



GreenFriends North America NEWSLETTER

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APRIL – JUNE



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GreenFriends
strives to
communicate
the importance
of treating
Nature with
respect and
gratitude.

We invite each of you
Green Friends to share
your ideas and
experiences with your
own gardening efforts
as well as experiences
with animals.

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AMMA'S 2021 VISHU MESSAGE



VISHU IS A FESTIVAL SPECIFIC TO KERALA AND COINCIDES WITH HARVEST SEASON IN SOUTH INDIA. IT SYMBOLIZES THE AGE-OLD BOND WITH NATURE.

One highlight of Vishu is the Vishukkani, which is the altar that every household decorates specially for this festival. Lord Krishna is at the center and many items are placed around Him which symbolize our relationship with Nature.

"In reality, the viṣukkaṇi we arrange in our worship room is the universe in miniature. The bright-burning flame of the oil lamp represents the eye of Virāṭ Puruṣa - God in the form of the entire cosmos. The golden kaṇikonna flowers represent his crown. The mirror symbolizes the universal mind. Nature's bounty is displayed in the viṣukkaṇi. In short, viṣukkaṇi is a blend of the Creator and the creation. Its message to us is to try to see the Creator in every aspect of creation. If we are able to see the spark of divine consciousness in everyone, maintaining an attitude of reverence, then our lives will be filled with happiness and peace."

—Amma



EXCERPTS FROM AMMA'S MESSAGE ON VISHU APRIL 14, 2021, AMRITAPURI

"Vishu is a glorious celebration of the deep connection between man and Nature. Vishukkani and the Kanikonna flowers are symbols of the bounty bestowed on us by Nature for our prosperity and happiness. All across the land, the Kanikonna blossoms spread their golden brilliance this time of the year. A feast for the eyes and the mind, they proclaim the beauty and opulence of nature.

Vishu is the time when the year's crop seeds are sown. Along with this, we should also sow seeds of goodness in our mind. If these seeds are cared for properly, they will multiply a hundredfold.

Nature is an open book. She is an inexhaustible treasure trove of knowledge. However, her knowledge cannot be imbibed with the mere intellect. For this, the heart is also needed. Only then will that knowledge become complete.



When we see a small plant, we should be able to feel love towards it. When we see trees, we should be able to feel gratitude towards them. When we see plants and animals, we should be able to feel kinship with them. However, today, man remains only at the level of the intellect. While the heart is like a needle that can sew together and unify every torn fragment, the mind is like a pair of scissors that can only cut and divide. Even in a garden with a hundred blooming flowers, some people will only see the flowers infested with pests. They turn the simplest thing into something complex."

"In many parts of India, Vishu marks the start of a new year. The day is known by different names in different states, and its traditions differ from region to region. In Kerala, we see the auspicious Kani and Lord Krishna's beautiful form at the break of the first dawn of the new year. Giving the foremost position to God and holding God above everything else in our life is not limited to the celebration of Vishu. It is the very hallmark of Indian culture. All our festivals and celebrations, our art forms and sports, our literature and scriptures - all were conceived as a part of humankind's journey to God. Our family life and society itself revolved around the central point of God and dharma.

"The message of Vishu encompasses everything that is needed for living. It contains lessons of God-remembrance and devotion. It contains the lesson of a good daily routine. It contains the lesson of eating healthy food. It contains the lesson of living a happy family life with proper discernment. It contains the lesson of conserving the environment and protecting Nature. In this way, the festival of Vishu gives us the experience of satisfying both the body and the mind."



Vishukanni of a devotee.

WATER IS SACRED



A section of the GreenFriends Farm orchard in San Ramon, CA, in early spring.



CONSERVATION OF WATER IS OUR SACRED DUTY

As stewards of Nature, as gardeners and arborists, much of our activity is necessarily centered around water. Amma is always reminding us that each drop of water is precious; not a single drop is to be wasted. So it is important to bring that awareness to all that we do when planning and caring for Amma's orchard and garden projects. Water is sacred. It is the bringer and sustainer of life, and in the end perhaps, water will become one of the final arbiters of human survival.

A central belief of traditional Native American culture is that water is sentient. Water is sacred. Water is life. In the ancient Vedas of India, one of the first references is to water: '*salilam apraketam*', which describes



Anand gathering mulch.

our world as ‘originally water, without light’ (Rig Veda X.29.3). Traditionally, the first prayer and offering of the day, aachaman, involves the ritual of sipping water for purification when commencing the worship.

Enough background. Much of this is already known, so let us take a moment to consider, “Why write about water?” This past rainy season in Northern California, where Amma’s MA Center San Ramon GreenFriends Farm is located, was the third-driest year since record keeping began in 1887, and this past month, it has been reported that the reservoirs in our NorCal bioregion are only half full. Even before this dire announcement, the teams that manage the [GreenFriends Farm](#) horticultural activities had begun researching and implementing water conservation methods. Many may already know about various ways to save water, but we would like to share a few of the best practices we have selected and put in place.

MULCHING

The first and foremost water conservation method we have implemented is mulching. Research shows that proper mulching can reduce water use by 25%. Most of us are familiar with using mulch to minimize evaporation, but it has many other benefits as well. Keeping the soil temperature cooler in the 125-degree heat waves in summer and warmer in the cool winters, mulch also suppresses weed growth, prevents erosion, enhances the fertility and quality of the soil over time, and promotes healthy microorganisms that help trees and gardens thrive.



Contour planting.

There are many types of mulch that we use, such as composted manure, straw, composted leaves, and select wood chips free of disease, black walnut and eucalyptus. Placed around fruit trees, but not up against the tree trunk, at least 2 inches thick, mulch can literally save tons of water annually.

CONTOUR PLANTING

All of the orchard is on sloping land. As much as possible since the orchard expansion began in 2008, we have been planting the trees along the contour lines. Planting this way helps slow the runoff of winter rains, which reduces soil erosion and enables the most rainwater to percolate more deeply into the soil.

COVER CROPPING, A.K.A. GREEN MANURE

Nitrogen-rich, quick-growth cover crops such as mustard, red clover, winter rye, vetch, flax, amaranth, legumes and/or buckwheat are sown between the rows of fruit trees. In San Ramon, we are using primarily mustard and red clover, which are very drought tolerant, to hold moisture in the surrounding soil, to keep the soil temperature cooler with their canopy, and to suppress unwanted weeds that consume precious water, all of which in turn helps conserve water.

