



GreenFriends North America

NEWSLETTER FALL 2020



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

RESPECT FOR ALL LIFE p. 2

Amma's love and compassion shown through her concern for a single mango tree.

LISTENING TO THE TREES p. 4

Swamini Ambikamrita Prana reflects on Amma's and our relationship with Nature.

CONFESSIONS OF A CLOTH-A-HOLIC p. 7

Tell-all confession about addiction to clothing and the clothing industry.

MY FIRST VEGETABLE GARDEN p. 9

A devotee shares her trials, tribulations, and the fruits of her efforts.

TRENCH COMPOSTING p. 11

Learn one of the easiest methods to create compost from your food scraps.

HEALING BENEFITS OF THE HUMBLE HOUSEPLANT p. 13

Houseplants offer a sense of consistency and comfort in this ever-changing world.

CONSCIOUS SHOPPING p. 16

How to reduce our dependence on throw-away or limited use products.

THE PIGEON CHRONICLES p. 19

One devotee's transformation after her encounters with a family of pigeons.

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

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as well as experiences
with animals.

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RESPECT FOR ALL LIFE



FROM AWAKEN CHILDREN, VOL. 6

This incident happened in 1984 in Amritapuri.

A few days ago, one of the residents transplanted a half-grown mango tree from one spot to another on a plot of land which the Ashram had recently bought. He didn't like the way the mango tree looked where it was, and so, with the help of some other residents, he moved the sapling to a corner of the plot. However, none of them had thought to ask Amma's permission before transplanting the tree.

A day or two after the mango tree had been moved, Amma made an unannounced inspection of the premises. When the brahmacharis saw that Amma was walking in the direction of the new land they looked at each other and started to whisper. They were all afraid because the mango tree had withered away soon after it was moved to a new spot.

As soon as Amma reached the new plot, She said,

"Something is missing. What is it?"

Everyone turned pale; no one spoke.

"Shiva! Where is the mango tree!" Amma exclaimed.

All remained silent. No one dared to say a word. Amma once again inquired,

"What happened to the mango tree? Has someone cut it down?"

Finally one Brahmachari stepped forward and in a very feeble voice said,

"Amma, Nedumudi moved the tree from here to the other side and we all helped him transplant it."

"Where? Where did you plant it?" Amma said in a very worried tone.

With the Brahmachari leading the way, Amma and the group walked to the place where the mango tree had been transplanted. Seeing its withered limbs, Amma called out in a heart-broken tone,

"Shivane! What did you do to this tree? How could you do this? What a great sin you have committed. Why didn't you ask me before you moved it? I wouldn't have allowed you to do such a thing. I can't bear the sight of this poor, wilted tree."



There was much pain and concern in Amma's words. Her agony was even expressed on Her face. She displayed the feelings and concern of a mother for her hurt child. Amma squatted down on the bare ground with her head down and her hands on her forehead. Those who stood near Amma noticed that she was wiping away tears.

While some wondered why Amma would cry over such a silly matter, others were overwhelmed with admiration for the divine

love and compassion that she could show toward all of nature, even toward plants. Moved by Amma's emotion, some could not control their own tears.

Moments passed. After a long interval, Amma spoke.

"Children, please do not destroy life like this ever again. Such acts are not fitting for those on the spiritual path. Our goal is to feel life everywhere. We should avoid destruction. We have no right to destroy. We cannot create; therefore, we should not destroy. Only God can create, sustain, and destroy. All three are beyond our capacity. Such great feats fall only under His jurisdiction. Therefore, do not repeat such an act. If you cannot judge things and situations properly on your own, seek the advice of someone knowledgeable or wise. And if they cannot give you proper advice, remain still. It is wiser to do nothing than to act foolishly."

**"We must remember that
everything is sentient,
that everything is full of
consciousness and life.
Everything exists in God."**

"There is no such thing as matter; consciousness alone exists. If we approach all situations with this attitude, destruction becomes impossible for us; the very idea of destruction disappears. Only then can you help and serve others for their benefit and for the betterment of the world."

"When Amma talks about the 'world,' She is not talking only about human beings. The 'world' includes everything - humans and animals, plants and trees - the whole of nature. It is true that human beings are the most visibly evolved creatures, but that doesn't mean that other forms of life are without feelings. The Vedas and the Upanishads say that everything is pervaded with consciousness."

