, this spot along the wall is the only warm, sunny place in my yard, and I thought that would make sun-loving plants happy—such as tomatoes, asparagus, strawberries, a couple of miniature columnar apple trees, lavender and flowers.

Now that the tanks have been through a couple of summers and winters, I'd like to update that report.

PROS – yes, their height is wonderful.

- They're excellent for herbs—my favorites are rosemary, thyme, oregano, chives, and parsley.
- They're good for raspberries to keep them from spreading and to make them easy to harvest.
- They protect against rabbits (though a raccoon bedded down in the clover of one of them and ate the chard, beet greens, and black-eyed Susans). The squirrels ate the strawberries.
- With a PVC pipe arched from end to end, they'll be easy to drape with bird netting next year to discourage raccoons and squirrels; I'll try the same with shade cloth for my lettuce and chard.
- Hardware cloth "compost towers" embedded in each end of the long tanks feed my red wiggler worms well with my layers of kitchen scraps, straw, and torn newspaper, which is easier than having a separate worm bin. Also, unlike my ground-level garden, the burrowing rats aren't able to eat them.



PNW Gardening

CONS – they're basically big flower pots, so they have the same limitations:

- Their metal sides in full sun make their soil a bit too hot on the worst days.
- In the winter they freeze during years when we have snow.
- They require almost daily deep watering (I am always surprised how quickly they dry out).
- Fruit and vegetable produce just seem to grow better in my ground-level garden. Fortunately, a hip replacement is making it easier to return to working at that level.
- Finally, the tanks are more expensive than simply digging up the ground and amending the soil.

Still, I'm glad I have all three systems going: flower pots, stock tanks, and a ground-level bed.



Tree Planting

Amma's Birthday Gift

Update from GreenFriends North America



We are so excited about all the tree-planting going on!

One family on Vashon Island, WA pledged to plant 21 trees, but went on to plant 180! At MA Center: PNW (Maltby Farm) volunteers planted 282 trees on October 13 and 136 trees on October 20.

MA Center- San Ramon is doing a lot of tree-planting, and Portland Satsang joined with Friends of Trees to plant hundreds of native trees and shrubs. Check out all the beautiful tree-planting photos at www.greenfriendsna.org/tree_pledge.html

Due to several requests, and to accommodate different planting conditions in our large geographical area, we have decided to extend the tree-planting date until March 31st.

The total of 'Pledged' trees was 1,060... but with all this planting going on, we will end up with a much higher total! Thank you to everyone who is participating! We are already at 702 planted, even though not all the groups mentioned above have reported their numbers.

If you or your group already reported your 'Planted' trees, and then you decide to plant more... no problem!

Just make another entry. Add the extra number of trees on the form under 'Planted'. (Note: Do not include the number of trees you entered before. The computer will add together all the 'Planted' entries for your name or your group's name.) You can add more 'Planted' trees whenever you like, from now up till March 31st. And as before, work party totals should be reported only by the group leader.

When Amma visits the U.S. in late November, Rema Devi will tell her about our gift of trees being planted to celebrate her birth. We will let you know what Amma says.

*"Humanity is dependent on nature for its very existence.
In truth, we are not protecting nature – it is nature who protects us."*

— Amma

Tree Planting

Why trees matter – a lot ... by Tirtha



"We have underestimated the importance of trees.

They are not merely pleasant sources of shade, but a potentially major answer to some of our most pressing environmental problems." -- Jim Robbins, author

1) They create oxygen

"For every breath you take, thank a tree," says Diana Beresford-Kroeger, a Canadian botanist, author and medical biochemist. Plants make oxygen through the process of photosynthesis, and trees of course are the biggest plants. "There isn't any other way on this planet to make oxygen," she adds.

Trees all over the world have been producing oxygen, and cleaning and filtering the air, for hundreds of millions of years. Whether we realize it or not, we and the world as we know it depend utterly upon the work of trees.

Mankind has embarked on a huge, uncontrolled experiment – we have destroyed about 80 percent of the world's forests. More are destroyed every minute. How long can we last without them? Instead of waiting to find out, many people are planting thousands, even millions of trees.

2) They sequester carbon

Trees are one of the few things that use up carbon dioxide. They store it as part of their growth process. This is a big help to us, as carbon dioxide is one of the main gases responsible for causing global warming.

In fact, large trees are one of our best defences against climate change. Big, mature trees use more carbon than young trees. That means we need to keep all that we have, and plant a lot more. We also need to avoid cutting trees

Tree Planting

down or letting them die unnecessarily, because when they are killed, they release much of their carbon.