Before the cover crop goes to seed, it can be mowed to act as a 'green mulch' around the fruit trees, or tilled back into the soil to compost, directly nourishing the soil's fertility. Cover crop seed can be expensive, but it is possible to let the crop go to seed and become perennial. Selection of which cover crop to plant also depends on what climate and soil you have, so be sure to research the recommendation for your area.



Mustard green manure in the orchard.

OLLAS

This is an ancient technique that originated in China and North Africa more than 4,000 years ago that uses unglazed ceramic pots, which are buried in the soil at the root zones of the plants. Water is poured, or in our case, drip irrigated, into the thin neck of the olla twice a week.

Through osmosis, water is delivered continuously to the roots of the plants with no evaporation. The roots naturally seek out the water and grow toward the source of water in the olla. Amma's gardens that have been planted in recent years are all watered by ollas buried in the soil with a hugely positive water conservation impact.

[\(See Clay Pot Irrigation\)](#)

DEEP STAKE WATER DELIVERY SYSTEM

This is the latest water conservation development being introduced in Amma's GreenFriends Farm orchards, and it is as modern as the ollas are ancient. Perforated pipes that are 24" to 36" long are drilled into the ground around the canopy line of the tree. Water is introduced into the piping via 'spaghetti line' drip irrigation and delivered directly to the root zone of the fruit trees.



Olla



Irrigation stakes ready to install

We are excited and hopeful to see the impact on water conservation during this year of extreme drought in California, but our preliminary calculations estimate that instead of 4 gallons of water needed in the past to saturate to the root depth, only 1¼ gallon will be needed due to the efficiency of the deep stakes' ability to deliver water directly to the root zone. This will have the added benefit of depriving surface weeds from taking the water away from the fruit trees that depend on water during the fruit-bearing cycle. This means that we can save 40% of water and that is our goal.

Because water is precious and scarce, conservation has become the mantra of our effort in Amma's orchards and gardens. To grow fruits and vegetables at the GreenFriends Farm with awareness of how our efforts can beneficially impact the broader ecosystem, we support the bees, the wildlife, the ponds, and the wellness of the water cycle in the long term. By Amma's grace and our effort, may the abundant beauty of Nature be found within and around us at the same time.

May the rains around the world be gentle and abundant, falling at the correct time and season so that all of Creation is nourished and harmonious. That is our prayer.

By Amma's grace, all this is possible.

**~KUSUMA,
FOR THE CORE GFF ORCHARD TEAM
MUNEEBAH AND JAY**



Drilling first before inserting the stakes.

SAUKHYAM REUSABLE PADS

“I HAVE BEEN LIVING IN AMRITAPURI FOR ALMOST EIGHT MONTHS NOW, AND

I am part of the Saukhyam reusable pads team. As a regular user of this eco-friendly product, I have been learning the day-to-day craft to help make the pads available for women all over the world. It is fascinating to see how much detail and care is put into each and every step of the process. First, let me say, Saukhyam pads are handmade with the use of eco-friendly components, such as colorful cloth pieces and absorbent banana fibers from the trees here in India. Women who are masters in the stitching arts and have a keen eye for quality take these thoughtfully-sourced materials and handcraft each pad.

I have been using Saukhyam pads for over two years, and doing so has really made a positive impact in the way I feel about my monthly cycle. Did you know that of the many plastic products that endanger our ecosystems, single-use women's pads rank among those that take the longest time to decompose? Research



Processing banana fiber.

studies have estimated that it can take up to 1,000 years. This is a frightening statistic that can only be reversed with the support of each and every user of such products. It is an urgent call to make a change, and Saukhyam reusable pads are a great way to support positive change. It is an excellent gift not only for you, but for Mother Nature as well.

Saukhyam offers a variety of options for every type of body and for every type of monthly flow. There are pads for daytime as well as night-time; for heavy flow as well as light flow; and liners as well. I use regular pads and daily liners, and it has been very rewarding to contribute in a small and effortless way to the environment. The pads are simple to use and also help save money in the long run, because they can be easily washed for reuse. The colorful options make it more fun, at least for me, to appreciate and enjoy. The pads are very absorbent, lasting hours for each use.



Banana fiber.

Being involved in the production of the pads has helped me understand and appreciate even more how much one contributes to the environment by purchasing these products. It is not only healthy for you and Mother Earth, but all the proceeds go directly to Amma's charitable activities around the world. While Saukhyam pads are currently only available for purchase in India, we are working to find ways to have them available through the Amma Shop. It is a very fulfilling service to be a part of, which is why I strongly recommend switching to reusable pads if you have not done so yet. It's a great way to become a part of this project, give back to our generous Mother Nature, and help make the planet a cleaner and more pure place for generations to come.

~BEATRICE SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SAUKHYAM REUSABLE PADS

PLEASE VISIT: [HTTPS://WWW.SAUKHYAMPADS.ORG/](https://www.saukhyampads.org/)

AND WATCH: [VIDEO ABOUT SAUKHYAM PADS](#)

ECO-FRIENDLY CLEANING



GREENFRIENDS NORTH AMERICA RECENTLY RECEIVED A REQUEST THAT MADE US THINK: HOW CAN WE CLEAN IN AN ECO-FRIENDLY WAY IN AND AROUND THE HOME?

We've compiled some initial ideas below, but please feel free to keep the conversation going and write to us with your suggestions.

Disclaimer: All the suggestions here are for general cleaning and not disinfecting for COVID. Please follow CDC guidelines for COVID-level disinfecting around the home, which can be found [here](#). All suggestions made are simply suggestions and should not be taken as expert cleaning advice.

REDUCE WASTE

Generally speaking, to clean the home in an eco-friendly way, let's consider the amount of waste we generate, and how we could keep more things from entering landfills. This would require us to choose long-lasting, biodegradable or recyclable options for household items and other items we use.

For instance, loofah sponges that are compostable for dishwashing; general-purpose cleaning brushes made of natural fibers and wood; toilet brushes made of silicone which will last longer than plastic-bristled ones; eco-friendly toothbrushes (some toothbrush suppliers offer a take-back recycling program) and eco-friendly toothpaste (toothpaste powder or tablets instead of tubes).

