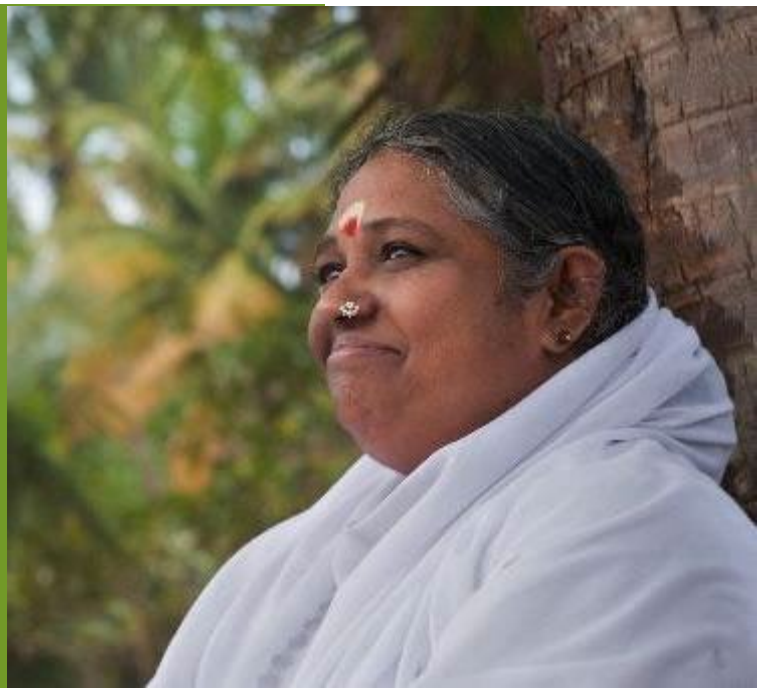
Embracing Nature Magazine

A Project by GreenFriends, Amma's Nature Organization



VOLUME 1, 2026

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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

Embracing Nature Magazine invites you to share your meaningful experiences with nature. From sustainable living, connecting with the environment, encounters with animals and birds, your story can inspire a deeper connection to Mother Earth.

Write to greenfriendsinfo@macenters.org

GREENFRIENDS MAGAZINES

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

As the 21st century marches on, it seems like every day we are faced with more things to worry about. From politics, to wars, to the rapidly warming planet and the accompanying rise of natural disasters, what's there to feel good about? On the environmental side, there is even a new term to define the angst of what is happening to the planet: "ecoanxiety." Our level of eco-anxiety only increases when we read or watch the news. But news tends to focus on all of the bad things that are happening while ignoring the good. Fortunately, there are actually some rays of hope, glimmering through the darkness of the daily news feeds. Here are even positive environmental news stories that can help to reduce some of our eco-anxiety.

TARGETED GRAZING

Many years ago, while Amma was in Santa Fe, a wildfire broke out in the national forest near my home. While Amma was giving darshan, I told her about the fire and my concern. The conversation led to the problem of forest management (or lack of) by the Forest Service. I complained about how cattle were allowed to graze unimpeded and the damage they caused to wetlands and riparian areas and how that increased fire danger. I asked her if there was anything that could be done, and she said, "More cows".

I was baffled. How could more cows solve a problem when it was obvious that more cows would only make the problem worse? In the back of my mind, it kind of shook my faith in the truth behind Amma's words. I filed it away as something I just could not understand.

About 10 years later, I came across a video of how western ranchers were beginning to concentrate their cattle to graze in very specific, limited areas and how the disturbance to the soil from the hooves plus the concentration of dung from a large number of cattle in a particular area actually improved the quality of the soil and led to positive environmental outcomes. Studies showed that where this practice was done, the land was markedly improved compared to areas where there were fewer cattle who could roam where they wished. And the MORE COWS, the better! Of course, Amma was right!

Since that time, the concept of targeted grazing has emerged as a positive approach to managing livestock while improving the environment. Targeted grazing:

- Reduces wildfire severity by removing light, flashy fuels
- Increases disturbance, which then promotes growth by native grasses, shrubs, and trees
- Fosters biodiversity by opening pockets of soil where native seeds can germinate and removes invasive and non-native species, especially in grasslands that are mostly non-native short-lived grass species
- Improves forage and accessibility for wildlife as well as humans

TARGETED GRAZING – HOW MANAGING WHERE AND WHEN LIMITING LIVESTOCK GRAZING CAN HELP THE LAND

PENGUIN POOP

Scientists from the University of Helsinki observed a colony of 60,000 Adélie penguins, pooping on a regular basis as birds are wont to do. As the wind shifted in the direction of the researchers, a fog formed over the course of a few hours. Using highly sensitive equipment, they measured high levels of ammonia gas, leading to cloud formation, which could be happening all over Antarctica. The clouds in turn reduce global warming. Who would've thought?

PENGUIN POOP COULD BE HELPING TO COOL THE PLANET

Ammonia gas from the penguins' feces sets off a reaction that potentially blunts some local effects of climate change.

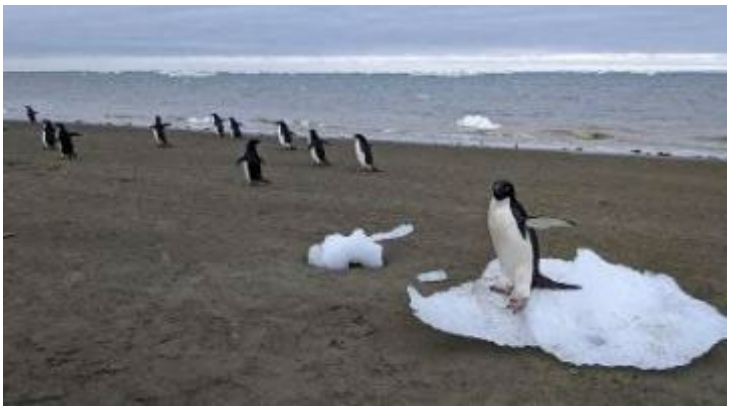


Photo courtesy of NPR.org

DREAM MAPS

Indigenous women in India have watched their villages' common areas under threat from climate change. Now they are leading an effort to speak up for their needs. (AP Video by Piyush Nagpal.)

Indigenous women – some of the least respected and acknowledged members of our human population. What do they know? As it turns out, they know a lot!

Odisha is one of India's poorest states and among the most vulnerable to climate impacts. A study by researchers from Odisha's Fakir Mohan University published in 2023 found that food production there had decreased by 40% in the last 50 years due to climate change. Comparing state government data

from the 1960s with their results, they found that common areas in many of their villages had shrunk by up to 25%.

Women are leading the way in responding to what is happening to the environment around their villages. Indigenous women from 10 villages, with help from a local nongovernmental organization, have surveyed and mapped out resources that are dwindling and what needs restoring. The women have created what are known as dream maps, showing their villages in their ideal states.

The women plan to submit their maps and surveys to local government officials, the first step in requesting village development funds to preserve or restore their common areas.

IN INDIA, INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND THEIR 'DREAM MAPS' SEEK TO PROTECT LANDS FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

REDWOODS RISING

An innovative forest restoration effort called Redwood Rising is making significant progress in healing damaged redwood forests that have been subjected to industrial-scale logging. The project focuses on the forests within Redwood National and State Parks, which contain almost half the world's remaining protected old-growth redwood trees that store more carbon per acre than any other forest type on Earth.

Despite their protected status and ecological importance, approximately two-thirds of the parks' 120,000 acres of redwoods show significant damage from past commercial logging activities. Some

areas were logged as recently as the 1990s, leaving behind missing trees and damaged streams, hundreds of miles of deteriorating roads, and compromised stream crossings.

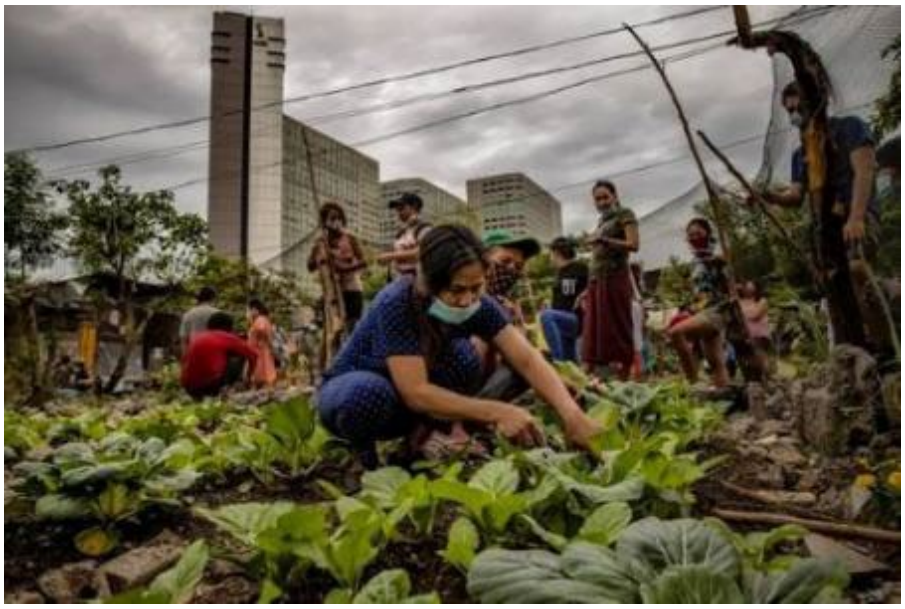
These forests will not recover on their own in the foreseeable future. They need our help.