An Ohio State University website states it would take a total of 269 small trees, of 2-inch diameter, to replace the carbon sequestration provided by a single 36-inch diameter northern hackberry tree! Moreover, all the previous years of carbon sequestration would be lost with the death of the big tree.

Science writer Jim Robbins is the author of numerous articles for Audubon, Scientific American, and Smithsonian among others, as well as the book, *The Man Who Planted Trees: a Story of Lost Groves, the Science of Trees, and a Plan to Save the Planet*.

He says he once thought tree-planting was at most a feel-good activity.

But now, he says, "In the last few years... as I have read many dozens of articles and books and interviewed scientists here and abroad, my thinking on the issue has changed. Planting trees may be the single most important eco-technology that we have to put the broken pieces of our planet back together."

3) Trees cool the air – and we need that, more and more

Trees cool the air in several ways. All of them are important, especially in cities, where pavement and sidewalks create a 'heat island' effect. Pavement retains heat and releases it at night, causing even nighttime temperatures to be higher in cities.

Global warming is already driving summer temperatures to hotter levels, so we need as much cooling as we can get. Infants, young children, sick people, the overweight, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to dying from heat, as their bodies are less able to cool themselves.

A study by the Carnegie Institution of Science found that evaporation from tree leaves can cool not only the local area, but also the global climate.

While scientists have known for years that trees absorb carbon dioxide (one of the gases causing global warming) only recently they found this is not the only – or perhaps even the most important – cooling effect that forests have.

An international study published in *Nature Climate Change* says trees also regulate the exchange of energy between the earth's surface and the atmosphere. Because of their height, trees powerfully effect heat transfer, by causing movement of surrounding air, and also by releasing moisture into the air.

"Forests play a more important role in cooling the surface in almost all regions of the Earth than was previously thought," said study co-author Kaiguang Zhao, assistant professor of environment modeling and spatial analysis at The Ohio State University.

Tree Planting

"This really affirms the value of forest conservation and protection policies in the fight against climate change," he added.

Trees are also the planet's "heat shield," says science writer Jim Robbins. "They keep the concrete and asphalt of cities and suburbs 10 or more degrees cooler and protect our skin from the sun's harsh UV rays."

"The Texas Department of Forestry has estimated that the die-off of shade trees will cost Texans hundreds of millions of dollars more for air-conditioning." (Not to mention that the energy to power the air-conditioning will most likely create much more carbon dioxide and even warmer temperatures.)

It is known that planting deciduous trees to the south and west of your home can help keep it cool, and even save up to 30 percent on your energy bill. (And winter sun will warm the house after the leaves drop.)

4) Trees improve our health

Studies have shown significant benefits for those who live or work near trees and green spaces, including:

- reduced stress
- greater efficiency, and ability to concentrate and focus
- greater productivity at work or school
- less illness, including asthma, and less sick leave
- better morale
- Japanese studies on 'forest bathing', or walking in forests, have shown improved immune response, reduced glucose levels in diabetics, reduced stress indicators, and less depression.

5) Trees are vital to the earth's ecosystems

A Japanese chemist discovered that decomposing tree leaves, and the nutrients they leach into nearby oceans, are essential to the health of phytoplankton and all the species that rely on them.

The loss of forests due to clearcutting had led to the collapse of miles of nearby marine habitat and declining fish stocks. Armed with this knowledge, Japanese fishermen have replanted coastal forests and were rewarded by the return of greater numbers of fish.

Trees, along with some other plants, are able to filter and clean up much toxic waste. This process, called phytoremediation, can even be used to clean up contaminated soil, air and water.

In short, trees are essential to our continued wellbeing, and to the wellbeing of our planet. To squander the large trees we have is not merely short-sighted, it is absolutely blind.

Tree Planting

"Trees outstrip most people in the extent and depth of their work for the public good."

- Sara Ebenreck

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia](#)

Links:

The value of mature trees in carbon sequestration:

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v507/n7490/full/nature12914.html>

Chadwick Arboretum at Ohio State University, <https://chadwickarboretum.osu.edu/research-and-education/why-trees-matter>)

The cooling effects of trees:

<https://carnegiescience.edu/news/water-evaporated-trees-cools-global-climate>

<https://phys.org/news/2017-03-forests-global-ways-important-previously.html>

People planting thousands, even millions of trees:

the Billion Tree Campaign at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billion_Tree_Campaign

Deaths due to heat:

<https://health2016.globalchange.gov/temperature-related-death-and-illness>

Ecological services performed by trees, article by Jim Robbins:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/opinion/why-trees-matter.html>

Phytoremediation: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phytoremediation>

Benefits of trees: <https://treecanada.ca/resources/benefits-of-trees>

and Green Cities: Good Health website: <https://depts.washington.edu/hhwb>

Tree Planting

Portland Satsang Tree Planting



Amma's Portland Satsang joined Friends of Trees on Saturday, October 13 to serve the City of Beaverton and Clean Water Services at Upper Fanno Wetland. We planted hundreds of native trees and shrubs to green this special site. We experienced some very poor soil conditions (e.g. really rocky!) that made planting challenging but it didn't stop us! In fact, we even did some significant trash seva on site.