We can also increase our intake of fresh food (if home-grown, even better), reduce plastic/metal waste; reduce and compost any leftovers or scraps from cooking; and use compostable bags for mainstream trash we may generate.

On a related note, we can simplify our lives by choosing to buy things that are easy to keep clean. For instance, if we have the choice, we can pick washable carpets that are easy to throw in the wash (ideally made of cotton or compostable materials) so we don't need to dispose of them or use heavy carpet cleaning solutions to clean them. Of course, if we do need to deep clean things, we can use eco-friendly mixtures to do so.

ECO-FRIENDLY CLEANING MIXTURES: DISH SOAP, BAKING SODA, AND ESSENTIAL OILS

As the simplest line of defense, dish soap and regular soap are good for routine cleaning and can kill many germs around the house. Another reason to use regular soap is that it doesn't increase the resistance of bacteria. However, per Scientific American Magazine, it may be best to [avoid antibacterial soap](#), as it isn't really necessary and may do more harm than good. Using antibacterial soap regularly can actually lead to the development of even stronger types of bacteria

You can make an all-purpose household cleaner by mixing dish soap and water in a 1:50 concentration (2.5 Tsp per 16 oz). If you are using castile soap instead of dish soap, you can follow the dilution recommended by one castile soap manufacturer of 2 Tbsps per 16 oz to make an all-purpose cleaner. To use your homemade cleaner, spray, and allow it to sit on the surface for a little while, then scrub and follow with a water rinse.



Use baking soda for cleaning stove tops

Beyond surface cleaning, for tough stains, you can make a paste of baking soda and water and allow it to sit on the stain before scrubbing away or applying a soap-based cleaner to it. This paste can also work well to scrub sinks and toilets, speaking from experience. Please exercise caution with bathtubs and shower pans, as baking soda is a mild abrasive and may scour some of the coating off (test on a small, inconspicuous area first).

Finally, you can add essential oils to our homemade cleaners/baking soda paste, as they have been found to have wonderful antibacterial and antimicrobial properties. Clove, cinnamon, tea tree oil and thyme have all [shown promise](#) in fighting common household germs, including E. coli and Staphylococcus.

[One study](#) showed that a 1/100 dilution of Cinnamon essential oil or Clove essential oil to water (100 drops per 16 oz) can be effective against food-borne germs. Instead of replacing soap with essential oils and water, I simply add them to homemade soap-based cleaners/laundry soap (maybe 20 - 40 drops per 16 oz).

KITCHEN AND LAUNDRY IDEAS

For the kitchen, in addition to composting, using baking soda paste for the stove, compostable/loofah sponges, one can use soaps with eco-friendly packaging and use recycled water to rinse dishes. One way to recycle water could be to use the water from rinsing veggies and fruit to soak dishes before washing. As for eco-friendly packaging, using solid dish soap or dish powder to wash could reduce plastic waste. Another idea could be to use the dishwasher, and see if it saves water.



Some dishwashers are designed to use and save on water compared to washing dishes by hand. If washing by hand, turn off the faucet whenever possible (soak dishes instead of scouring them with the water running), or use the two-sink method (one sink for soaping, one sink for rinsing) if you have two sinks, or a dish bucket and a sink.

Similar waste reduction principles can apply to doing laundry as well - namely, that of reducing dryer sheet waste and laundry soap bottle waste. Instead of dryer sheets, you could use wool dryer balls with essential oils. These reduce static, help scent the clothes, and according to some, speed up the drying. Additionally, you can use

laundry strips or solid laundry soap bars (dissolvable in water to form soap) for clothes washing, and try to use cold water and wash clothes only when dirty.

You can also make laundry soap at home using an online recipe. I found this too time consuming so switched to buying dissolvable laundry soap bars.

RECYCLE AND REUSE RESOURCES FROM THE SHOWER

Finally, if you let the water run initially to warm up the water when having a shower, you can collect that water in a bucket and use it for other household chores like cleaning, watering the plants, flushing the toilet, etc. In this way, you reduce the water used when showering.



SHARE YOUR ECO-FRIENDLY CLEANING TIPS

We're hoping this will just be a starting point for eco-friendly cleaning ideas around the home. Please do feel free to share thoughts, ideas or suggestions by emailing info@greenfriendsna.org. By sharing ideas that others adopt, we can make a far greater impact. We look forward to learning from everyone's ideas.

~DIKSHA, WASHINGTON, DC

DISCLAIMER

Any reference in this newsletter to a specific product, process, or service does not constitute or imply an endorsement by GreenFriends North America or MA Center.

GARDENING WITH YOUTH IN OKLAHOMA AND MA CENTER DALLAS



Tree planting at MA Center Dallas



DEAR AMMA COMMUNITY, WITH MOST OF US HAVING THE VACCINE BY MAY, WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO SOME NORMALCY DURING THE SUMMER OF 2021.

Since outdoor activities are considered some of the safest for interactions, we wanted to focus on some rewarding gardening activities that engage all ages in the Amma community. Gardening activities for Amma families and satsangs can bring extended families back together at Amma's centers outdoors and also doing seva in your city at parks, retirement homes, churches, schools, or community centers.

Amma is encouraging us to be outdoors, absorb some sun daily, get active physically, and plant vegetable gardens and trees. Gardening requires lots of healthy bending and stretching of every muscle and tendon. It's Gardener's Yoga: Bend, Stretch, Pull that weed, Plant that seed!

As Amma tells us,

"Forests play the most important role in maintaining nature's harmony. It is only due to them that there is any semblance of harmony in the world today. We must stop polluting and exploiting mother nature. We have to protect her in order to ensure our survival as well as the survival of future generations."

Recently, I coached two 17 year-old twins on digging up a native Redbud tree from my farm in Oklahoma City to take home and plant as a memorial for their dad who'd died 6 weeks before. Planting memorial trees for those who have died of COVID is another way to help nature and remember the many loved ones who died in 2020.