Redwood Rising addresses multiple ecological challenges beyond simply replanting trees. The project team works to repair watershed damage, remove failing logging roads that cause erosion, and create conditions that allow young forests to develop old-growth characteristics more quickly.

"Redwoods Rising unites Save the Redwoods League, California State Parks, and the National Park Service to restore these previously logged forests, protect the parks' remaining old growth, and ensure the long-term health of these magnificent trees and all the plants, animals, and people who depend on them. Together with redwood enthusiasts, park visitors, local communities, and Tribes, we will bring back the vibrant forests of redwood giants that once blanketed these lands."

REDWOOD RISING PROJECT TRANSFORMS DAMAGED FORESTS INTO CLIMATE SURVIVORS

CITIES TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

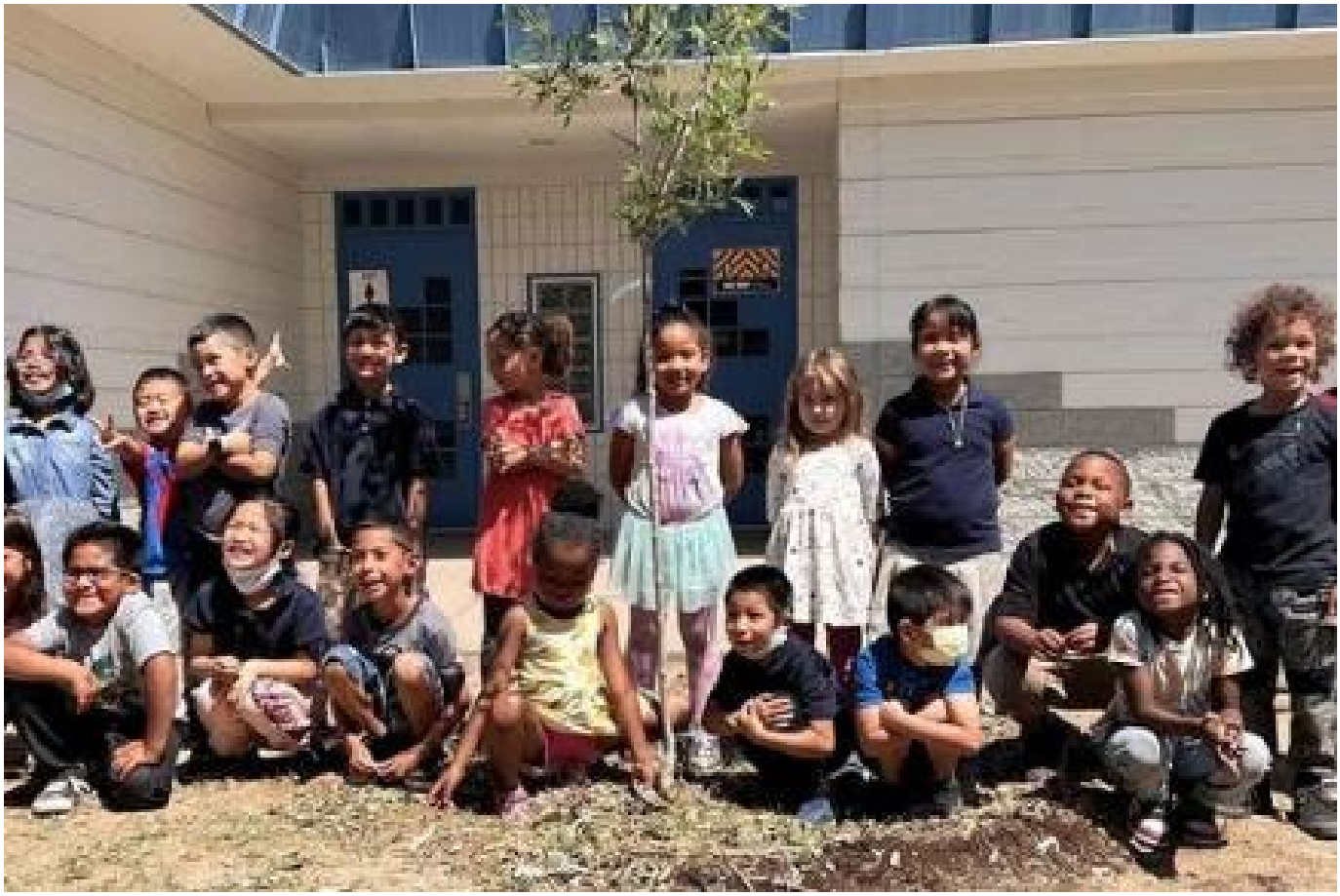


Ezra Acayan / Getty Images

In a story originally published by Grist, ten years after the Paris Agreement, nations are still nowhere near ambitious enough in their commitments to reduce emissions. It's been cities and other local governments that have taken the lead. According to a new report by the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, along with C40 — a global network of nearly 100 mayors prioritizing climate action, collectively representing nearly 600 million people — three-quarters of the cities in the latter group are slashing their per capita emissions faster than their national governments.

CITIES ARE FAR OUTPACING COUNTRIES IN FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

TREES AND THE URBAN HEAT ISLAND EFFECT



West Phoenix grade school kids with a newly planted tree

In this informative article from **One Tree Planted.org**, the positive effects of planting trees in cities is explained and cites case studies in Miami, FL and Phoenix, AZ – cities that experience intense heat throughout much of the year.

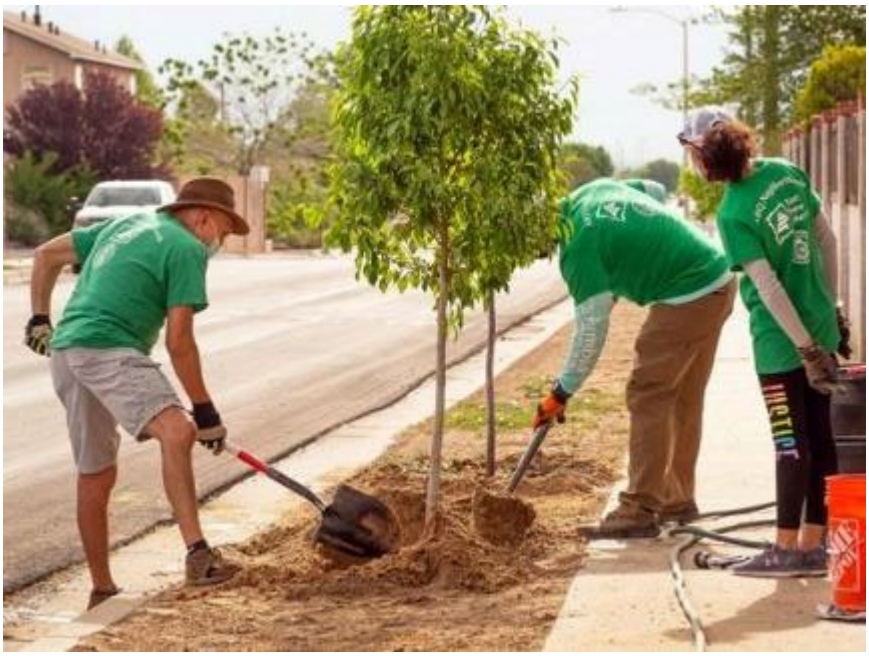
In heavily populated areas with busy roadways and tall, close-together buildings, there's little opportunity for hot air to escape, thus creating urban heat islands. Urban heat islands are areas within urban and suburban environments that experience elevated temperatures, especially when compared to rural zones. When homes, businesses and industrial buildings are built close together, they generate, trap and store heat, significantly increasing surrounding air temperatures.

According to the US EPA, "the annual mean air temperature of a city with one million or more people can be 1.8 to 5.4°F (1 to 3°C) warmer than its surroundings — and on a clear, calm night, this temperature difference can be as much as 22°F (12°C)."

1. Trees Provide Shade
2. Trees Help with Evapotranspiration
3. Trees Reduce Energy Use

THREE WAYS PLANTING TREES HELPS REDUCE THE URBAN HEAT ISLAND EFFECT

TREE NEW MEXICO



Tree New Mexico volunteers planting a tree

To take the concept of reducing heat islands in largely lower income urban neighborhoods a giant step forwards, there is Tree New Mexico (TNM).

A few years back, my wife Bhuvana and I drove to Albuquerque to help plant trees in a lower income neighborhood. We were a part of hundreds of volunteers participating in one of the many Tree New Mexico tree plantings. We were both surprised and impressed by the level of organization and dedication provided by TNM. Except for a couple of paid staff, everyone else was a volunteer. TNM had canvased the neighborhood, going door-to-door offering homeowners a free tree of their choice (based on trees that would do well in the high desert environment of Albuquerque) in their yard. Upon acceptance by the homeowner, TNM sent a crew around to pick the best location and dig the hole for each tree.

On the Saturday we went, numerous teams fanned out and carefully planted the trees, all of which had been donated. This was one of several such planting days in spring and fall. Once the trees were planted, all the homeowners had to do was agree to properly water them. And even after the trees were planted, TNM would send staff out to check on the trees to make sure they continue to grow and remain healthy.