Tree Planting



Tree Planting

Tree Planting at Maltby Farm

Thirteen volunteers gathered at Maltby Farm on October 13 and planted a total of 283 Willow tree cuttings (live stakes). These trees will help us control the non-native and invasive reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) on the property. The trees will be creating shade in a couple of years and this type of grass does not grow in the shade.

We also plan to add Spruce, Western Red Cedar, and Red Alder trees to the area. Each will grow to its respective natural height, diversifying the canopy into different layers that will create a better habitat for animals and plants. The Red Alder will also add nitrogen to the soil.



Tree Planting



Tree Planting



Tree Planting

Free Trees (Part 1 of 3) by Sri Lakshmi



Our little family made a pledge on Mother's 65th birthday to plant 21 trees. We didn't know where they would come from or what kind of trees they would be, other than the fact that we wanted 12 of them to be fruit trees. We had no idea how we as a family would accomplish this simple gift.

Days went by before any of us took action. Then, one day my son and I were driving along when we saw a Hazelnut tree on the side of the road. It was in a broken, five-gallon bucket with the word "FREE" written all over it. The tree was about four feet tall, well rounded and well loved. We stopped and loaded our new tree into the station wagon. My son and his friend planted the Hazelnut tree that evening.

After we planted our first tree, we turned our attention to the fruit trees we wanted to plant in the front yard. Our favorite nursery had closed down and our next favorite nursery did not have any fruit trees. At that moment, I chose to clone our existing fruit trees instead of the Peach and Lemon trees I had had my heart set on.

So, just a few days after planting the Hazelnut tree, we filled several XL Mason jars with Willow water. (We had learned of using Willow branches for their all-natural root boosting hormones when mail-ordering Goldenseal Rootstock. The Goldenseal is now well into its 4th year!) We then prepared a dozen cuttings from branches on our Apple, Pear, Cherry, Plum and Madrone trees. We also took cuttings from our Rosemary, Lavender and Oregon Grape shrubs.

Tree Planting

After working on all the cuttings, I walked towards my neighbor's house. At one point, I looked down and realized I was tromping over an acre of baby trees. I felt like I was in Gulliver's Travels. My neighbor had been mowing them down all summer so now they had several tops. They were like a carpet of the coolest baby trees ever. They had exceptionally strong roots and trunks. I asked if I could have some. He said yes, I could have them all, the whole field of them. I could hardly wait to come back with my family and start harvesting them.

Stay tuned-Part 2 will be in the next PNW GreenFriends Newsletter



Tree Planting

GreenFriends Without Borders by Bhavya (Julie)

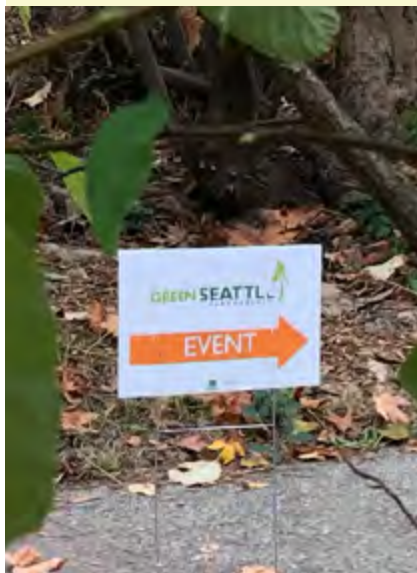
A Japanese exchange student was staying with me last week. It was his first trip to the US. He is in the student council at his school, Chiyoda in Japan. They pursue the Sustainable Development goals set by the UN.

I took him to Maltby Farm and Visala, Satyavati and others helped him plant a tree.



Forest and Habitat Restoration

A Morning With The Greenbelt Crew by Lin Rose



“I’m looking for Karuna,” a tall young man said as he descended the first tier of the Hanford Stairs to the Greenbelt work party.

He was the last of 20 volunteers from the University of Washington’s Introduction to Environmental Science class that turned up on a cold, foggy morning in Seattle to volunteer their labor. Below us, the silver cars of the Light Rail Transit system rattled across the horizon, headed for SeaTac. Tall maples showing fall colors formed a canopy overhead, and ferns filled the understory.