Trees can be purchased or dug up as seedlings that show up every year in your or a friend's yard or at Amma's Ashrams. Six years ago, I rescued and dug up fifteen 10-inch-tall maple tree seedlings from Amma's Chicago Ashram that were in a dirt roadway. They are now almost 20 feet tall (see photo)! I've heard it said that Amma's Ashram is Her body, so having the maple trees from Amma's Ashram on our farm feels like having Amma here! Giving and planting a seedling when a baby is born so they can grow up together is a great way of gifting a family's new arrival and supporting Amma's tree planting initiative.

"Carpooling, nurturing honeybees, planting trees, cleaning the environment, waste management (reduction) and, growing vegetables were recommended many years ago (by Amma) and Amma's children are doing that. If we all get together and do it with more focus, we will be able to transform this earth into heaven. For that, we should first create heaven within ourselves. I pray to the Supreme to grace us with the blessings to do so." - Amma

Amma was asked what should AYUDH (Amrita Yuva Dharma Dhara – the youth wing) kids do to remain focused on Amma and the spiritual practices and principles Amma teaches them. Amma said that today's youth are the pillars for tomorrow's world. The young have the potential to make a change in the world. Amma stressed on how the AYUDH children could inspire others by coming together to take initiatives to protect



10" maple seedling from MA Center Chicago
grew to 20 feet in 6 years!

Mother Nature. Amma said that they could organize tree planting drives, initiatives for preserving traditional organic seeds, cleanliness drives, etc. It is all about channeling the energy the youth have for the right cause.

See: [Quenching the drought with Love in San Ramon, CA](#)

PLANTING PROJECT AT AMMA'S DALLAS ASHRAM WITH CHILDREN FROM DALLAS BALA KENDRA

Bala Kendra is MA Centers' spiritual values study and activity group for children. Most MA Centers and many satsangs host these. For more information about Bala Kendra in your area, you can inquire at your regional MA Center or satsang.

Oklahoma satsangs wanted to gift Amma with Iris plants for her Texas Ashram for Amma's Birthday in September of 2019. September is the perfect time to divide Iris tubers and replant them. The Oklahoma satsangs collected 400's Iris Rhizomes to plant along the walkway to the front door of Amma's Texas Ashram.

We've noticed, whenever we give a gift to Amma, She gives back to us many fold. This time Amma gifted us with the seva help of many of the Dallas Bala Kendra youth. Their support and seva turned the Iris planting into a very special and wonderful experience for our Amma community of all ages.

SHARAN

Sharan showed up first wanting to help and worked tirelessly and cheerfully wheelbarrowing and dumping dirt in the pots and tubs we needed to fill. His helpfulness was a joy to be with. Sharan worked tirelessly for over two hours, even missing lunch. (For a growing, always hungry, 13 year-old, this was amazing!)

He went in after we finished and told Triptta he was so hungry and was there anything left to eat. Amma and Triptta made sure he did not leave hungry. Sharan even thought to bring us a tray of glasses with water for this 98-degree hot and humid afternoon in Texas. He also helped plant the Iris tubers.



Sharan delivers a tray of water to the sevites

INAYA

5 year-old Inaya wanted to help with the seva. I asked her to sort the tools in the black plastic bags. Inaya said, "What is sort?", to which Sharan kindly asked her if she knew what the words arrange and organize meant. A 5 year-old got a vocabulary lesson as well as a seva experience! Inaya, in her Sunday best dress, helped sort tools and plant Iris until the heat became too much for her.

She announced, "I'm sweating! I need to go inside and get something to drink!"

It was an extremely hot, sunny, and humid day. She came back several times for short periods to help, but when she began to sweat would announce loudly, "I'm sweating and need to go inside!"

Smart girl. We adults agreed we'd rather be inside, too, but needed to finish the planting before we left Saturday.

ANAND

Anand wanted to help. He became one of our super sevites, helping plant, water, and wheelbarrow tools and bags of soil to the rose bed and storage area. Anand brought a teachable moment for us when he brought his orange peel prasad to us for compost. Anand said he wanted to give it to us to put in the Iris bed.



Inaya (in peach colored top) helps water the plants

We thanked him and shared, "These peels are compost, but before they are usable, they will need to sit a few months in a compost pile to heat up and decompose, and then they will become usable compost."

This was another wonderful and natural teachable moment!



Anand (with hand spade) helps Swami Shantamritananda Puri

DHEEKSHA

7-year-old Dheeksha arrived wanting to help. We had Dheeksha smooth soil in the pots for planting. She also helped us plant so many Iris! Dheeksha brought joy to the planting with her enthusiasm. She started with gloves on, but quickly shed them, saying, "I don't need these".

Before long, she was stroking and smelling the soil, and commented, "Look, I'm petting the dirt!"

We appreciated that she liked to connect with the earth. Dheeksha wanted to know the difference between dirt and soil and we spoke about this and how compost is a farmer's black gold. It's wonderful when teachable moments happen naturally!

AMRITASHYAM

Our littlest sevite was 2 years-old. It was probably long past his nap time, but Amritashyam spent much time with a hand tool shoveling dirt from the tub to a small bucket. He seemed to be enjoying himself and happy with his task. Little ones always seem to get a second burst of energy when in nature. Amritashyam then held the hose behind Dheeksha while she watered the Iris beds. He was a happy gardener!

Next time we have a planting project at Amma's Ashram we will definitely be calling the Bala Kendra youth to help with this seva! We want the "A" Team, the Amma Super Sevite Dallas Bala Kendra's gardeners' help!

If an ashram is not close to you for gardening, consider contacting a senior center to see if they would like to engage children and adults from your Amma community in a gardening project at the center or retirement home. This is a great way to support intergenerational relationships. Active, able-bodied children will be the seniors' arms and legs planting for seniors. They can coach them with their years of wisdom and experience gardening. So many elders have gardening skills they can share with youth.



Dheeksha pets the soil



Dad helps Amritashyam move soil



The irises the kids planted blooming in Spring 2021

Amma guides us to get going growing and being outdoors helping nature and ourselves stay healthy, happy, and eating organic food. Nature and gardening are therapy for our body, spirit, and mental health!

~ ANASWARA, EDMOND, OK
(ANASWARA IS A RETIRED, AWARD-WINNING
AFTER-SCHOOL EDUCATOR)

GARDENING RESOURCES



AMMA HAS ASKED HER CHILDREN MANY TIMES TO PLANT VEGETABLES, AND SHE HERSELF HAS HER OWN ROOFTOP GARDEN.