"God dwells in everything. Nowhere is it mentioned that God dwells only in human

beings and not in animals or other species of life. He is in the mountains, the rivers, the valleys, the trees. He is in the birds, the clouds, in the stars, the sun and moon, everywhere. God dwells in sarva charaachara, in both the moving and the unmoving. How can a person who has understood this kill and destroy?"

"You may think that humans can speak, walk, act, think and feel, whereas plants cannot. You think that they are lifeless, so you can cut them, destroy them, and use them for your own selfish purposes. However, everything in Nature has a purpose to fulfill. There are no mistakes in creation. Everything in Nature is well-calculated and accurately measured. The proportions are perfect."

"Every creature, everything that has been created by God, is special. Think of the miracles of Nature. Camels are blessed with a special bag to store water; the kangaroo has a cradle to carry its baby wherever it goes. And even the most insignificant and seemingly harmful creatures or plants have a specific use. They have a part of their own to play. Amma has heard that spiders keep the insect population in balance; snakes keep the rodent population under control, and even the tiny, one-celled plankton in the ocean serve as food for whales. We cannot know the purpose of everything. Nature is a mystery to us. Therefore, we act foolishly and destroy trees, plants, and animals. Many ayurvedic herbs and plants look to us like useless weeds. Out of ignorance we destroy them. But a knowledgeable ayurvedic physician knows how useful and significant they are."

"Man is dependent on Nature for his very existence. Nature is an indispensable part of life on earth. Without Nature no creature, not man or anything else, can live. Therefore, it is one of our foremost duties to lovingly care for all living things. You may feel that destroying a tree or a

plant is a lesser wrong than killing a human being."

"This concept is wrong. Plants and trees also have emotions and can feel fear. When somebody approaches a tree or plant with an ax or a hacking knife, the plant is afraid; it trembles with fear. You need to have a subtle ear to hear its cries, a subtle eye to see its helplessness, and you need a subtle mind to feel its fear."

"You do not see its suffering, but you can feel it if you have a compassionate heart. In order to see the suffering of a plant, your mind's eye must be open. Unfortunately, you do not see subtle things with your external eyes. Because of this, you destroy a helpless tree or plant."

"It has been scientifically proven that not only humans and animals, but plants and trees also have feelings and emotions. They can even express themselves to a certain extent; and if we have the right attitude, we can learn to understand."

"Ages ago, the saints and sages of India, having delved deep into the laboratory of their own consciousness, proclaimed that plants and trees also have feelings and that they could express their feelings if one had a

loving and compassionate attitude toward them."

Interrupting the profound flow of Her words, Amma looked at the mango tree. For some time Amma remained silent, her gaze fixed on the tree. A few moments passed and she slipped into an indrawn mood. While Amma sat with Her eyes shut, tears ran down her cheeks. Perhaps she was feeling compassion for the mango tree. Perhaps her tears were for something else which we can never know.

Amma once again went up to the tree. This time she embraced it and kissed its trunk. As if addressing the very life of the tree or some deity that presided over it, she spoke,

"My children acted indiscriminately. They are ignorant children, which I consider my own fault. I have not taught them well enough for them to feel the life in all creation. On their behalf, I seek your forgiveness for their ignorant act."

Amma once again embraced the tree and kissed it, before walking directly back to the Ashram. The brahmacharis and the residents all felt ashamed. They never would have imagined that someone would apologize to, and seek forgiveness from a tree.

Who but a person who beholds life everywhere could do such a thing?

Everyone thought that the transplanted mango tree was dead. It had shed all its leaves and its young trunk had gone limp. Then, suddenly after receiving Amma's attention, the tree slowly began to show signs of life. After a few days, the tree sprouted new leaves, and it was again looking healthy and well.

Only then did the residents realize the significance of Amma's embracing and kissing the tree. In doing so, she must have transmitted new life into it.

