
Organic Land Care *with*

August, 2005

*"Peace cannot be achieved through violence,
it can only be attained through understanding."*

Albert Einstein



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This newsletter is distributed free of charge to all SOUL members.

Please feel free to make copies and share this information.

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The Feel-Good Event of the Season

SOUL Victoria participated in the first ever Organic Islands Festival on July 9th and 10th this summer!

This event was put together by Debra Morse, promoter and SOUL member, under the motto "Get to know your Organic Community" to "celebrate, discover and meet the people on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands whose products and services are making our islands' lifestyle more enjoyable and sustainable."

This festival was a great success for SOUL – both publicity wise and emotionally. We had a willing audience with positive attitude, receptive and open to dialogue. Young and old were interested and unafraid to stop and actually enter a booth, pick up a brochure, and start up a conversation. Very few just walked by with that empty expression in their eyes of disinterest and information overload. This was a very different experience from the regular garden trade shows.

The beautiful extensive grounds at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific proved an ideal venue. Visitors and exhibitors alike leisurely walked around without rush or crowding; most everybody had a smile on their face all day!

A crew of terrific SOUL volunteers excelled at handling set up and take down, and expertly staffed the booth on both days.

We thoroughly enjoyed the live music and, of course, all the free, delicious organic food samples to nibble on!

We had inspiring talks, made lots of good contacts and will likely get a few new members out of this event. Here's to the start of what will hopefully turn into an annual tradition!

Thank you all!





Soil Testing (Part IV)

Testing for Minerals

By Heide Hermary

Heide Hermary is president of Gaia College Inc. She can be reached at heide.hermary@gaiacollege.ca

By now you can recognize the common thread: organic soil management has very little to do with fertilizing, and very much to do with mulching and biodiversity of soil dwelling organisms.

But what do we do when our soil is truly “poor”? Certainly not all soils are created equal. Their capacity to “store” minerals, and even their mineral composition differs substantially from place to place. Many soils do, in fact, have less than desirable amounts of essential plant nutrients, including micronutrients.

There is no need for despair. Brazilian soil scientist Ana Primavesi demonstrated that it’s not the quantity of nutrients, but their quality and uninterrupted availability that’s important! In other words, plants grown in mulched and biologically diverse but otherwise poor soils thrived above those grown in biologically dead soils and the regular addition of fertilizers.

So once again, how **meaningful** is the information provided by soil mineral tests in an **organically** managed landscape?

Here is how Elaine Ingham of the Soil Foodweb Inc. explains it:

“What we want to know from chemical testing is: How much of a particular nutrient in the soil is available for the plant to take up?

Do our current testing methods give us that information? Probably not. Does any soil test predict what the plant **will** take up? No.

Just like a person, just because the food is in the freezer, the refrigerator, or even prepared and on the table, does not mean we will actually eat it. Just because nutrients are in water solution does not necessarily mean the plant can or will take them up.

In the assessment of soil chemistry underway with researchers in Australia there is no soil in Australia that lacks phosphorous. Or boron. Or silica. Or any nutrient, except perhaps nitrogen. If agricultural practices have really beaten on the soil, sulfur may be low as well. But nowhere near zero, and certainly not limiting for plant growth for several crops at least.

The nutrients are in our soils. Only when soils have been hammered by poor agricultural practices, or by severe disturbances, should significant additions of nutrients be required. Otherwise, all you need is the biology to move the nutrients that are present, but sequestered and tied up in soil, into soluble pools for plants to take up. So you can add the huge amounts of inorganic fertilizers recommended every year, forever, and destroy water quality at the same time, or add the biology needed, plus the foods

to feed them, and exit the toxic chemicals from your shelves.

You add back the nutrients needed for plants in the foods for the microbes. You only have to replace what the plant took out, which is perhaps a half ton of well-made aerobic compost per acre. In fact most of the time your plants themselves will add the needed foods: as long as you keep plant cover on your soil, the organisms will keep working for you.”

So what does that mean for us? If our soil has been highly disturbed (and many urban soils are), or chemically managed, it would indeed be useful to check the mineral composition of the soil. Based on those test results, fertilizers can then be used for the short term to correct any mineral deficiencies until the mulch and soil biology have become established.

Most homeowners, however, might as well spend their money on good organic soil management and some full spectrum organic fertilizers to tie them over for a couple of years, and skip the soil mineral test.