Fortunately, there are many ways to plant gardens—in your yard, in containers on your balcony or patio, in a community garden, or in window boxes. You can even grow sprouts in your kitchen.

STARTING A GARDEN

If you haven't started your own garden yet, it's a good idea to begin by learning about gardening in general and what you will need to start a garden.

- [Get Growing](#) - a book by GreenFriends available [here](#) and coming soon to the DC ashram bookstore.
- [GreenFriends](#) - website offers concrete gardening information and inspiring gardening stories from devotees.
- [Square Foot Gardening](#) - is another good resource for beginning gardeners.
- Check out the many YouTube videos to learn how to grow sprouts. No special supplies needed.

Those with gardening experience can obtain general information and have your gardening questions answered by certified professional horticulturalists through the [University of Maryland Extension](#) website.

You can enjoy homegrown vegetables that are healthier and tastier than store bought!



**"IT IS THE DUTY OF HUMAN BEINGS TO SERVE AND TAKE CARE OF NATURE,
WHICH IN TURN, WILL SUPPLY US WITH ALL THE NECESSARY THINGS."**

~AMMA, AWAKEN CHILDREN V. 3, P.78



SOURCES TO BUY SEEDS, SHARED BY SWAMI SHANTAMRITANANDA PURI

<https://www.seedsavers.org>
<https://www.rareseeds.com>
<https://www.seedsofchange.com/seeds>
<https://www.highmowingseeds.com>
<https://strictlymedicinalseeds.com/>



NATURE IS LOVE: GREENFRIENDS & HEALING OUR WORLD BY SWAMI JNANAMRITANANDA PURI

[Download the eBook \(pdf\)](#)



AMRITACULTURE

SEED SAVING COURSE

Take the step towards becoming a truly self-sufficient gardener and start preserving biodiversity today! This comprehensive four-week course will take you step-by-step through all aspects of seed saving.

<https://courses.amritavirtualacademy.com/courses/amritaculture-seed-saving>

GROW AND SERVE

An Eco-Documentary! Join Greenfriends Australia in their journey to grow, harvest, cook and serve a community garden to those in need during the pandemic.

Self-paced | \$8 USD. Open to all levels of gardening experience.

<https://courses.amritavirtualacademy.com/courses/grow-and-serve>



PLANNING YOUR GARDEN

It's winter. The time to plan the garden and get ready for spring. This is the time to evaluate last year's harvest, if it's not your first time, to see what worked and what didn't.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- Did I plant too much of any one vegetable?
- Did I plant them too close?
- Were they properly placed or did some plants get too much shade?
- Did I plant them too late so that I didn't have time to harvest them before they went to seed, or bolted, or the frost got them?

FOUR-SEASON PLANNING

The solution to some of these questions is to sit and create a four-season plan: one for early spring, then for mid-spring, another for early summer and, lastly, for late-summer and fall.

After taking stock of your prior year, if it's your first time, decide what you like to eat and which vegetables you have enjoyed eating, or would like to try. It is always a good idea to try at least one vegetable that you have not grown before. Decide how many varieties of a given vegetable you will be growing. If you grow peppers, are they going to be Habaneros, sweet peppers or bell peppers, or a few plants of each type?

CONSIDER PLACEMENT

Then survey and measure your garden. Where is the north versus south? Where should the paths be, and the compost? If you have a compost pile or bin, was it placed correctly, or does it need moving? Do the raised beds need expansion, or should they even be moved? Was there enough room left in the paths for a wheel barrel to go through?

HOW MUCH COLOR CAN YOU INCORPORATE IN THE GARDEN?

This is really important for several reasons. A garden can become a place to relax and escape into your own world. It's important for it to look pleasing to the eye, and the greater amount of color, the better. You can leave a section or small area for planting flowers or various types of peppers that have different colors, or herbs that give a fragrance when handled. All these different inputs can help make your garden experience joyful and relaxing in addition to providing you with great fresh produce.

CREATING THE PLAN

Some additional considerations: do we want a focal point? Do you need fencing to keep deer, groundhogs, and rabbits out? Would you like to use containers for certain crops? If you are planting perennials such as rhubarb or asparagus, they need a permanent place where they won't interfere with the rest of the garden? It is very important to avoid interference between plants. When you start the plan, it is best to have different layers. You should place them based on the layers according to the height of the plants.

LET'S TAKE AN EXAMPLE: TOMATOES

If they are the kind that is indeterminate (keep growing indefinitely) in the north, they can get to be five to six feet tall by late summer. They will shade anything that is behind them. If you are in more southern states, they will be a lot taller and everything will be shaded. Therefore, these should be placed more toward the north side. You can also take advantage of the shade they provide and plant shade-tolerant plants that will thrive with tomatoes. One example could be planting tomatoes with parsley or carrots. As long as they get a little sun or dappled sun, they will do well during the summer months and can be grown from spring through fall. Once the tomatoes are done, you carefully remove the plant by cutting the base of the tomato plants and allowing the parsley to finish the season into late fall. Put these ideas on paper and specify where plants should go. Note when you anticipate the harvest to take place based on the date the variety will be ready. Consider if radishes are planted - they would be ready in thirty days from seed to harvest. Will you follow with a second and third crop?

SUCCESSION PLANTING

Succession planting will work great if you plan it out and know when the last planting will take place in a given space. You can do this as a family project, with the kids coloring the various plants and deciding what they should grow. If children grow something, they then tend to eat it, as it was their labor. The curiosity rises in them, and the greater their involvement in the garden the better.

MAKING A LIST AND CHOOSING SEEDS

Make a list of the early spring plants that are cool weather crops, followed by the warm season crops and, once again, the cool season plants. Once your plan is complete and you have decided where things should go, then order the seeds. This way you don't order way more than what you need. Seeds only last two years or so in the refrigerator. After two years, their germination rate goes down significantly. In this list you should note if you want seeds if you are going to start your own seedlings, or if you plan on buying those plants that require transplants like broccoli, cabbage or cauliflower and, if so, who will be your supplier. Where are you going to order the asparagus or rhubarb crowns? Are you planning to put in strawberry plugs or bare-root blackberry plants?