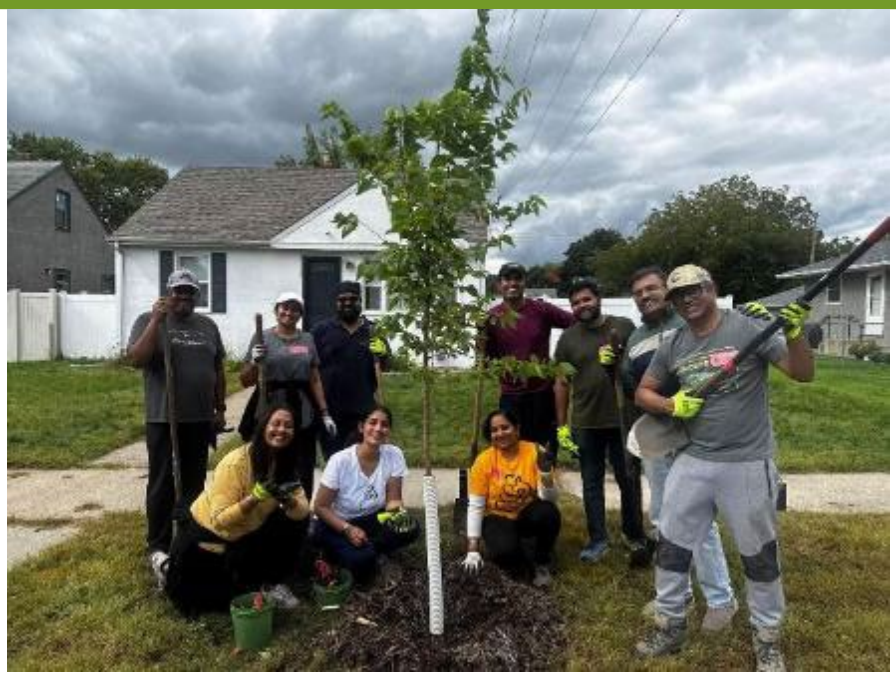
Bhuvana and I were impressed enough to go on to become “tree stewards”. through a 14-week course in “Urban Forestry”, designed for “people who love trees, love their community, and want to support the healthy growth of both”.

For 30 years, Tree New Mexico has become the premier private, non-profit tree planting organization in NM (and the nation); planting thousands of trees each year and building a high level of understanding and advocacy for the expansion and maintenance of urban forests. It is totally non-profit and has planted over 1,250,000 trees throughout Albuquerque and in communities throughout New Mexico.

TREE NEW MEXICO - *Tree New Mexico is dedicated to helping communities plant and care for trees in urban areas - large and small - throughout The Land of Enchantment.*

~ GOOD NEWS COLLECTED BY VISHWAN, NEW MEXICO

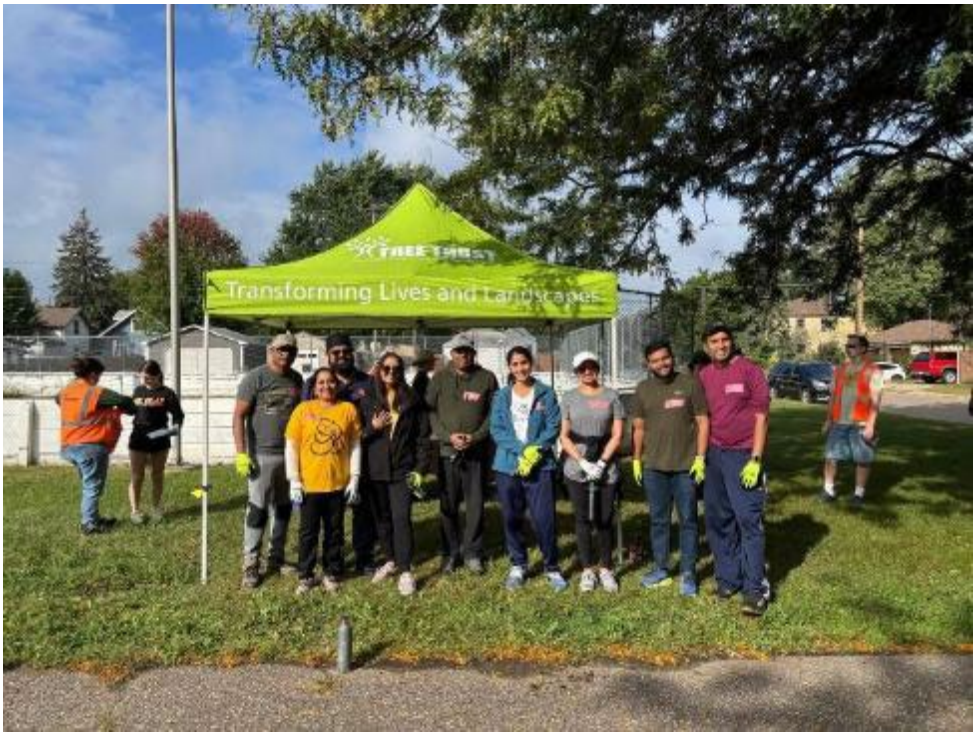
A DAY OF SERVICE AND GRATITUDE IN MINNESOTA



MINNESOTA AMMA SATSANG PARTNERS WITH TREE TRUST TO HONOR MOTHER NATURE

In joyful alignment with Amma's divine guidance on the sacred duty of "planting for future generations," MN Amma Satsang once again joined hands with the Minneapolis–based nonprofit "Tree Trust" for our annual tree-planting seva.

Tree Trust's mission—Tree Trust's mission is "Transforming Lives and Landscapes." This organization believes that "He who plants a tree, plants hope." (Lucy Larcom)—beautifully mirrors Amma's timeless call to protect and revere Mother Nature as a living manifestation of the Divine.



A DAY OF SERVICE AND GRATITUDE

- **Volunteers:** 17 MN Amma Satsang members joined by neighbors and friends
- **Trees planted:** 10 shade and ornamental trees
- **Location:** Residential neighborhoods in Excelsior, Minnesota.

Together, we carefully placed each sapling into the earth, mulched, watered, and staked them, ensuring they will thrive for decades to come. Beyond their future canopy of shade and habitat, these young trees symbolize resilience, communal harmony, and the living prayer that future generations inherit a healthier planet.

“Tree planting was a beautiful way to give back to the community. The idea that we, as individuals, can plant seeds that grow into trees over the years—weathering the winds of the world—mirrors how I view the impact of doing good. Each of us has the opportunity, even in small ways, to plant seeds of kindness and empathy. The tree that blossoms from those acts may be one we never see, but it will continue to grow long after we’re gone.” - *Gauri Binoy, MN Amma Satsang volunteer.*

“As Amma lovingly reminds us, Mother Earth cradles our entire lives in her divine lap, nurturing us with unconditional love and patience. The tree-planting seva with the Minneapolis Satsang was a sacred opportunity to offer our humble gratitude to this benevolent Mother, honoring her through a small yet deeply meaningful act of love and reverence.” - *Sharada Sridar, MN Amma Satsang volunteer*

“It’s amazing how many small hands can create something so lasting. Planting with Tree Trust was a powerful example of what is possible when people come together as a community with shared purpose. Surrounded by volunteers—each of us digging, lifting, and planting side by side---I felt the quiet but powerful strength of collective action. The tree planting served as a centering force as well. I felt humility in the fact these trees will grow long after we’re gone, as silent witnesses to a future we may never see. It reminded me that we’re just one part of a much bigger story, but have the opportunity to leave a mark on when we work as one." - *Indrajeet Nair, MN Amma Satsang Volunteer*

WHY TREES?

- **Environmental impact:** Each mature tree can absorb approximately 48 pounds of carbon dioxide annually, cool urban heat islands, and improve air quality.
- **Community well-being:** Green spaces foster mental calm, strengthen neighborhood bonds, and provide habitat for birds and pollinators.
- **Spiritual resonance:** Planting trees embodies Amma’s teaching that selfless service (seva) is love in action—an offering to both humanity and the Earth.

Why was this particular location selected for the tree planting?

This location was selected for new trees because there was a recent community effort to transform an empty lot into a family-friendly park for local residents. They raised money to install a new playground, but needed to add some trees for shade and to block the noise of the nearby highway.

Who is responsible for maintaining the trees?

These trees will be regularly watered and maintained by the City of Excelsior.

Is there any additional or interesting information you can share about the planting initiative and its impact on the environment?