LISTENING TO THE TREES



REFLECTIONS FROM SWAMINI AMBIKAMRITA PRANA

In 2014, after a gap of 10 years, Santa Fe, New Mexico was again scheduled as a regular stop on Amma's annual summer tour. When Amma arrived at the Amma Center New Mexico in Santa Fe after so many years, she stepped out of her camper, looked out over the native tree canopy of the high desert landscape and with open arms, exclaimed,

**“Namah Shivaya,
do you remember me?”**

She wasn't yet talking to the small number of ashram residents who had gathered around for the late-night welcoming, she was first speaking to the pristine Nature, the trees, shrubs, plants, and animals that make up the high desert ecosystem, and which must have also been staying awake for this sweet reunion.

For Amma, talking to and listening to trees, plants, rocks, animals, birds, bugs, and the ocean, is quite normal. A great soul, a Mahatma, who sees herself in all beings, and all beings within herself, is quite at home and familiar everywhere. That is her constant experience. For one example, see the story about Amma and 'The Mango Tree' ([Respect For All Life](#)).

Amma has said that eventually, science will uncover many things that the ancient sages discovered in their inner meditations.

I remember reading *Secret Life of Plants*, by American scientists Peter Tomkins and Christopher Bird, way back in the 1970s. They followed up on the experiments of the Indian scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose who, in the early 1900s, thrilled the scientific world with his research showing that plants, and even metals, respond to stimuli in the form of radio wavelengths similarly to animals. The later research of Tomkins and Bird found that plants respond also to even the subtle vibrations of emotions and intentions of a human mind.

It was the first time that educated western minds seriously contemplated the possibility that sentience is not confined to humans and animals, but might be found even in plants and rocks.

The ancient sages of India, with their divine insight, spoke of the supreme Universal Consciousness, the vibration of Universal Energy, that pervades everything in the entire universe.

For Jagadish Chandra Bose, after much push-back by skeptical eminent English scientists of his day, he was invited by a sympathetic English colleague to present his research in the prestigious setting of the Royal Institution of Science. He ended his presentation with these words:

"I have shown you this evening autographic records of the history of stress and strain in the living and non-living. How similar are the writings! So similar indeed that you cannot tell one apart from the other. Among such

phenomena, how can we draw a line of demarcation and say, here the physical ends, and there the physiological begins? Such absolute barriers do not exist."

"It was when I came upon the mute witness of these self-made records, and perceived in them one phase of a pervading unity that bears within it all things - the mote that quivers in ripples of light, the teeming life upon our earth, and the radiant suns that shine above us - it was then that I understood for the first time a little of that message proclaimed by my ancestors on the banks of the Ganges thirty centuries ago:

"They who see but One, in all the changing manifoldness of this universe, unto them belongs Eternal Truth - unto none else, unto none else!"



And now some wonderful discoveries about how trees communicate with each other are being published. These discoveries are happening outside of the laboratory and in the forest itself. As one example, Peter Wohlleben, in his book, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, writes about his experience and observations in the woodlands of Germany. He is a

professional forester whose love of Nature and of trees opened his awareness beyond just seeing the forest as a commercial enterprise, but as a wonder to be explored.

His wonderful discoveries show that there is so much more to a forest than just what we can see. He calls forests "superorganisms with interconnections much like ant colonies." He found that trees communicate with each other through their roots and exchange nutrients and help each other out during times of stress. They even warn each other when being attacked by insects or people.

He has made many other valuable discoveries because he has been listening to the trees. One need not be a mystic like Amma to take time to love and take time to really see and listen to trees; to appreciate how important trees and all of Nature is to the quality of life... to life itself.

Amma says,

"Plants and trees too have emotions and can feel fear. If you have a compassionate heart, you can sense this."

Our beloved Guru and the Vedic scriptures, teach us that the foundation of the universe is love, sacrifice and dharma, and that every being on earth has an important role in maintaining the harmony of life on earth, from the humble grain of sand, to the Great Mahatmas meditating in the Himalayas.

She repeatedly reminds us:

"The harmony of Nature depends on all things that have been created. Every aspect of Nature tirelessly contributes its share to life. The participation of a little bird, an animal, a tree, or a flower is always complete. No matter what the hardships, they continue to try, wholeheartedly."

Amma continues, saying,

“We are indebted to the world and to all the beings in it, all of which have nourished us, and brought us to our current state.”