PRE-PURCHASE ITEMS

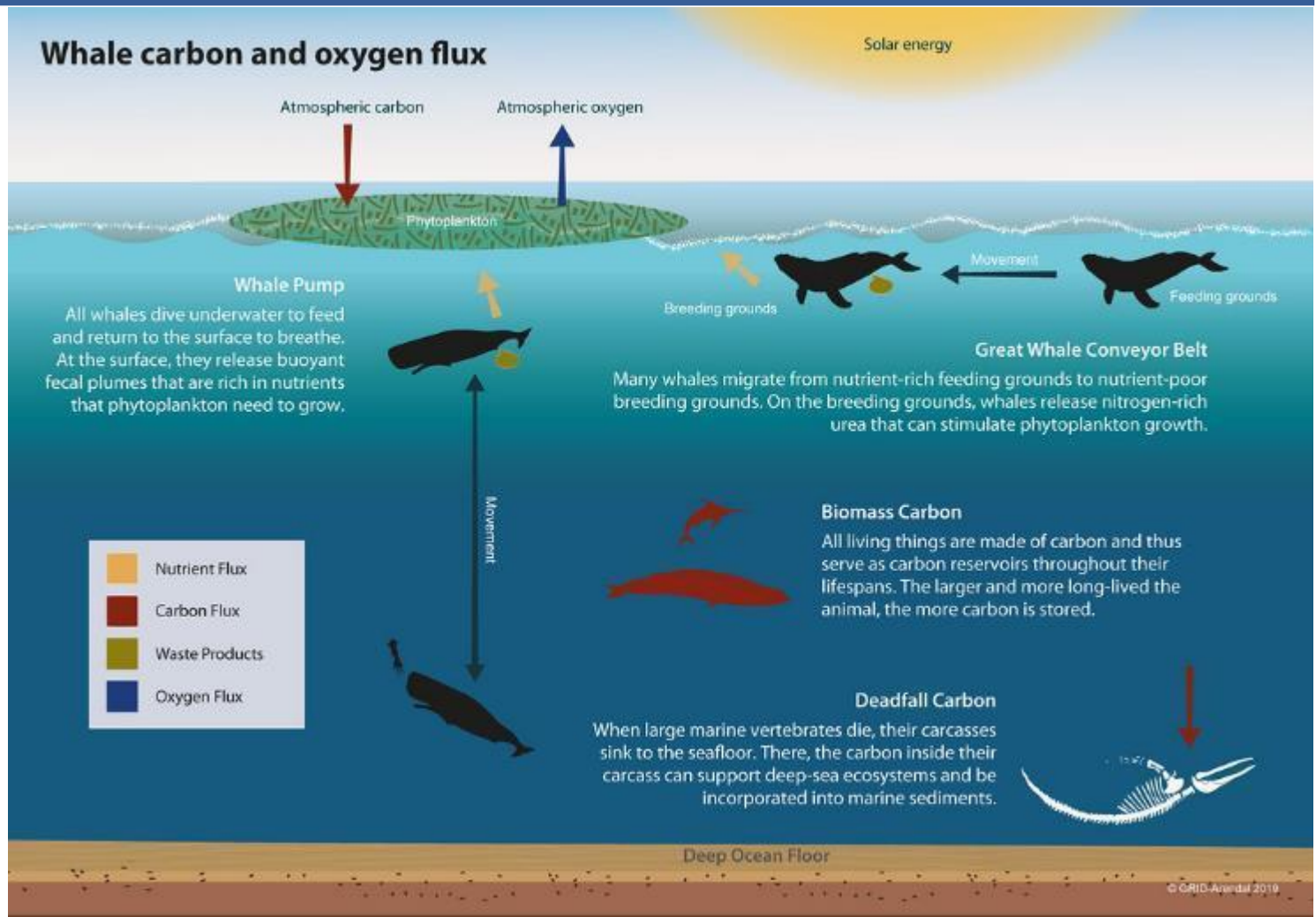
It's a good idea to purchase pots for herbs; this way they will not take over the garden and can easily be moved. Or create a small raised bed for just the herbs. Some will easily survive through any winter. Mints and their family should be kept in pots, no matter what. Otherwise, they will invade your garden and take over. Since they need drainage you will need holes on the pots. The problem with the holes is the roots can reach the soil in the garden and spread. Considered placing a piece of cardboard under the pot to prevent the roots from invading the garden. Later in the season check under the pot to remove any roots that start to grow outside of it.

Purchase growing trays or materials to make your own blocks to start seedlings. Build a cold frame and purchase your shade-netting units and floating row cover made of cloth for insect protection.

Now you are on your way to having a well-planned garden. Be ready for spring! For more information about organic growing go to [Gardening the Organic Way YouTube Channel](#)

~ MARLENY FRANCO

WHALE ECONOMICS - A WIN-WIN NATURE-BASED SOLUTION TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS



Courtesy GRID - Arendal



A WIN-WIN NATURE-BASED SOLUTION TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

The journey began in Baja, Mexico in 2017, when Ralph Chami, a financial economist and Assistant Director at the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#), went out on a research boat to enjoy and learn about whales. During the trip he learned phytoplankton is responsible for approximately 50% of all oxygen produced (every other breath we take) and for the capture of about 43% of all CO₂ produced. That is equivalent to the CO₂ captured by 1.70 trillion trees per year—4 Amazon forests' worth per year! More phytoplankton means more oxygen and more carbon capture. He also learned how whales generate phytoplankton blooms through the "Whale Pump".

Ralph was deeply inspired and humbled when he became aware of all the services whales provide which we depend on for our survival. But this new-found knowledge left the economist with some burning questions such

as, why is it that humans are compensated for their services but nature is not? And why do species who play such a crucial role in generating biodiversity, capturing carbon, and balancing and regenerating entire ecosystems, only have value after they're dead?

After deep contemplation, Ralph realized there was something fundamentally and ethically wrong with our current economic system and what was needed was an entirely new mindset. The great transcendentalist, Buckminster Fuller said: "You never change things by fighting against the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the old model obsolete."

And that is what Ralph felt called to do, to build a new model using a carbon pricing model to quantify the value of carbon-sequestering services provided by species. This is something which had never been done before.