Whatever you do though, never use mineral fertilizers without a soil test. It’s not only a waste of money, but it can do a lot of damage to your soil as well!

Next time: testing for pH



Gardening with Native Plants

The Coastal Buffer Zone

By Laurie Hardy

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Rosa nutkana

Our NW coast is remarkable in its climate extremes and yet it never ceases to amaze me how its impact is tolerated by many of our plants, both native and ornamental. A walk along Victoria's Dallas water front shows shrubs and trees, "hanging in there," battered year long by incoming winds and ocean sprays. But nature does prevail and she shows us many examples of what to grow under these conditions. Along the coast you find niches of beautiful hemlocks, salals, sedums, roses and kinnikinnick.

In our private seaside gardens we need to pay a lot of attention to Mother Nature. She sends winds that carry sand particles that scour

foliage and inhibit growth on the windward side; salt that dehydrates plants and upsets their electrolyte balance; sun that dehydrates our shallow coastal often sandy soils; and fog and rain that present dampness issues. These combinations throughout the year can inhibit plant growth dramatically and in severe cases result in plant death.

So, what to do? Our soils need a constant build up of good composted material to maintain soil fertility and micro-organisms affected by these conditions.

Protection is vital, so a good 2-3 inches of leaf mulch will help retain soil moisture and ease the dehydration factor brought on by

wind and sun.

I like to create layers for coastal gardens as each level assists the other with water and wind protection. The big boys like Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*) and Shore Pine (*Pinus contorta*) combine well with our ornamentals such as the Coast Beefwood (*Casuarina stricta*). Good seashore plants.

The shrubbies, such as Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*) and the evergreen Huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*) do well with many of the Rockroses (*Cistus*). Again, given good mulches around their roots, they will tolerate those cold salty winds. Salal is very common, but is evergreen and makes great cover.

The groundcovers are vital to save that soil. Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Sea Pink (*Armeria maritima*), and Seashore Lupine (*Lupinus littoralis*) do well with many of the perennial verbenas (*Abronia* spp.).

Remember, in selecting shoreline garden plants always think about protection, groupings, niches and different levels. Use mulches, large rocks and put hardscape features to good use by tucking plants near and behind them. Water, monitor and appreciate their adaptations.



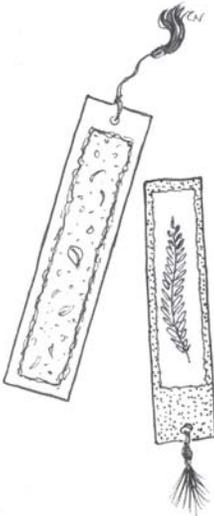
Kids in the Garden

Make your own flower paper!

By Christina Nikolic

*Christina Nikolic is a landscape designer in Victoria, B.C.
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Capture the colours of summer from your garden and create your very own, unique paper that has real flowers



embedded in it. You can even try and write on this paper, or create greeting cards, invitations, envelopes, or bookmarks from it.

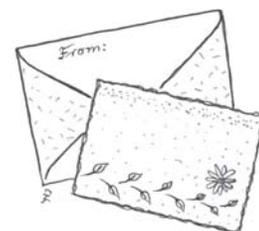
What you need is an armful of paper from the recycling bin, a few handfuls of colourful flowers, a large plastic tub

and water, a food blender, sponges, towels, and a screen the size of a sheet of paper with a frame around it. You can actually buy a papermaking kit at the craft store, but it is easy to make your own from a picture frame and some window screening.

There are many good sites on the internet where you can learn how!

Now, what flowers can you use? Look around in the garden: Where are the yellow flowers? How about those dandelions and buttercups in the lawn - who ever said they were just useless weeds! Sunflower petals and nasturtium flowers are another source for rich warm yellow and orange colours. You can find pink and red flowers on native fireweed, cosmos, roses, and hydrangeas (they also come in blue and purple). More blue and purple

flowers grow on cranesbills, periwinkles, and lobelias. Some Japanese maples have fabulous deep red leaves that look like a small hand with many fingers. Maybe you can even find some white flowers, some silvery leaves, or the transparent, paper-like seed pouches of the money plant (some people call it "honesty" plant). Just remember to ask before you gather anybody's flowers or leaves! For greenery, use the leaves of ferns or bamboo. Little bits of thin, peeling bark, like that of birch or arbutus trees, add an interesting touch.