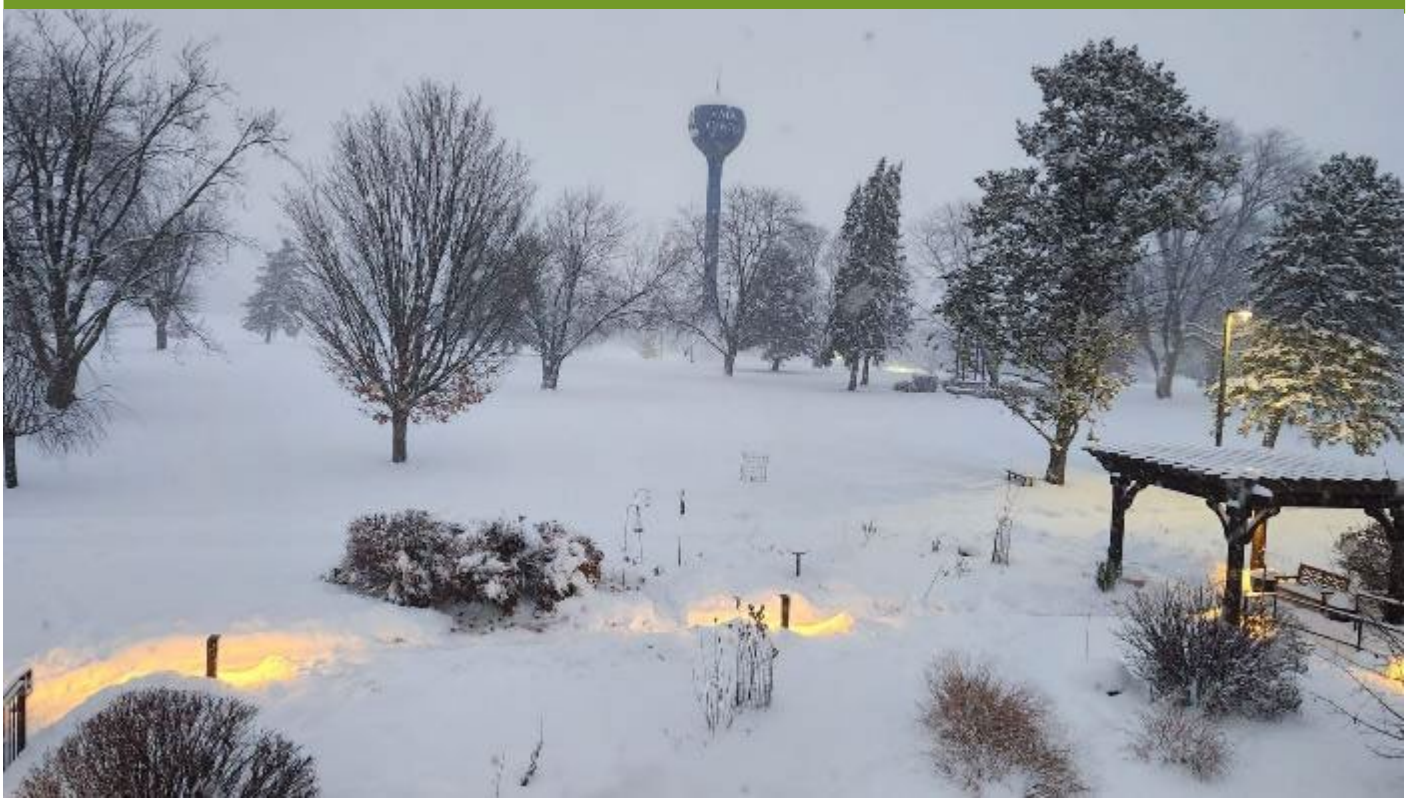
A lot of neighbors and community members came out to this event to see the work being done. Some families helped plant trees, and some older neighbors who could not actively participate expressed lots of gratitude for the work of the Amma Satsang volunteers for contributing to their community's greenery.

Our collaboration with Tree Trust is an ongoing commitment.

Let us continue to answer Amma’s call—rooting our communities, our planet, and our hearts in love and stewardship. Together, every sapling we plant today becomes a towering blessing for tomorrow.

~ CHITHRA BINOY, MINNEAPOLIS AMMA SATSANG

YEAR-ROUND BIRDS AT MA CENTER CHICAGO: PART 2



MA Center Chicago in the depths of winter

IN THE PAST 5 YEARS, OVER 150 SPECIES OF BIRDS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AT MA CENTER CHICAGO'S 140 PLUS ACRES.

A resident of Amma's Chicago ashram opens her eyes and heart to recognize local hardy birds who endure the Midwest winter. As a continuation of Volume 1 2025's photo-essay, readers are invited to appreciate eight more wintering species.

In the past five years, over 150 species of birds have been identified at MA Center Chicago's 140 plus acres. Most of these birds are migratory, some just passing through in the spring and fall to their breeding or wintering destinations, while others stay and breed here during the spring and summer months. But there are 16 species of birds that make MACC their home year-round. These birds have adapted to the cold, snowy winter months when food is scarce and the winds are bone chilling.

Red-Tailed Hawks soar above the trees and fields looking for prey, usually rodents. In the fall, we often see a low flying juvenile around. It seems oblivious to humans and spends more time on the ground hunting for food than an adult hawk. The juvenile's tail is brown striped and doesn't get reddish feathers until the second year when it is considered an adult.

Red-tailed hawk juvenile

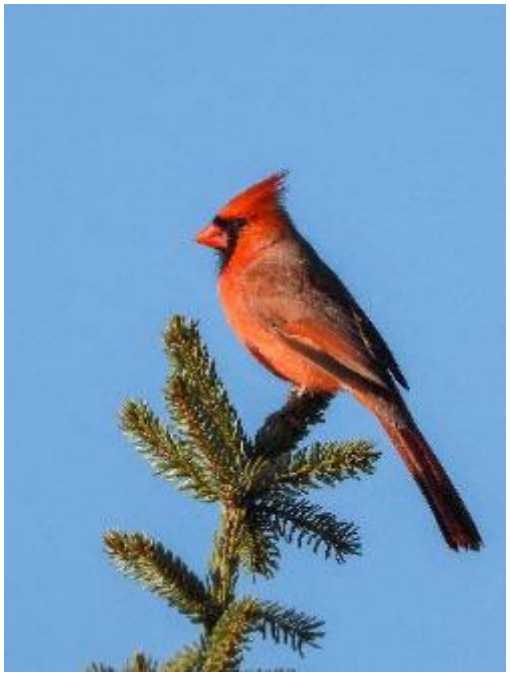
House Sparrows are Old World birds that were introduced to New York in 1851. Today they populate most of North America. The males are black, white, tan and brown and the females brown and tan. A flock of about 40 comes to the feeders daily. They seem to have increased in number here. They can be aggressive at times, taking over the nesting boxes of bluebirds and swallows. Some house sparrows here build large, loosely woven nests under the canopy at the parking lot entrance. The babies can be heard chirping but are never seen in the nest, which is well hidden under the loose nesting material of grasses and even feathers. Both parents will grab seeds from the feeders for the fledglings who wait on the sidewalk with open mouths.

House sparrow male

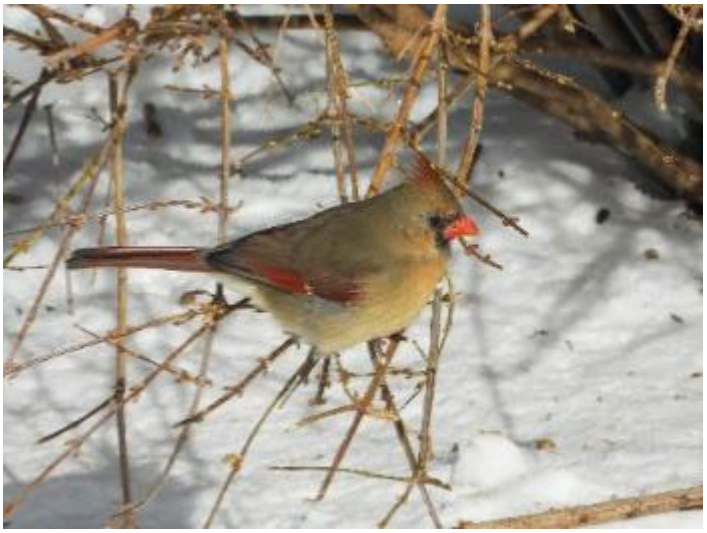
European starling

In the 1890s, one hundred **European Starlings** were released in New York's Central Park by fans of Shakespeare. They wanted to introduce to America all of the birds mentioned in his plays. Only the starlings survived and thrived. Today there are over 2 million starlings across the United States, Canada and Mexico. In late summer the juveniles that were born here start to form large flocks with other starlings from the area. By autumn, the flocks will number in the hundreds and the tan-colored juveniles will get their first winter plumage which is black with tiny heart-shaped spots. There are several adults that stay here at MACC all year. Starlings make a variety of unusual sounds including mimicking car alarms. At least one starling here mimics Eastern Meadowlarks and the Killdeer that are summer residents. They can be heard during the months when these birds aren't present.

Northern Cardinals are always a delight to see, especially on a snowy winter day, the male with his bright red plumage and black face, and the female with her light brown plumage and bright orange beak. Male cardinals are territorial during breeding season and at that time the one that lives near the South Lodge chases other cardinals away from the bird feeders. But during the winter, several cardinals may be seen there foraging together.