“Just sign your name here on the roster,” I said, offering my clipboard. “Then follow the blue flags along the trail to find Karuna and the others and get some work gloves.”



He strode off enthusiastically into the greenery, leaving me free to walk around the work site and take pictures. I had been afraid the footing would be too uneven for me to handle, but the expertly built wood-chip trails were cushy and sturdy. I just followed the dozens of little blue flags marking the way.

Seeing what the crews have accomplished during this year’s and last year’s work seasons blew me away. The photographs over the months have simply not done the scene justice! For one thing, the drying piles of blackberry and ivy debris are bigger than they look, and areas that have been re-planted with native trees and plants have a more complex flagging and labeling system than can be captured in photos.



Forest and Habitat Restoration

I could tell the layout has been carefully thought out and executed. The site will become a lovely forest as everything begins to take hold and mature.

Another way to tell what has been accomplished is to compare the left side of the Hanford Stairs to the right side.



To the left of the stairs in the photo (above) is an open slope dotted with ferns and tiny new plantings below the maples, cedars, cherry, and alder trees that now stand in the open, free of their former strangulation by ivy and blackberry vines.

My photos don't do any better justice to the project than those before them—but I can't resist trying to give a sense of the work that's being done.

To the right of the stairs (see the photo below—the north side of the site) is a solid wall of greenery—you can't even make out individual trees among the tall tangle of blackberries, miscellaneous vines, and other invasive plants. It's a telling indication of what the greenbelt volunteers had to deal with when they began the cleanup



Forest and Habitat Restoration



Watching the students' bucket brigade reminded me of a line of ants as they carried woodchips from a giant pile at the foot of the stairs, across the road, up the stairs, and handed them off to other workers lined up along the trail. The trail ants ferried buckets to an area where they were being emptied around some new plantings to form a trail. Then the ants headed back down the stairs and started over. I was transfixed by all that youthful energy and willing teamwork.

Karuna unobtrusively walked a circular loop that went up and down the stairs and back and forth on the trail as she conferred with coordinators spotted around at strategic points to direct the volunteers. Clearly, she loves this place. If she stood still long enough, she might grow roots right in the middle of a cluster of ferns.



Forest and Habitat Restoration

Greenbelt Restoration Work Parties

Sept. 30, Oct. 6, and Oct. 14



September 30



October 6



October 14

During the first three fall work parties, we focused on three main tasks. Those three tasks included developing the paths that are located throughout the site; weeding; and preparing new areas for planting trees, shrubs and ground-covers in mid-November.

Path Development

Last year, the paths became muddy and slippery during the winter. In order to prevent that from happening again, we thought of ways to make sturdier paths. We did that by cutting up dried blackberry and ivy debris as well as small branches and then spread them over the paths. Then, we covered the debris with 3-4 inches of wood chips.

1) Cut up debris

We have many piles of dried debris on the property. We decided to use some of it on the paths. This debris pile was four to five feet high at the beginning of the September 30 work party. By the end of the October 14 event, it was just two feet high.

Forest and Habitat Restoration



2) Spread debris on paths



3) Bucket Brigade

Next, we formed bucket brigades to spread the wood chips on the paths.



Filling buckets



Filled Buckets



Carrying the chips to the next destination

Forest and Habitat Restoration

4) Celebrate success

The wood chip paths are so beautiful. And they are so much easier to walk on now.



Weeding

As blackberry shoots, bindweed and ivy start to regrow, we dig them out.



Also, there are areas that still have long blackberry vines. During one of the work parties, several students competed with each other to see who could cut down the longest vine.



Forest and Habitat Restoration

Preparing new planting areas

We also prepared new areas for planting. One of those areas contained an old compost pile. Karuna had started to take it apart prior to these work parties by removing weeds, bulbs, trash and branches that were mixed with the rich dirt. The students continued that process during these three events. The first photo shows what the pile looked like on the morning of Sept 30. The second photo is of one group of students working on the pile, and the third was taken after the Oct 14 work party. If you enlarge the third photo you will see that it also shows some of the shrubs we planted in fall of 2017.



Another area was covered with dried blackberry vines, branches, stumps and other types of debris. Students raked and/or carried the debris to another part of the site. The third photo below shows what the area looks like now.



Students gathering the debris

Pile they moved debris to

New planting area

Many thanks to all of the team leaders, most of whom are GreenFriends members, and volunteers who participated in these three work parties, and all of the previous ones. Because of their help, we are moving forward at a rapid pace in restoring this forest. The support of Green Seattle Partnership and the Seattle Parks Department have also been invaluable.