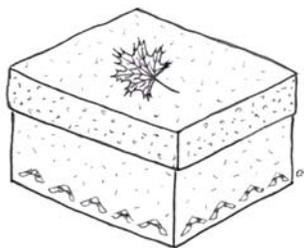
Here are two useful tips: Flat, thin, silky flowers and leaves work better than frilly, fleshy,

feathery ones; and separate flower petals are easier than entire flowers.

To prepare, tear the paper into inch size pieces and put these into a bucketful of water the night before you want to make your flower paper. It also helps to press your flowers and leaves overnight before you use them. So gather them the day before, and spread them between two layers of dishcloth on a smooth flat surface, like a table top, and then go find some heavy books to weigh them down. Then in the morning, your paper is nice and soggy already and your flowers are pressed nice and flat and you are ready to go!

Now you are ready to grind up the paper in a blender with the water (careful: keep the blender and work surface as dry as possible - water and electricity are a dangerous mix). Put the ground up paper slurry into the large tub. It should have the consistency of watery pea soup. Add the prepared flowers and leaves to the slurry, and any dye (explained below).

Now it's screening time! Dip the screen frame into the slurry and lift it up slowly, pausing at the water surface, trapping the paper particles and pressed flowers on the screen. Hold the screen horizontally and wiggle it a little from side to side - that way your paper will turn out evenly thick. Now lift the screen out completely, and let the water drip off. Turn the screen upside down onto a towel carefully, remove excess water with the sponge, and ease the paper off the screen and onto a drying rack to dry. You may have to practice a few times before it works out. Another way of doing this is to have several screen frames and to leave the paper on the screens to dry. The drying may take



several days. Do not put your paper out into the sun to dry, for the sun will bleach all the colour out of the flowers!

And who says paper has to be white?

Try dyeing your paper with berry juice. It's a good idea to wear rubber gloves for this! Put a handful of ripe blackberries and native Oregon grapes onto a piece of cheesecloth. Lift the cloth at the corners, twist it, and squeeze the juice out of the berries. Let the juice drip right into the pulp slurry, which will turn a soft purple. The squished berries can go into the compost when you're done.

When you use the bright and warm colours of yellow, orange, and red flowers with your purple paper, you will produce a nice colour contrast. The cooler colours of blue, pink, and purple flowers on the other hand will look soft and harmonious on your light purple paper.

You will love your flower paper, and so will everybody who receives it as a special letter or gift.





Green Roofs

Taking your Garden to New Heights

By Liam Hall

*Liam Hall is one of the principals of Paradise Cityscapes in Victoria
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There has been a lot of buzz lately about high-profile developments with green roofs planned – locally we have Dockside Green and the Burnside-Gorge Community Centre, and in Vancouver there is the Convention Centre. The focus is on the viability of *extensive* systems, which are lightweight and nearly self-sustaining once the plants are established.

Perhaps the concept receives so much attention because it is such a logical step towards minimizing our impact – when one considers how much of the urban footprint is represented by rooftops, and how many undisturbed meadows can be re-created right in our midst, the conclusion is pretty much unanimous: green roofs are good. They aid storm water management, they cool down hot summer cities and filter the air, they insulate buildings and prolong the life of roof membranes, and their mere sight can enhance the pleasure of

living or working in the city – particularly if you're a bee.



Chicago City Hall
Photo: Chris McGuire

But just how good are green roofs at doing all of these things? These are answers we need, because installing a planted system on the roof is more expensive than shingles. Benefits will only be truly realized when *many* roofs are greened, so mechanisms which bring down their cost and encourage widespread adoption are required. Policy makers will be reluctant to embrace the concept with such incentives until they can quantify the benefits for the urban environment and the public. Local data on everything from storm water retention to thermal performance to insect colonization will

demonstrate the value of green roofs – and push them closer to the mainstream.

In order to fully understand extensive green roofs (and have some fun, too) we need to build them. Small projects on public pavilions, over new additions, or even carports will contribute to a growing body of knowledge on different materials and the long-term performance of overall systems.