LOVING GRATITUDE

How do we repay this debt? The scriptures have a prescription. That is LOVING GRATITUDE, which can be done in many, many ways. The ancient Rishis identified 5 areas where this daily gratitude is necessary, in order to maintain harmony in life. They are as follows:

1. LOVING GRATITUDE TO GOD, the Consciousness that pervades the entire Universe, every being, and from Whom the first primordial vibration of creation, the sacred syllable AUM, emanated. We give gratitude through the many ways that we worship, pray, and meditate to commune with this Universal Consciousness. To listen to, and communicate with God, within ourselves.

2. LOVING GRATITUDE TO THE RISHIS AND GURU. This is done by listening to, and reading and studying the scriptures given to us. This includes the Guru's teachings, which reveal the great truths of the ancient teachings in a way that we can understand and follow in the age in which we are born.

3. LOVING GRATITUDE TO OUR ANCESTORS AND PARENTS. We appreciate them by listening to them, giving love and respect when they are alive, including taking care of them when they are old, and then praying for their souls after they die.

4. LOVING GRATITUDE TO SOCIETY. This is done by listening to the needs of others, of society, and giving in charity to those who are less fortunate than we are. By being kind to others and being good neighbors and good citizens, doing our civic duty, abiding by laws, voting, paying taxes to support our communities.

5. LOVING GRATITUDE TO MOTHER NATURE. This is done by taking time in nature, to listen to it, and then nurturing and caring for mineral, plant and animal life. To conserve water, paper, and other commodities. Living simply is included here, by not taking more than we require of natural resources. To take care not to pollute our earth, air, and water resources. Examples of caring for nature include planting trees, growing gardens, providing bird baths in drought-stricken areas, bird feeders in cold winter areas, caring for animals, clearing trash and debris from nature parks and other natural areas, and more.

GreenFriends North America is primarily concerned with #5. The beauty of #5 is that through our gratitude to Mother Nature, we are also worshipping God and our Guru, respecting our ancestors, and being good citizens!



GREENFRIENDS NORTH AMERICA TREE PLANTING CAMPAIGN

For the past number of years, we have all witnessed the widespread destruction of forests through human carelessness, commercial use, forest fires and other natural disasters.

Amma, concerned about the destruction of the world's forests, has for years been asking us to plant one tree per month. How many of us have done that? I will be the first to admit that I have not.

Now, during Amma's recent Divali address, she asked us to plant a tree for every festival during the year! For those of us who celebrate Indian festivals, that can be more than 1 per month!

We at GreenFriends North America want to kick start our tree planting program again and make it a permanent fixture.

Together, with our efforts and Amma's grace, we can make this request of Amma's a reality. We are working out a plan and will be contacting Amma's devotees with something soon. We are collecting ideas from all quarters. Your ideas are very welcome.

Please contact us at
info@greenfriendsna.org

“Feeling Life's oneness broadens our minds, expands our hearts and spreads love to all of creation.”

- Amma



CONFESSIONS OF A CLOTH-O-HOLIC



RiverBlue,
from [The Environmental and Human Cost](#)
[of Making a Pair of Jeans](#)



I AM A SELF-DIAGNOSED CLOTH-O-HOLIC IN RECOVERY.

I love beautiful things. I loved beautiful clothes and liked to surround myself with silks, cashmere and rich colors. I had earrings and bracelets to go with every outfit. Then I got a spiritual wake up call. Everything in my apartment got covered in mold and I had to dispose of practically everything I ever owned.

I tend to gain and lose weight regularly so I always had several sizes of clothing for every occasion in my closet. I had Winter clothes, Summer clothes, clothes for the Fall/Spring, casual clothes, business attire, formal wear, Indian sarees for weddings, formal punjabis, Indian satsang clothes, workout clothes, night clothes and a variety of coats, jackets, gloves, scarves and hats. I had shoes for different occasions and every season as well as sports equipment such as snowshoes, scuba gear and swimwear.

Collecting these many possessions had been easy. With stores like Gap, Old Navy, Target, H&M, department stores, Amazon and the many Indian and Western vendors on it, I was able to quickly grow my collection.