Nature

Fall and Winter Trees

From Savitri in Maine: Savitri took a photo of this Magic Oak Tree when she was in Boyne Valley, Ireland.



Nature

From Bhavya in Redmond:



Nature

From Karuna in Seattle:

This tree looked red from a distance but when I got close I could see that most of the leaves were still green.



Source Reduction

Woman In The Arena by Diya

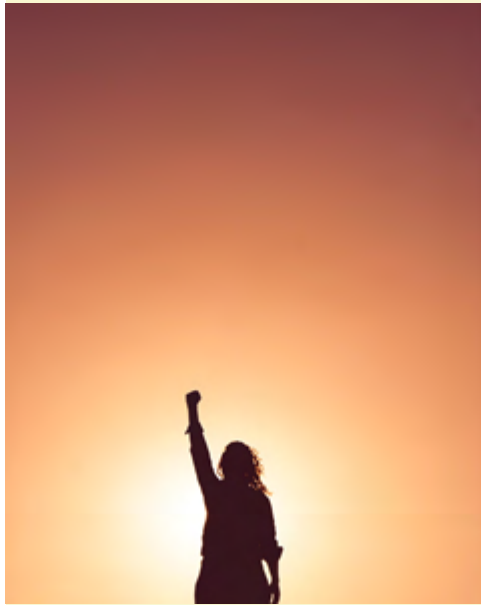


Photo by Miguel Bruna

Two months ago, we moved from the town of Newport to Seal Rock, Oregon. Everything was hunky-dory with Newport's sanitation company and their weekly pickups. With them, we could compost all food items as well as all other compostable products such as compostable sponges, bamboo toothbrushes, bamboo "Q-tips", etc. I was feeling good about my efforts to reduce landfill trash and the contribution I was making to the environment by shopping consciously and only purchasing products that could be composted.

When we moved to Seal Rock, everything changed overnight. Not only are Seal Rock's pickups every other week for yard waste and recycling, there is no compost program per se. Fruit and vegetable trimmings can go into the yard waste bin where they'll rot for two weeks before being picked up. But there is no provision for compostable products such as my sponges and toothbrushes. As a conscious citizen who wants to do the right thing and is willing to go

the extra mile to do it, I found myself very frustrated that I didn't even have an opportunity. I could not accept this and was determined to do something.

I spoke to the sanitation company and they explained how the current system works. They present a proposal to the city council along with a budget at the beginning of the year, and the city council has to approve it. For reasons I won't get into, they decided on this particular program for our rural area. They told me their program had already been approved and to make any amendments to it, the city council would have to get involved and request the changes. Well, I was a dog with a bone at this point and I was not going to go away quietly. So if that meant contacting my local officials, that was exactly what I was going to do.

The problem is, I have never liked or wanted to be involved in politics. I never really cared to take the time to understand how my government works. Most of the time I'm either disgusted or frustrated by it, so my modus operandi is to avoid it altogether. I'm ashamed to admit I have taken my rights for granted because I've never really had to fight for them, and I assume I'll always have them. I'm beginning to learn, however, nothing is certain in this world and I better wake up and start becoming a more informed citizen. My inability to recycle and compost effectively were what finally forced me to stand and be counted. For me, it was the final straw.

At this point I realized I had three options:

1. Use these challenges as an excuse to throw in the towel and give up.
2. Acquiesce to the situation and do what little I could while continuously muttering and complaining about it.
3. Take action and stand up for the environment and for what is right—which meant getting off my duffers, putting on my big-girl pants and haranguing my state senators and local city council members and not giving up until I got through to them.

Source Reduction

I was afraid though. Afraid to get in over my head with people a lot smarter than me and therefore be discredited or brushed-off. Afraid I would get emotional and lose my composure around this situation so close to my heart. Afraid I would get nowhere and fall into a state of hopeless despair. But I picked up the phone anyway, and something remarkable happened: an inner strength rose up inside me and I found my voice. I spoke my truth and felt my power as a citizen, a tax payer, a voter and a steward of the environment. And they responded.