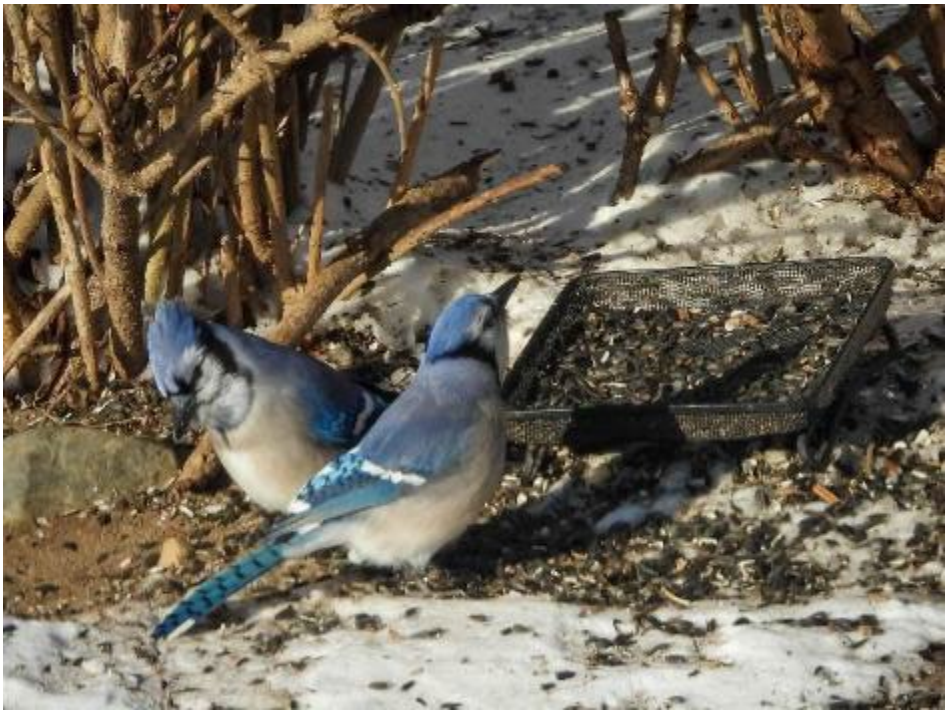


Northern cardinal male



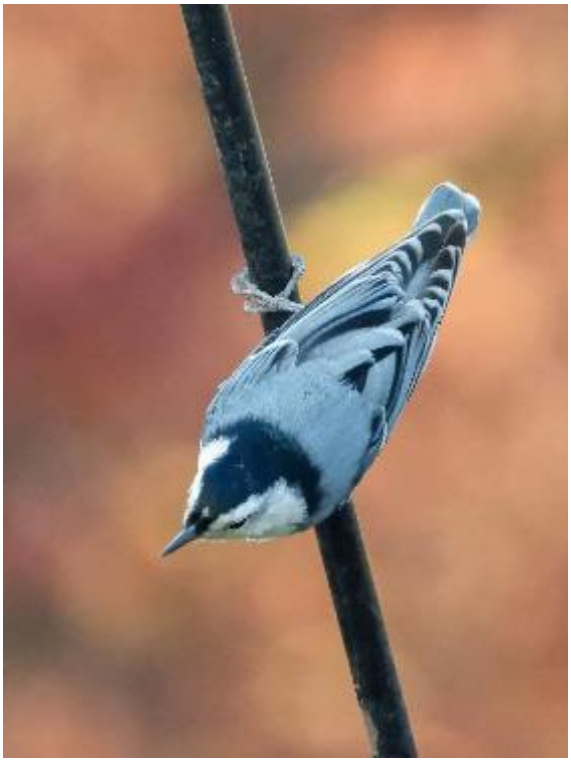
Northern cardinal female

Blue Jays always noisily announce their arrival to the bird feeders often causing the smaller birds to scatter. Jays have several calls including one that mimics a hawk. The pair that lives here is a frequent sight at the feeders during the winter, but during breeding season they are busy raising a family in the trees along the creek on the west end of the property. By August, it gets noisy by the creek and ponds when the young jays start to go off on their own, flying from tree to shrub to tree loudly calling wherever they go.

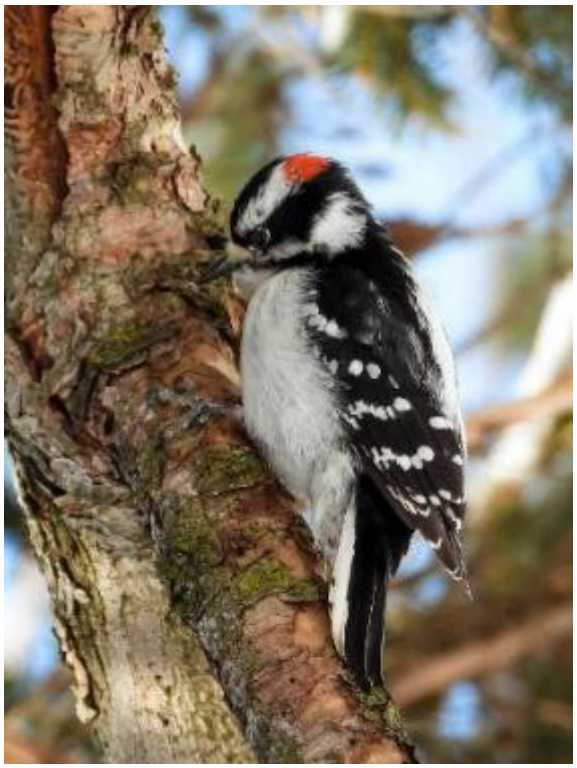


Blue jays

White-breasted Nuthatches creep up, down or sideways along tree trunks and limbs to forage for food. They like insects and large meaty seeds. They might make a few quick trips to the seed-filled feeders but will spend more time at the suet feeders, hanging upside down as they eat. They are gray with a white face and undersides, the male having a black cap and nape. Pairs are often seen together. We have several pairs here including one in the quad by the South Lodge.



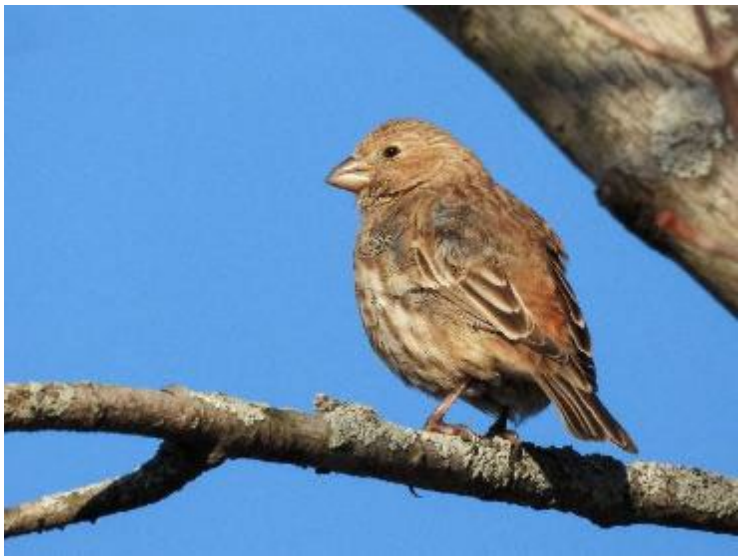
White-breasted nuthatch



Downy woodpecker male

Downy Woodpeckers are small, sparrow sized black and white birds. The male has a red patch on the back of his head. A pair is often seen together in several locations at the Center but appear to nest in trees along the creek because, later in the summer, young Downys are sometimes observed moving about tree trunks and limbs there. Downy woodpeckers eat mostly insects but also like seeds, and will cling to the mullein and other weed stalks to forage.

House Finches are native to the western United States and Mexico. Some were brought to New York in 1940 to be sold as pets. Pet shop owners released them when threatened with fines by officials for illegal trade. The house finches in the east and here in the Midwest are descendants of those birds. They are more susceptible to disease due to their small gene pool. They have streaked light brown and white plumage with the males adding a rosy-red head, breast and rump. They can be heard singing sweetly high in a tree or foraging on the ground, often with sparrows.