When I was growing up overseas, how well you dressed was a symbol of your status, a sign of whether one was successful or not. In my collection were gorgeous one-of-a-kind saris handed down from my mother, the likes that can no longer be bought today. There were outfits that she had lovingly bought for me or gotten stitched overseas in my

"People should realize their dharma (duty). So many things are unnecessarily wasted in this world. Too many cars, too much food, too much energy being used. Conservation means conserve one's energy first. The Consciousness that you are, realize that and awaken to the Truth. Just as we observe traffic rules, Nature also has rules, and they are subtle rules. This is what spirituality teaches, take what you need and share the rest with others who have nothing. Just as we fasten the seat belt while driving in a car or an airplane, it is time to fasten your seat belt. Plant as many trees that you can, take care of nature, pray, serve and take care of others."

-Amma

favorite colors. Each outfit in my closet had a story associated with it.

Whenever I went to an Amma program, as soon as darshan started, I would do my pranams to Amma, get a token and then head straight to the Amma shop to see what new items had arrived in the clothing section. It was an obsession. I would promise myself that I was not going to buy anymore outfits but inevitably I would find myself on the last night of the tour cramming yet another outfit into my already full suitcase.

I used to justify my "habit" by telling myself that since I occasionally donated clothes to thrift stores or charities, it was okay. As I started emptying my closet, the sheer volume of clothing I owned started to become a burden. The literal and energetic weight of what I had accumulated and how attached I was to these items began to dawn on me.

The irony of the situation is that I had been researching the clothing industry for a GreenFriends article when this situation arose in my life. The more I learned about the clothing industry, the more I knew that I was contributing to the pollution of the planet and the wasting of precious resources. I also realized that the emphasis on how I looked on the outside distracted me from deeper spiritual growth.

As Amma has said, the body is just a bag of bones and excreta. Trying to dress the body to be more attractive stemmed from a deep need to be seen and accepted by those around me. Everywhere we look, we are constantly being bombarded by messages that the solution to all of our problems is the next beauty product, procedure or latest fashionable outfit.

Here are some facts I learned about the clothing industry:

- It takes approx. 850 gallons of water to produce the cotton needed for one t-shirt - the equivalent of three years' worth of drinking water. ([World Wildlife Foundation](#))
- It takes over 2000 gallons of water to grow enough cotton to produce just one pair of jeans. (Treehugger.com)
- Textile dyeing is the second largest polluter of clean water globally, after agriculture.
- It's estimated that around 20% of industrial water pollution in the world comes from the treatment and dyeing of textiles, and about 8,000 synthetic chemicals are used to turn raw materials into textiles. (Conscious Challenge)
- Microfibers, tiny bits of plastic about the size of a grain of rice, are a source of pollution from synthetic clothing such as fleece jackets. Washing a typical polyester fleece can release thousands of microfibers that can travel to the local water treatment plant, where they can slip by filters and enter rivers, lakes, and oceans. Microfiber pollution has been found in rain, inside fish and even in beer. ([Is Your Fleece Jacket Polluting the Oceans? | KOED](#))

- Around 85% of all textiles thrown away in the US – roughly 13 million tons in 2017 – are either dumped into landfills or burned. The average American has been estimated to throw away 80 lbs of clothes each year. (<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200710-why-clothes-are-so-hard-to-recycle>)
- Much of the donated clothing in North America is not used for the benefit of local charities as people believe. It is instead sold in bulk to Africa and other third world countries. Due to the decline in the quality of materials used to make the clothes, not all of the items can be sold. The unsold items end up being trashed or burned which causes more pollution. The import of cheap used clothes also thwarts the local textile industries and tailors. Several of these countries tried to ban these imports but faced pressure from US lobby groups. It is important to understand the impact of our choices on not just the planet but also on developing nations and their citizens around the world. (<https://www.un.org>)

My life has gotten very simple. No longer burdened by possessions, I am able to feel an energetic freedom that I may only have experienced after finishing college. I am very careful about buying anything now and will only buy it if I absolutely need it and cannot rent or borrow it. While I did not plan to become a minimalist overnight, I am grateful to Amma for saving me from my addiction to clothing and material possessions.

I hope my story gives you pause to think about your life, how you consume goods and how you can simplify your habits to better align with your spiritual goals. May you be more with less.