Prior to this, species had no value until they were dead. For example, a slaughtered whale is worth \$40,000 (Chami et al 2020) in the current market but worth nothing when it's alive and thriving and providing countless benefits to the ecosystem. When Ralph applied his [valuation framework](#) to the carbon-sequestering services provided by whales, the number came in at approximately \$2 million dollars per individual whale. Shocked and trembling, he called two colleagues and asked them to verify his numbers. The numbers stood, and he realized this framework could change the way humans view and relate to nature, and that it must be [published](#).

In March of 2019, he jumped on a plane and headed to Baja, Mexico to gather more data for the publication and this is where I first met Ralph. When I learned about his love for the whales and what he was doing to try and save them, I knew he needed to meet Amma to receive her blessing for this sacred work he describes as, "a win-win solution" to the climate crisis.

The reality is, we need a way to capture and drastically reduce our atmospheric carbon in the next 10 years to avoid a [1.5°C](#) rise in global temperature, but we can't just shut everything off all at once. That is why nature-based solutions are considered an essential part of the transition to a net-zero world.

But it's not just about reducing carbon, it's about restoring and protecting vital ecosystems that naturally reduce carbon for us! As Amma has said, "Humanity is dependent on nature for its very existence. In truth, we are not protecting nature - it is nature who protects us."

And Mother Nature is a carbon-sequestering rock star! She's been doing it through the soil, tidal marshes, mangroves, rainforests, seagrasses, kelp forests, phytoplankton, and many other species for over 4 billion years! It wasn't until humans started disrupting this delicate balance that vital ecosystems began to collapse.

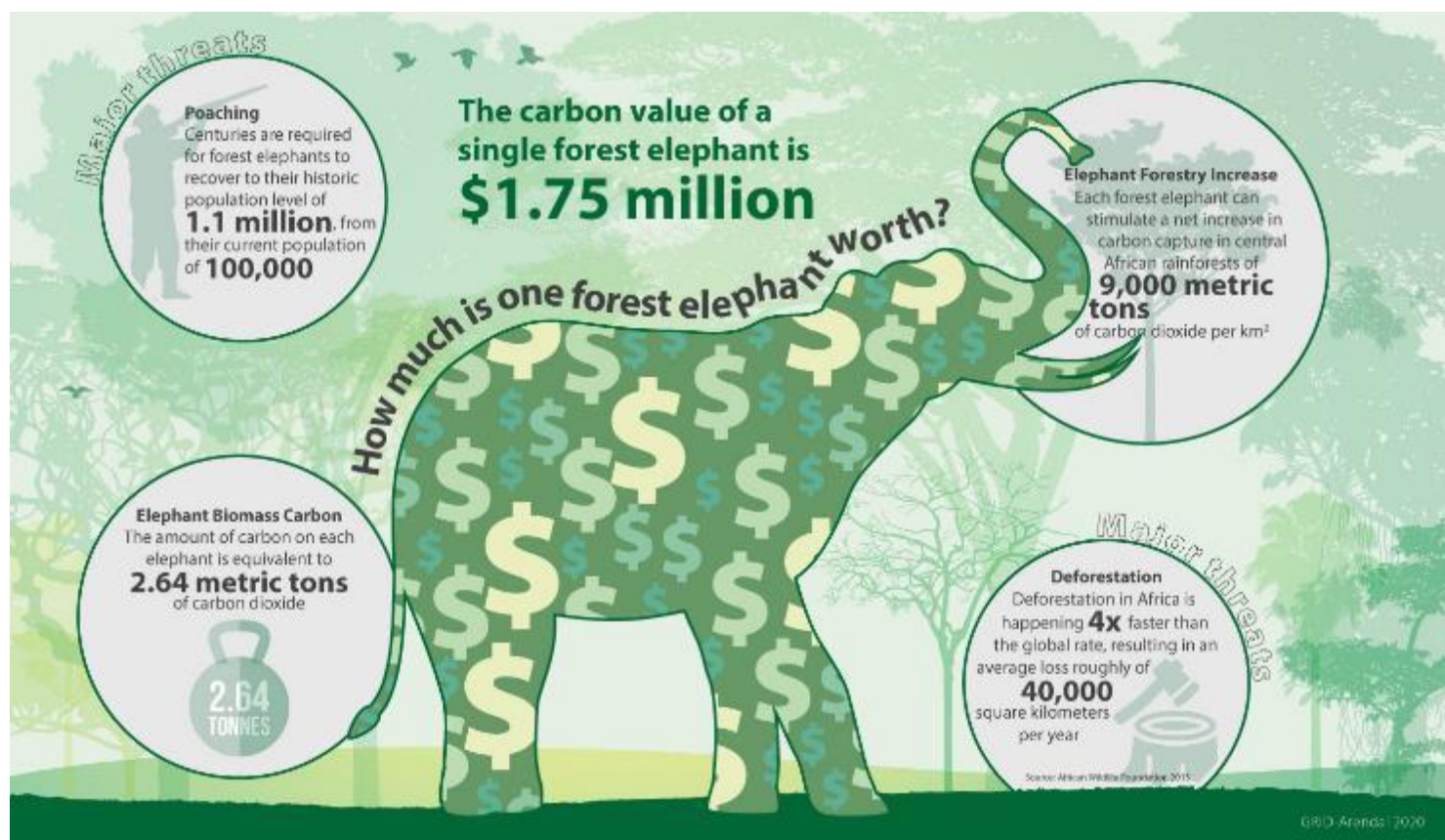
In July of 2019, Ralph met Amma during the Washington, DC program and received her darshan. She sat with him for over forty minutes, looking over his papers and asking questions while Swami Amritaswarupananda Puri translated. She expressed so much enthusiasm when he showed her the diagram of the Whale Pump and explained his findings. Amma said he had 'a beautiful mind' to think of such a heart-centered approach to help Mother Nature. After lavishing him with love, she pulled a secret stash of mala bracelets out from under her chair and slipped one on his wrist. He hasn't taken the bracelet off since.

After meeting Amma, Ralph found himself in high demand being invited to present his work to universities, environmentalists, scientists and economists all over the globe. Suddenly, these diverse professional groups, which had previously been divided because they all spoke different languages, were now being united around

the idea of a way to protect and preserve nature that was also profitable, inclusive and sustainable. The youth, who are now bearing the brunt of our mistakes, should also have a place at the table and be part of the conversation.