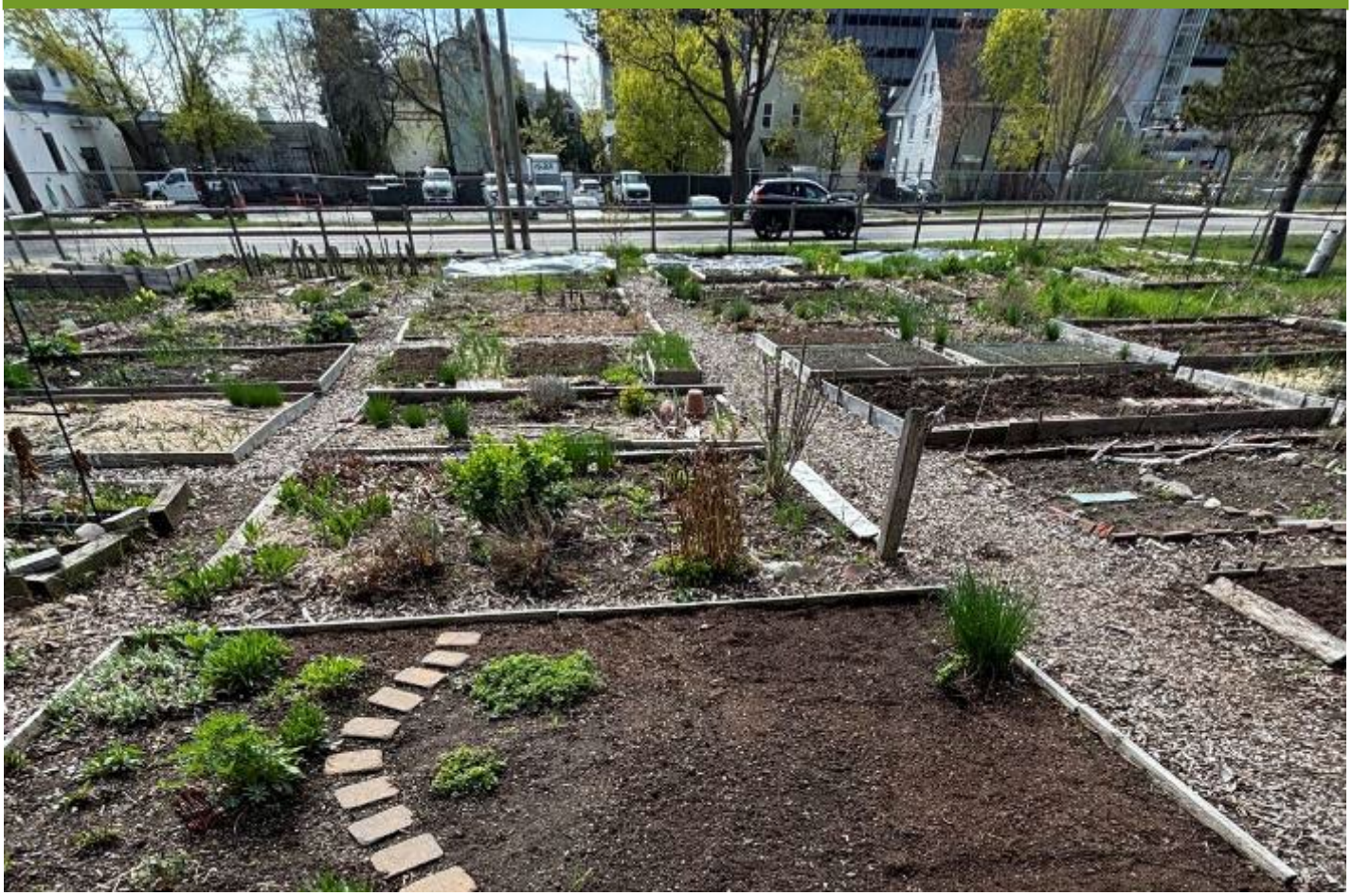


House finch female

What special birds and animals thrive year-round where you live? We welcome your research and reports, to open our hearts and minds to the most resilient of God's creatures. Write to greenfriendsinfo@macenters.org.

~ NISHKAMA, MA CENTER CHICAGO

DIGGING BENEATH THE SURFACE



BY GRACE ALEXANDER. ALSO PRINTED IN PORTLAND, MAINE'S NEWSPAPER "*PRESS HERALD*," ON JANUARY 15, 2025.

My aunt has a garden plot that I took care of over the summer while she traveled. It is a small 8 x 10-foot plot located in one of Portland's community gardens. The community garden holds about 30 different plots, each of which has a different owner. It is wedged between a dusty dog park and a shelter for abused women.

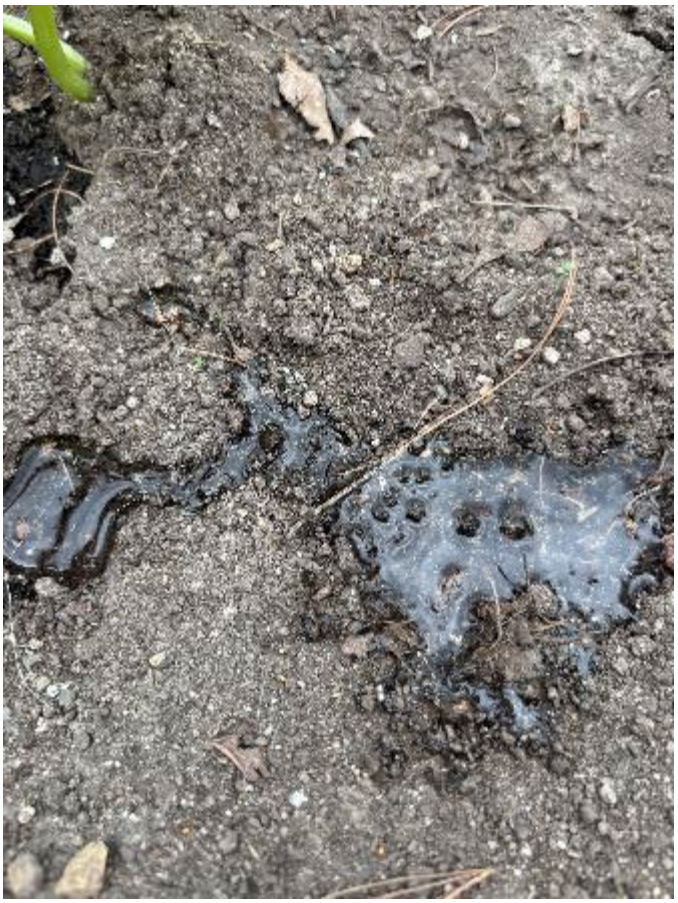
Each week I would make the roughly one mile walk from my house down to the garden. I would pass the West End's mansions and trimmed gardens, walk down a steep hill, and past groups of homeless people clearly on drugs, until I eventually arrived at the garden. I would open the

gate, and then make my way over to a locked shed. I would plug in the code my aunt messaged me and retrieve a key to turn on the water spigot. In the shed there were two large water cans which I would grab and carry over to the spigot. I would insert the key to the spigot and fill the cans with water. I would then carry the watering cans and feed the many plants in my aunt's small plot.

Besides my aunt's plot, there were 29 other plots that looked perfect. Their soil was a uniform dark brown color, the plants had clear rows between them, and each plant was with its own kind, which I would later learn is called homogeneous monocultures. My eyes would light up when I would see these other plots, they produced the most aesthetically pleasing gardens. I often wished that my aunt's garden looked that way. Unfortunately, my aunt's was the single derelict looking plot. Most people walking by the garden would have thought that my aunt's plot was abandoned. There were weeds, an excess amount of thyme, leaves covering the ground, and zero organization of like-kind plants. Everything was a mess.

One thing I specifically admired about other plots in the garden was that their soil seemed perfect. It was a rich, dark brown, almost black, and was evenly distributed across the plot. I loved how you could see the full cucumber plant top to bottom, not just the tops of the plants like in my aunt's plot. I loved how the thyme, basil, and mint each had its individual section, not a single weed or leaf intruding on its space. I loved how nothing seemed out of place; if they were growing tomatoes, there would only be tomatoes in the section.

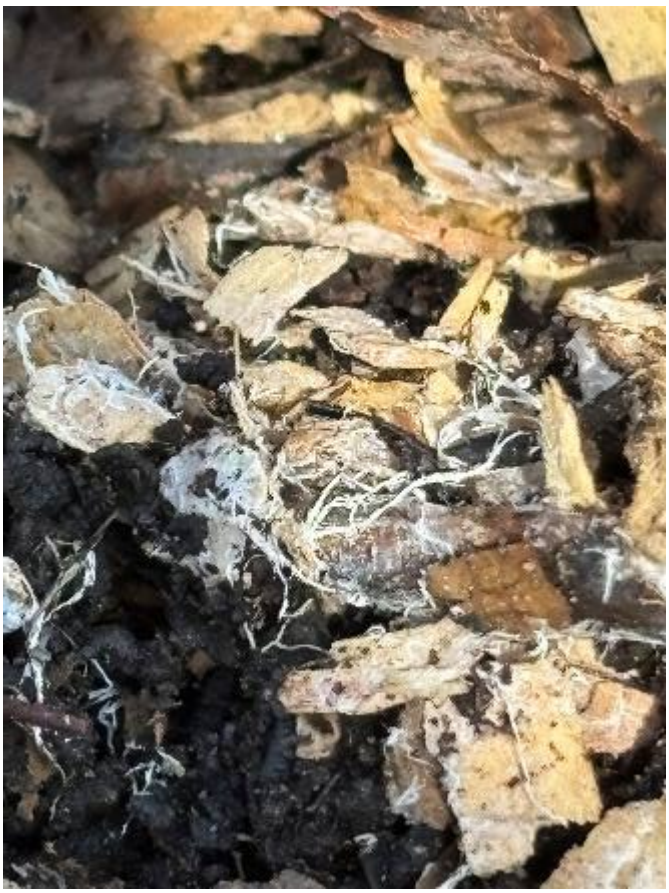
My aunt was in town one day and we went to the garden together. While everything seemed perfect in the neighboring plots, I learned that it wasn't when my aunt showed me their soil up close. "Grace, come over and bring the watering can. Pour the water onto the soil and see what it does." I followed her instruction and poured the water onto the soil and observed how the water formed a pool atop the soil and then took many seconds to seep into the soil. "Grace, now come over to our plot and pour water onto the soil." I was shocked to see how the soil immediately absorbed the water. I began to pour water on, in increments, just to see how fast the soil drank the water. If you even just blinked, the water would be gone.