Green Roof Closeup
Photo: Paradise Cityscapes

To facilitate this, Gaia College will be including a green roof workshop in its Ecological Landscape Design Program this fall. Be sure to check it out on the website: www.gaiacollege.ca/design



The Green, Green Grass....

....of Cordova Bay Golf Course

By Lorraine Locherty

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A nutrient-rich tonic alive with beneficial microorganisms is helping golf courses create healthier landscapes.



This biologically active brew is produced by Earth Elixir Quality Compost Teas, the first compost tea brewing company to set up shop in town. With a growing client list that includes botanical gardens, golf courses and landscape professionals, Earth Elixir is providing an effective natural alternative to chemicals in the movement toward environmentally sound landscape management.

Earth Elixir uses state-of-the-art commercial brewing equipment to aerobically extract billions of living microbes from high quality compost. Basically, we are

applying modern science to the ages-old practice of making compost tea to enhance crop fertility. Technology allows us to refine the process – to select and grow beneficial microorganisms in a controlled environment and to monitor the process every step of the way.

Award-winning Cordova Bay Golf Course recently started using compost tea from Earth Elixir as part of its long-term commitment to reduce chemical fertilizers and move toward a nutrition program based on natural products. Once a week, compost tea is made by Earth Elixir brewmaster Danielle McCann, (pictured on the left) in a 100-gallon brewer set up in the golf course maintenance area. When it's ready, the tea is pumped into a boom sprayer for application on selected greens and fairways.

A similar commitment to using natural products has resulted in a compost tea trial at world-famous Butchart Gardens. Butchart is partnering with Earth Elixir to test various formulas on its roses, azaleas and annuals in a controlled setting. As part of the long-term trial, soil and foliar samples are collected and sent to the lab for analysis and data is compiled for review.

Gardeners will soon be able to pour themselves bottles of aerated compost tea from mini-brewers bubbling away at garden centres. The first public demonstration of the tea brewers recently took place at the Garden Path Organic Plant Nursery in Saanich. Owner Carolyn Herriot is sold on the benefits of compost tea and will be setting up an Earth Elixir mini-brewer at the nursery to allow customers to pour themselves a fresh brew to take home. Plans are in the works to sell bottled tea at selected retail outlets, including Narnia Farms at 577 Johnston Street in Victoria. Customers will eventually be able to order online from our website, www.earthelixir.com.



Cordova Bay Golf Course
Photo: Earth Elixir Quality Compost Teas





Become a SOUL Organic Garden Expert

Make a difference!

Please visit our website for more information
<http://www.organiclandcare.org/expert/>

Make a Difference!

Are you concerned about the effects of environmental toxins on our environment - or on your own family's health? Then take this opportunity to learn to do things differently – and make a difference in your community.



Whether you grow your own fruit and vegetables, or whether your gardens are purely ornamental, you can garden organically – without the use of pesticides and other toxic chemicals.

And as a SOUL Organic Garden Expert you can share your knowledge and empower others to learn and do things differently as well.

Yes, you CAN make a difference – in your own life, the lives of your family and friends, and in your community.

Share your Passion!

Here are some things you can do as a SOUL Organic Garden Expert:

- Be a mentor to a less experienced gardener
- Give a workshop
- Start an organic gardening program at your local school
- Write an article
- Organize a pesticide-free campaign
- Build a community food garden and get your hands dirty
- Be as creative as you like – use your unique talents – follow your personal interests

Just do what you can and enjoy – there is no requirement to serve a minimum number of volunteer hours. In fact, the most important thing you can do is right in your own home:

- Be an example to your neighbours, your community, your own family.

Have Fun!

As a SOUL Organic Garden Expert you are part of a group of like-minded people who are all committed to learning something new – and then sharing it with their communities.



You'll have fun learning about age-old wisdom and cutting-edge science, growing more beautiful gardens than ever before, and making new friends with people who share your passion.

And you'll enjoy the support and collaboration of your fellow SOUL Organic Garden Experts as you all embark on a journey to do things differently.

*And most importantly –
Mother Nature will thank
you.*

A BIG thank you to our supporting members!!!
Kennedy Garden & Landscape Services, Victoria, B.C. (250) 216-2659
Helios Landscaping Victoria, B.C. (250) 383-7303
Gaia College, Cowichan Station, B.C. (250) 709-2229



To find an organic land care professional in your area please visit the SOUL web site at www.organiclandcare.org