In August of 2019, Ralph graciously accepted the invitation to speak at the [World Peace Through Inner Peace AYUDH Youth Summit](#) in Chicago. (AYUDH is the Youth wing of Amma's network).

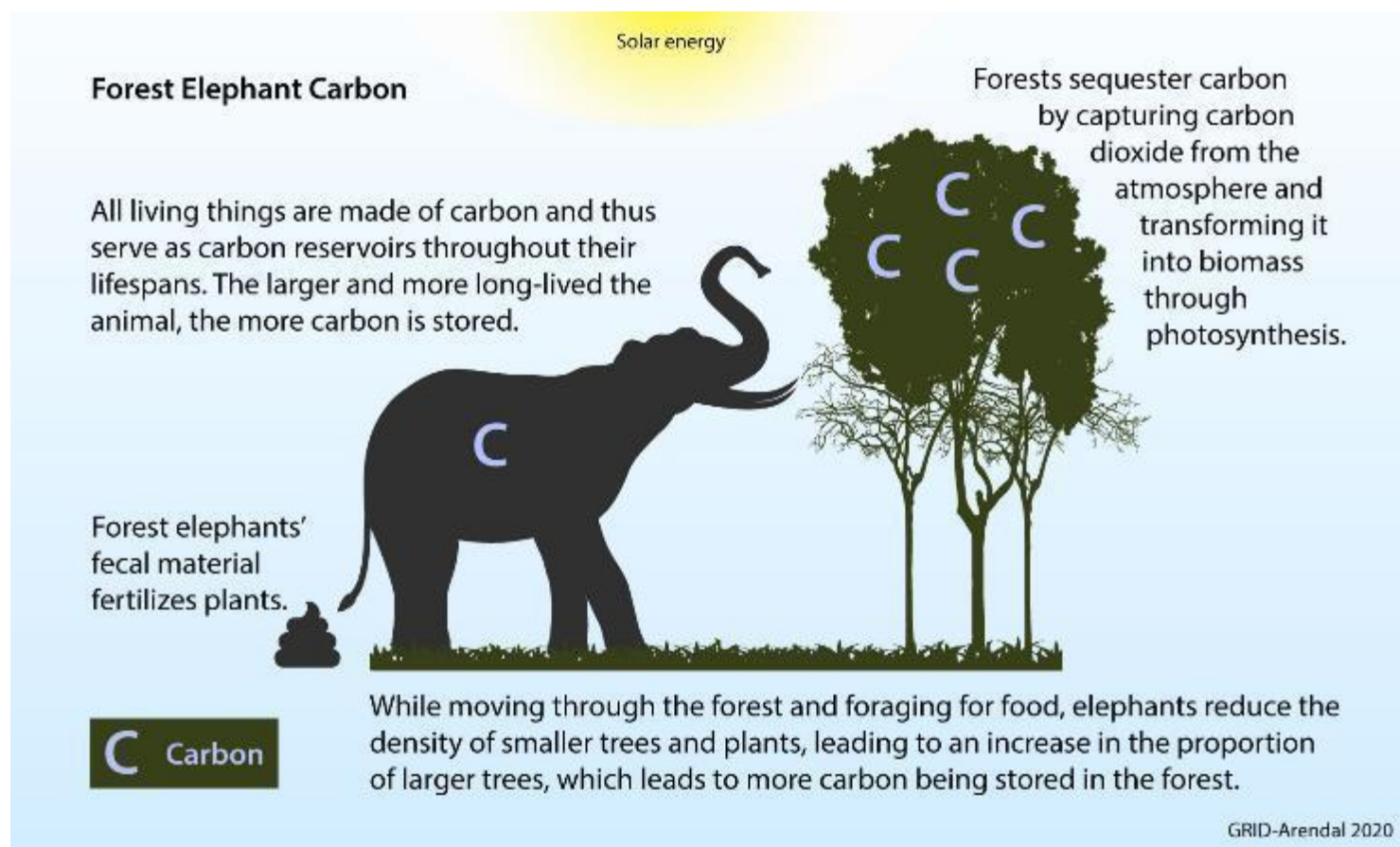
Most recently, Ralph was contacted by scientist, [Fabrio Berzaghi](#), asking if this methodology could be applied to the [African Forest Elephant](#). Like whales, forest elephants are a [Keystone Species](#) who help forests capture carbon. They are often referred to as eco-engineers because through their foraging and trampling of young shoots and small trees they allow larger and more carbon-dense trees to get bigger. Using the same model, he was able to quantify the elephants' carbon-sequestering services at approximately \$1.75 million dollars per individual elephant. When these elephants are slaughtered for ivory, they are worth only \$40,000. (Chami et al 2020)



Courtesy IMF

The hope is, when governments begin to realize they have billions of dollars in live "assets", or natural resources, they will have a vested interest in protecting and helping them grow, rather than exploiting and extracting them. Corporations who have made financial commitments to reduce their carbon can invest in these natural resources to offset emissions while transitioning to sustainability. The revenue generated from these investments can go back into the local communities to offer sustainable employment. This is a model that uplifts humanity while honoring nature.

As Amma has said, "Nature gives all of her wealth to human beings. Just as nature graciously serves, protects and helps us, it is our responsibility to return that dedication and service by helping her. Only then can the harmony between nature and humanity be preserved."



[Courtesy IMF](#)

The last two years have been a whirlwind. Ralph credits Amma with opening doors and minds that were previously closed and for removing many obstacles along the way.

Amma says, "Where there is Love, everything is effortless."

Ralph says his love for nature compelled him to act, but it is Amma's grace that has kept him going. So, how is all of this going to get accomplished? That's another article...

"Many people talk about environmental preservation, but true greatness lies in putting these principles into practice and doing something about it." – Amma

~ DIYA, SEAL ROCK, OREGON

Reference: "[On Valuing Nature-Based Solutions to Climate Change: A Framework with Applications to Elephants and Whales](#)," by R. Chami, T. Cosimano, C. Fullenkamp, F. Berzaghi, S. Espaneol- Jimenez, M. Marcondes, and J. Palazzo. ERID, Working Paper No. 297.