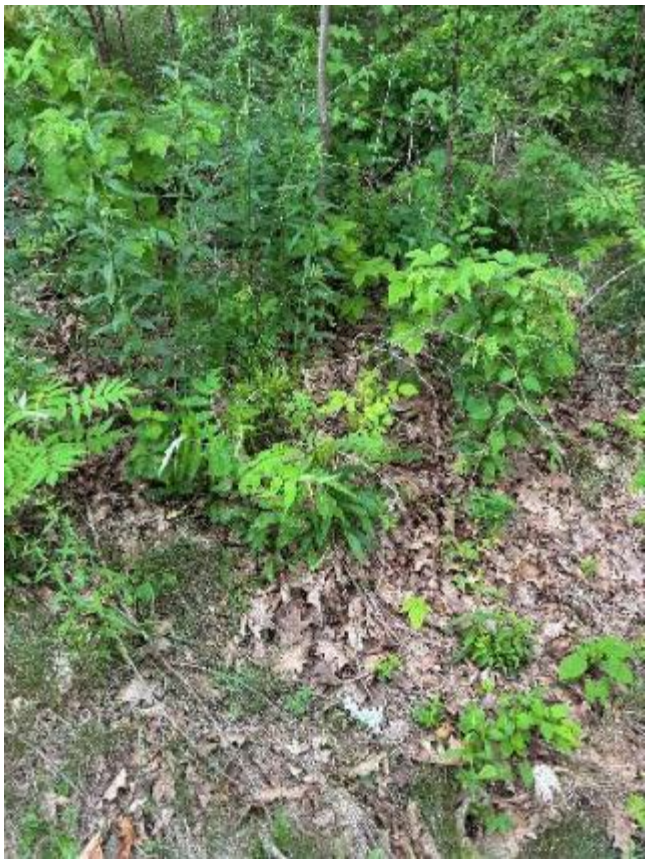
Water puddling on bare soil

My aunt taught me that the nutrient value of vegetables depends on the soil in which they are grown. For a soil ecosystem to flourish it needs four main beneficial microbes: bacteria, fungi, nematodes and protozoa. To survive, beneficial microbes need space to live, air and water. The beneficial microbes in soil act like the digestive system in human bodies. They digest the soil, organic matter and each other, and their waste becomes digestible food for plants.

Here's how it works: plant leaves, through photosynthesis, produce sugar, which they send to the roots and into the soil. Then small microbes eat the sugar, and larger microbes eat the smaller ones and poop out the nutrients that were formerly held in the smaller microbe bodies. Their poop is essential food for the plants as it's filled with minerals like nitrogen and carbon. Without the beneficial microbes the plants can't get the variety of nutrients that they need to flourish and photosynthesize properly.



Beneficial fungi



Forest floor

One of the best soil ecosystems is a forest floor. A forest floor is spongy, with sticks and leaves covering the soil surface, shielding it from direct sunlight so it doesn't dry out. Therefore, the protected soil sponge has the capacity to absorb water, hold water, and freely drain water, because it has holes for air and water to get in and out. With the air and water, the plant's roots in the forest floor are nourished and able to function properly. The whole soil ecosystem works together to help the plants thrive.

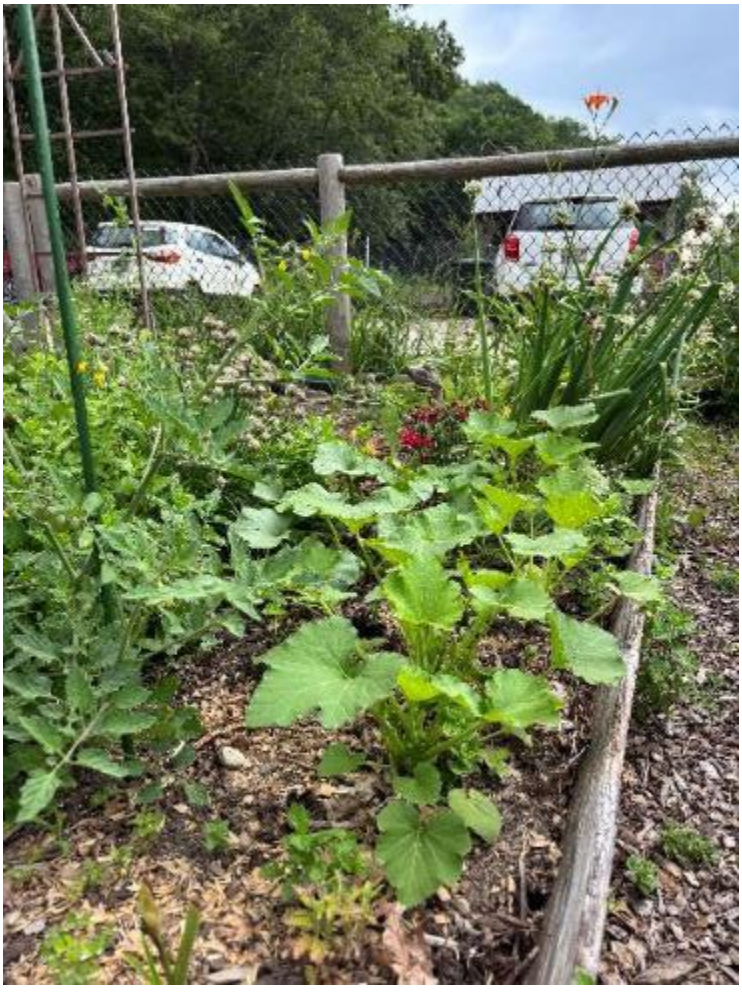
Back in the garden, the soil in the neighboring plots was easily subject to drying out because it was directly exposed to sunlight and raindrops. Dried out soil is much more dense and compacted, meaning less air and water can enter. Rain falling on bare soil also forms a crust layer

preventing air and water from being absorbed. Beneficial microbes cannot survive in non-air or anaerobic conditions. In contrast, harmful microbes thrive under these conditions and further prevent the water from penetrating the soil.

I realized that my aunt's garden, for all its chaos, held a deeper kind of order, emulating the forest floor. The weeds towering over everything weren't just there by accident; they provided shade so the soil didn't dry out. The leaves scattered across the surface weren't signs of neglect; they were a natural cover so that the sun and rain wasn't directly hitting the soil. The tangled mix of plants wasn't random chaos; it allowed different parts of the ecosystem to work together. What seemed like a mess at first glance was actually the garden's way of quietly taking care of itself.

My aunt's garden taught me that the real value often isn't obvious from the surface. It's easy to be impressed by the perfect rows and neatness of other plots, but it's what's happening below the surface that matters most. The richest, most nutrient-dense produce came from soil that looked neglected on top, but was thriving underneath. Like in the garden, life's real purpose often lies just out of sight, where you can't see it until you're willing to get your hands dirty and uncover the meaning.

~ GRACE ALEXANDER,
NIECE OF SEETALA, AMRITAPURI



Seetala's forest floor garden

BEEKEEPING FOR AMMA

IN THE BEGINNING

My name is Pauline, the lead beekeeper at Amma Canada Farms in Georgetown Ontario (outskirts of Toronto). Our small beekeeping team has been practicing beekeeping since 2009 and has maintained hives each year. In 2009, our beekeeping journey started with Nigama, our first beekeeper. Nigama paved the way for future beekeepers to follow after she departed for Amritapuri.

What was exciting in 2025 was establishing a partnership with Bees Are Life and working with an experienced beekeeper who also practices compassionate beekeeping methods similar to ours. In tandem, we shared a total of 11 hives amounting to over 110 pounds of honey! A good harvest—considering all of our hives were from nucs (a nuc is a Queen and about 5,000 bees)

that were purchased this spring. Each year our first jar of honey is offered to Amma before going to food banks or market.

My beekeeping journey began in 2016, under the leadership of Poornesh and Sonia, the ashram's two main beekeepers at that time. My personal experience began with non-hive duties like building frames and hive boxes, extracting, bottling and selling honey. My first hands-on experience with the hives was love at first sight, despite being stung on the same day! When Poornesh and Sonia left Toronto, there were no volunteers to take on this seva, and sadly, beekeeping would have been halted. I took on the role of interim lead beekeeper, waiting for someone else to take over the lead. I am now going into my 9th year (and still waiting)!

My seva involves overseeing and managing the hives, inspecting bees for potential issues, training newcomers, constructing bee equipment, and overseeing the extraction and sale of honey. I am particularly fascinated by honeybees and dedicated to understanding their biology, needs, and challenges, having learned about their life cycles and the essential roles they play in our ecosystem. Although beekeeping practices are time sensitive, challenging and physically demanding at certain times of the year, nothing brings me more delight than working at the hives.

The challenging part of beekeeping is working with a species that sees the world very differently than humans and with whom the ability to communicate is limited to keen observation and honestly, often trial and error. In addition to this, honey bees are very sensitive to weather conditions. The unpredictable weather makes it very difficult to plan ahead and one must remain flexible and adapt daily to the changes in weather.

What brings a sense of delight are the bees themselves. While working with and observing the bees, one sees a gentleness of spirit, a dedication to the task at hand, and the manifestation of a collective consciousness. Bees work hard and share the fruits of their labour evenly. There is no hoarding, no greed, no asserting of one bee's authority over another bee, no fights for power and control among members of the hive. The selfless nature of the individual bees awakens a natural respect and love for these little creatures.

I believe beekeeping is a privilege, and it is through Amma's grace that I am able to offer this service. My work as a beekeeper at Amma Canada is driven by a deep love and respect for the bees and a commitment to sustainable practices. The challenges of beekeeping are offset by the joy of working with such a vital species, and the ashram's beekeeping philosophy is centered on the idea of mindful, compassionate care. Through Amma's guidance and our team's collective effort, the goal is not only to harvest honey but to ensure the health and survival of the bees, whose existence is so crucial to our world. Honey bees play a critical role

in the pollination of our crops. No matter how well plants are watered and fertilized, without the activity of pollinators, crop production would fall to near zero.