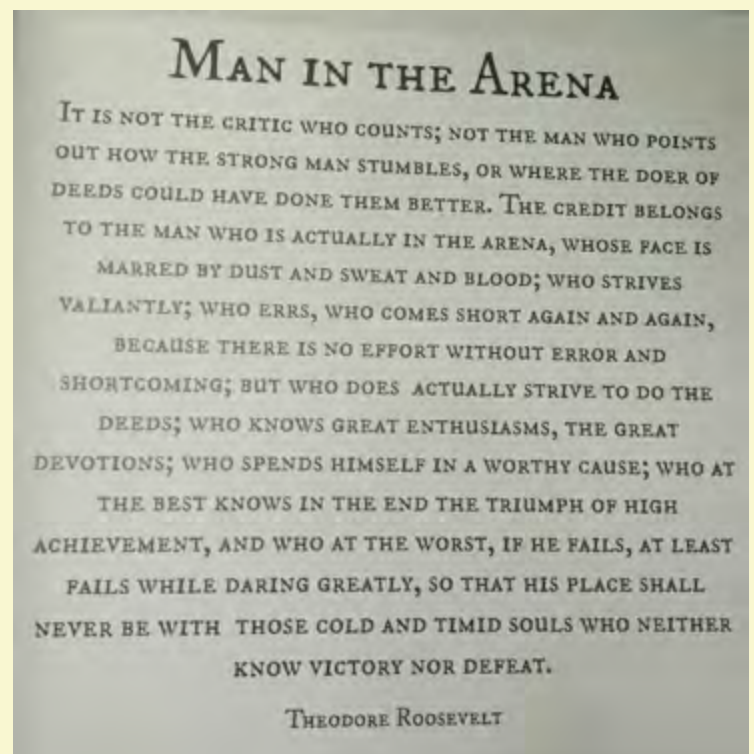
I had a great conversation with one of the council members who was actually in complete agreement with my concerns. I humbled myself and asked him to explain how things work at the governmental level and how things get done. I was given encouragement, support and some suggestions about whom to contact and how to move forward with my endeavor with the greatest possibility of a successful outcome. I even found out that he, too, is a member of the Surfrider Foundation – a grassroots organization, now worldwide, that protects and defends our ocean and beaches. I realized a stereotype I had about politicians was based on contempt prior to having personally spoken to any of them.

I am now in the process of taking the actions he suggested. Whether or not I'm able to effect a change in my sanitation company's policies is not as important as what my efforts changed in me. I grew. I learned. I took a stand. I realized if I want change to occur, especially in today's world, I can't hide anymore. It's not enough to sit on the sidelines and complain. It's not enough to vote every four years in the presidential election and call myself a responsible citizen.

For the first time, I'll be voting this month in the midterm election which takes place in the middle of President Donald Trump's first term. All 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives and 35 of the 100 seats in the United States Senate will be contested. Additionally, 39 state and territorial governorships as well as numerous other state and local elections will also be contested. I skipped out on these important elections before not understanding the perils of political apathy. I think many people did, and that is why we are where we are now.

In a way, I'm grateful I moved to a new town where my ability to recycle and compost responsibly was threatened. It forced me into action. I feel with today's current global situation, I need to be more involved at the local level where change occurs first and where I can actually serve and impact my community in positive and beneficial ways.

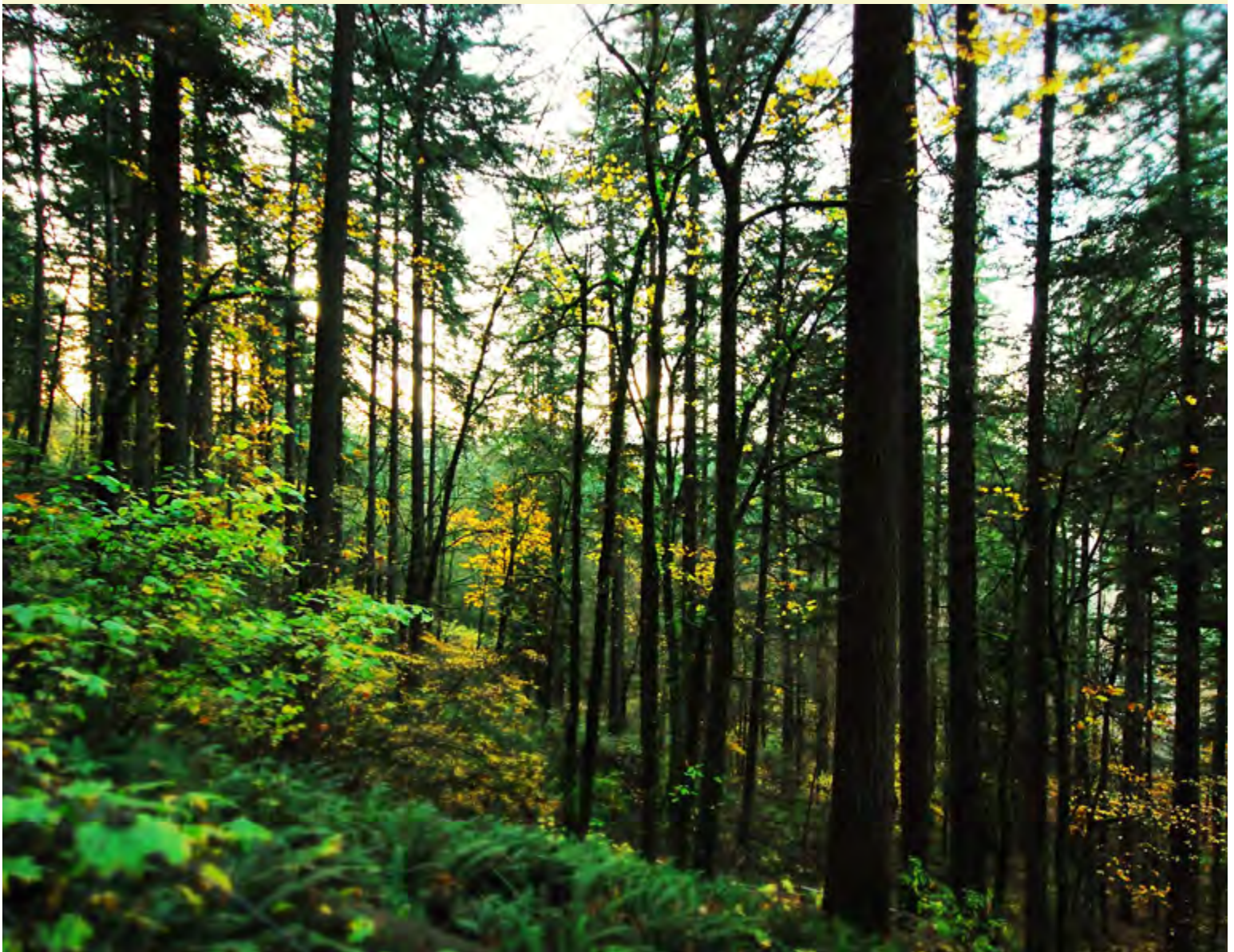
The other day as I was getting ready to email various