A DAY AT THE HIVES

At Amma Canada beekeeping is a labour of love. Our small team see the bees as a manifestation of the Divine Mother and approach them with mindfulness and respect. The day begins with a review of tasks at the bee barn, followed by loading the van with the necessary tools and then heading off to the apiary. Upon arrival, we chant “Om Dhyayamo” and greet the bees. We work gently with the bees, inspecting the hives for signs of concern such as the absence of eggs, larvae or queen, overcrowding, disease, pests, etc. Work at the hives ends with the chant “Lokah Samantha Sukhino Bhavanthu”.

As with our other Amma Canada farm practices, our hives are managed using certified organic practices; that is, avoiding synthetic use of antibiotics and harmful chemicals. Our honey is branded as “Amrita Madhu.” It is raw, unpasteurized, and coarsely filtered to preserve its valuable nutrients. We extract only the surplus honey from the hives since the bees’ wellbeing is prioritized over honey production. Sufficient stores of honey are left for the winter months and early spring as we feel this is a more natural and healthier diet for the bees.

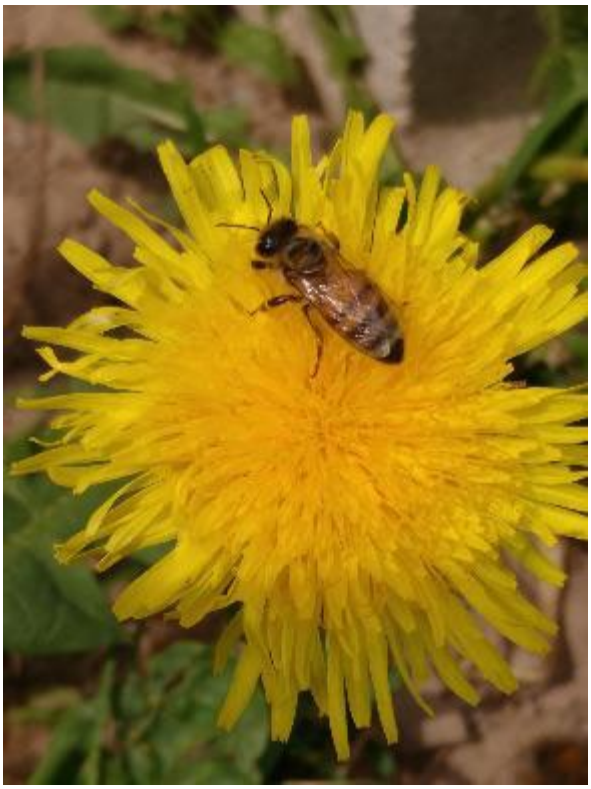
CITIZENS OF THE HIVE

Honey bees are social insects that live in a highly organized society, and share a collective intelligence in which they make collective decisions. Each colony consists of three types of bees: the queen, the worker bees and the male drones. Bees understand that they are totally dependent on each other.

THE QUEEN

The Queen is the most significant bee in the hive. She is the hive's reproductive force, the mother of all the bees in the hive. She typically lives for three to five years. While the term Queen has a connotation of a ruling monarch, in the hive the Queen's role is one of self-sacrifice. The Queen lives inside the hive, never seeing the light of day except during her maiden flight or when a new hive is created. (A new hive is created when the hive becomes too crowded. Worker bees produce a new virgin Queen and the "old" Queen plus half of the hive leave to start a new hive elsewhere.)

Inside the hive the Queen exudes a unique fragrance that fills the hive. Each Queen's fragrance differs from the next. In the book "Song of Increase", Jacqueline Freeman, an intuitive beekeeper who communicates with bees in a manner similar to the way the founders of Findhorn communicated with plants, states that the Queen's scent "speaks" to the bees – "This scent surrounds us and speaks to us every day, telling us how we are loved, and in return, we want nothing but to honor the Queen by being in service to the hive." (Does this remind you of anyone in the world of humans who has similar effect on people?) Amma!



THE MAIDEN BEES (WORKER BEES)

The female bees in the hive are called worker bees. They compose 90% or more of the hive's population. A few days after being born, the worker bee becomes a nurse bee feeding the larvae. As bees mature they build honeycomb, feed and care for the Queen, clean the hive, maintain the ideal temperature of the hive, and gather, process and store, nectar and pollen. They also defend the hive from intruders, pests and diseases. Worker bees live for three to six weeks.

The worker bees are truly role models for those on the spiritual path. They perform most of the duties needed to maintain the hive. They work in harmony with one another, are totally dedicated to the task at hand and are ready at a moment's notice to defend the hive.

In speaking of the worker bees, Gunther Hauk in his book "Towards Saving the Honey Bee" states: "Truly, the term "labour of love" would apply to the workers, whose selfless activity is a

source of marvel and amazement …. they work utilizing and applying wisdom, insight and understanding."

In "The Song of Increase", Jacqueline Freeman reveals a message she received from the Maiden bees – "We are embodied in the knowledge of our connection. Some of you believe you stand alone. In our beautifully connected world, nothing stands alone. There is consciousness in everything. This is God's voice and how God speaks to us."

THE DRONES

Five to ten percent of each hive is composed of male bees called Drones. Drones are generally seen as useless by most beekeepers, except for their role in mating with a virgin queen. Because of this, drone larvae are often destroyed as beekeepers see the drones as simply taking up space, consuming honey and as a possible source of spreading disease. However, when the drone larvae are destroyed, the Queen quickly replaces them.

Jacqueline Freeman's explanation of the drones' function sheds light on why the Queen would quickly replace the destroyed drone larvae. She states that the drones' buzzing sound is like a song. It transmits knowledge to the young bees, telling them the spiritual and functional purpose of honey bees in the world. Jacqueline goes on to say that the drones' song moves through the hive like a prayer becoming part of the vibratory being of each bee. Rudolph Steiner, the visionary philosopher-scientist, also states that the drones are responsible for communicating to the hive the feeling state in which the hive dwells.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEES AND THEIR DECLINE

In Canada, there are around 1,000 different species of bees. These bees and other pollinators are crucial for our food supply. Bees pollinate about 70% of the world's crops, and one-third of the food humans consume relies on bee pollination. However, bee populations are declining due to climate change, increased use of pesticides (neonicotinoids), monoculture farming, habitat loss, disease, and the spread of varroa mites, the number one killer of honey bees worldwide.

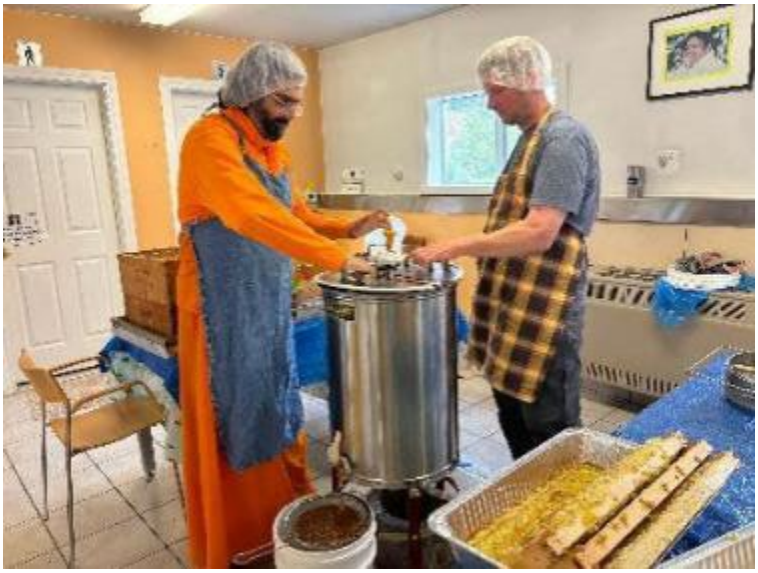
Despite our best efforts to prepare hives for the harsh Canadian winters, colony losses are a common and heartbreaking occurrence. As beekeepers, we have to accept the sad reality that, at times, many of the bees will not make it through our winters.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Goals for 2026

- Our partnership with Bees Are Life continues for another year.
- Mentor one or two new beekeepers
- Increase colony number and honey production
- Invest in some new bee equipment
- Study disease management techniques

People often ask me what can they do to support pollinators. I am a strong advocate of supporting pollinators through actions like planting bee-friendly plants such as asters, sunflowers, hollyhocks, calendula, bee balm, goldenrod, and coneflowers to name a few; and herbs such as borage, lavender, fennel; avoiding pesticides, buying local honey, leaving your dandelions in your lawn and supporting local bee associations. I encourage people to adopt a hive, take courses on beekeeping or gardening to deepen their understanding of bees and their crucial role in our ecosystem. Bees are vital for food production and demonstrate the interconnectedness of life on our planet. Bees are a sacred part of Nature. We need bees and now, bees need us.



In one of Amma's previous posts on honey bees, Amma states:

> "Bees play a vital role in the preservation of Nature and society. They pollinate the plants that provide us with fruit and grains. Similarly, humankind benefits from each and every living creature. All beings on earth depend on one another for survival. If the engine of a plane is damaged, it cannot fly. But even if just a single vital screw is damaged, the plane cannot fly. Similarly, even the tiniest living being plays an important role. All living creatures need our help as well in order to survive. They are also our responsibility."

Om Lokah Samastha Sukhnino Bhavantu!

~ PAULINE, AMMA CANADA FARMS

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