Source Reduction

council members in the neighboring cities, I paused for a minute and thought, “How is this going to make a difference? I’m just one person.” Then suddenly a memory from many years ago came into my mind. My father had a quote from Theodore Roosevelt, our 26th President, hanging on the wall in his office in a glass frame titled, “Man In The Arena”. I remember being a child reading that quote and it having a powerful effect on me. I pulled it up on Google and re-read it again, and I knew that regardless of my trepidation, I had to stand up and get into the ring.

As I write this article, I am feeling very grateful to my father. He faced many hardships but continued to get into the ring with a smile on his face every day of his life. He would always tell me he was proud of me and that I could do whatever I put my mind to. He also told me I was a force to be reckoned with but to use it wisely. I hope my current actions are what he meant.



PNW Litter Project

PNW Litter Project Stats

In September **31** Litter Project members and their friends picked up litter for **58** hours. (Average **1.87** hours; Median **1** hour; Range **2** minutes to **10** hours) We have picked up litter for **10,117** hours since the project began in July of 2011.

TerraCycle Stats

TerraCycle is an organization that recycles items which are normally considered unrecyclable. We have sent them **341,224** cigarette butts since 2013. GreenFriends has also sent them **394** Drink Pouches, **732** Cereal Bag liners, and **2,997** Energy Bar wrappers.



Amritapuri Projects

Swachhata Hi Seva- Litter Pickup in Amritapuri by Karuna



Towards the end of the second week in September, we started to see signs posted around the ashram about an upcoming event planned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The event, Swachhata Hi Seva, would be held from September 15 through October 2. It was timed to be near Mahatma Gandhi's 149th birthday and the 4th anniversary of Prime Minister Modi's campaign to clean up India. To read Amma's encouragement for everyone in India to participate in the clean-up, [click here](#).

We soon learned that Swachhata Hi Seva would begin with a video conference where representatives from many different groups around India would report to Prime Minister Modi, and each other, about the clean-up work they had done during the first four years of

the campaign. They would also share their plans for Swachhata Hi Seva.

Amma was to be one of the speakers. After the video conference, ashram residents and visitors, students from the local Amrita University and groups from Amma's other institutions in the area would be cleaning up a six kilometer stretch of the coastal region near Amritapuri. Work parties would also be held at Amma's schools, universities and institutions throughout India.

During the afternoon of the 14th, I glanced into the auditorium and saw lots of activity. There were at least ten men setting up and testing cameras; I believed that they were from Amrita TV and surmised that this must be part of the video conference preparation. Later in the day, and throughout the night, chairs were set up in and around the auditorium, and the auditorium was decorated.

Seating began at 9:15 a.m. Amma arrived around 10:15. Ashram residents and visitors as well as students from Amrita University and people from Amma's other local institutions were present. I thought it was interesting to listen to the speakers; they represented so many groups dedicated to cleaning up India. Only a few of the presentations were in English but it didn't matter to me. I enjoyed seeing and hearing the speakers' passion for the campaign. The Prime Minister responded to each presentation.

Amma watched the video conference on a monitor that had been set up in front of her. The presentations were projected onto numerous larger screens so that everyone seated in the auditorium could watch... and hear... them. Amma was the last speaker to present.

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The first video below shows the Prime Minister introducing Amma. It also shows Amma giving her presentation. (The flags you see waving in the background on the photo above and in the video are Swachhata Hi Seva flags.) To read excerpts from Amma's speech in English, [click here](#).

The second video is of Prime Minister Modi's response to Amma's report. There are English subtitles at the bottom of the screen throughout the video. The Prime Minister's respect for Amma was palpable.

After the video conference was over, instructions to go to the beach to board buses were given over the loud speakers. There were so many people. Some of the female college students grabbed each other's waists so that they wouldn't get separated. I felt like joining them as a way to make it through the crowd, but I resisted the impulse. It has been a long time since I've been in the middle of a crowd that big.

I had originally thought about going to the beach and helping with the cleanup. I knew that I couldn't do it for very long in that heat and the last time I did litter pick up without a litter grabber, I hurt my back and was out of commission for most of the year. I thought I could help for 15 minutes though. When they started talking about buses, however, I assumed that going for a short time wasn't going to be an option, so I headed for my flat.

Later, I learned that Amma had gone to the beach to help with the clean up before she started giving darshan that day. The couple that she was going to marry at the beginning of darshan helped too, in their wedding garments! I'm assuming that Amma was at the beach closest to the ashram, so that would have been an option for me, too. Seeing the photos below reminded me of all the times Amma has joined in the ashram work. In the early days, I remember her carrying building construction materials, such as bricks and bags of gravel. She was, and is, SO strong.

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More than 1,600 people participated in Amritapuri's 6 kilometer clean up!

I had never thought about what would be done with the trash that was picked up that day. In the West, we would have either dropped it off at some waste management facility or city employees would have picked it up. A few days after Swachhata Hi Seva, I started seeing notices from the ashram's recycling depot asking for volunteers to help sort the litter. It was then that I remembered there was no infrastructure in India to deal with garbage (or at least none that I know of). All the trash that had been collected during the ashram work party had been brought back to the ashram. I decided to help for a while.

There were many processing tables set up on the beach, with approximately eight volunteers at each station. One bag after another was brought to us and the contents were dumped onto the table. This photo shows what the garbage looked like, although the items in many of the bags were dirtier. Some of the bags contained the biggest ants I've ever seen.



We sorted the filthy trash into new bags. There were bags for hard objects, soft plastic, metal, shoes, plastic bottles, glass bottles and fabric. I was impressed by how fast we were able to sort each bag and be ready to move on to the next one. When the bags of sorted items were full, they were moved to a separate area. Next, someone sewed the bags shut. After the bags were sewn, they were moved to another pile

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The sorting had already been going on for days. I don't know how many bags of litter had been brought back to the ashram after the work party, but this photo shows how many bags still needed to be processed when I left the recycling depot that afternoon. The original pile must have been huge.

When I left the beach, I felt happy that I had participated in the work. A day or so later, I started to think about the situation again. What was going to happen with all of those bags? The ashram has had a recycling program for many years, and I knew the recycling companies they sell to wouldn't take dirty garbage.



Before I go on, let me say something about the ashram's recycling program. There are recycling stations all over the ashram. Residents and visitors separate their garbage into many different bins- hard items, soft plastic, yard waste, fabric, metal, dirt and hair, sanitary items such as toilet paper, cardboard, paper, food waste, and soiled plastic.

The garbage bins are picked up daily and taken to the recycling depot. Volunteers do a second sorting there.

They move any items that were put in the wrong bin and separate recyclables from non-recyclables. After the second sorting is done, the yard and food waste is taken to the composting facility and objects that need to be washed are washed.

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Then, an even more detailed sorting process occurs. For example, there are at least 10 types of recyclable paper and many types of plastic and metal.



The day after I worked with the trash, I found myself sitting next to the person who is in charge of the recycling depot. She confirmed that the more in-depth sorting will need to be done and that the recycled items will have to be cleaned before they can be turned in. The thought of doing that work, in addition to all the regular ashram recycling, has got to be overwhelming; I imagine it will take all year. Maybe the next time I'm in Amritapuri, I will help again.

The photos and videos in this article came from Amritapuri.org.