~ ANONYMOUS

(Name withheld at the request of the author)



STEPS TO REDUCE YOUR CONSUMPTION OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES NEEDED FOR CLOTHING

REDUCE

- Use less items. Learn to be satisfied with less. You need less than you think you do. I currently own two sets of night clothes, two sets of casual clothes, two layers for warmth and a winter coat. Given COVID and working from home, I have no need for satsang, formal or professional clothes for the time being.
- Buy items that can be sustained over time.

REUSE

- Swap clothing with friends, family and neighbors
- Repair existing clothing

RECYCLE

- Donate to thrift shops or shelters
- Educate yourself on the clothing industry



MY FIRST VEGETABLE GARDEN



However, inspired by Amma and by the example set by Green Friends, I'm changing that this year.

STARTING SMALL

I decided to start small, since I have a lot to learn. My home is situated a few miles west of Austin, Texas, on the Edwards Plateau. Not having enough soil is a big issue here, and what soil there is contains large amounts of crumbled limestone. The thin soil and porous bedrock leads to runoff.

Additionally, central Texas has long, hot summers with intense sunshine (July and August highs average 95F), so ample water was a consideration. For these reasons, I decided to use a raised bed to better manage the soil content and moisture.

GETTING STARTED

Texas A&M University has a network of agriculture extension offices around the state that offer many public services to help people grow plants. They offer excellent resources for everything from container gardening to large-scale farm



The Edwards Plateau

production. There is even a wonderful digital booklet about home composting that I'll be using to start that project soon.

Using that website, I found a one-page vegetable planting calendar for my county that I used to decide what to plant. Again, being very new I wanted something to help me stay organized. I chose to use some square-foot gardening techniques to take some of the guesswork out of how much to plant and where.



My planning guide

While attending to all these technical details, I wanted to make sure I also remembered to revere the plants and the process of gardening. In Her Guru Purnima address this year, Amma said that planting trees is the right thing to do to help heal nature, but that we must also "tune into the divine will". I wanted to remind myself that I am not growing vegetables, they are growing while I serve them.

I planted some seeds: beets, arugula, lettuce, kohlrabi, and carrots. When they were in the ground, I gave each one a few drops of water blessed by Amma, and bowed down to them. Then I prayed to be able to provide the plants what they need to fulfill their role, for their protection from my mistakes while I learn, and for me to

A HUGE BLESSING DURING THIS PANDEMIC IS THAT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WORK FROM HOME.

I calculated that I have gained about twenty hours a week that I used to spend getting ready for, shopping for, commuting to and from, and recovering from a full-time office job. All those hours were in addition to the 40 hours I spent in the office. With this gift, there is more time for spiritual practices, Amrita Virtual Academy courses, virtual satsangs and yoga classes, and for starting new projects. I decided to start a small vegetable growing project.

My South Texas ancestors were ranchers and farm laborers. My grandparents and great-grandparents grew vegetables to supplement the food they purchased. Despite that heritage, I'm embarrassed to say that I've never grown a vegetable-producing plant.

remain open to the spiritual lessons that gardening can teach me.

After a few weeks, I planted more seeds for a staggered harvest, and then added a handful of transplants: Brussel sprouts, cauliflower, chamomile, tomato, and broccoli.



Cabbage worm damage

I expected to be excited about watching the little seeds grow, but I didn't anticipate that I would be out there seven times a day on my hands and knees, peering into the soil to see if I detected any green. On the fifth day after planting those first seeds, I saw the green edge of the tiniest leaf in the world, and I felt my heart rejoice! Today, there are a few tomatoes forming on the vine and the brassicas are growing heartily.

CHALLENGES

There have been challenges, of course. Cabbage worms showed up on the Brussels sprouts and cauliflower. I hand-picked them off the leaves multiple times a day. I started to worry I wouldn't keep up with them, and bought a non-toxic pesticide. However, I was determined to use that only as a last resort. After about seven days of removing them by hand, I stopped seeing them appear! I read that rosemary deters cabbage moths, so plucked several tall sprigs and stuck them in the soil around the plants, like sentries. I'm not sure how effective it is, but it smells wonderful.

GROW YOUR OWN VEGETABLES

We all know Amma has been encouraging all her children to grow some food. In her recent birthday address, she even provided some garden design guidance for small five- and one-cent parcels of land (I learned that one "cent" of land is

1/100th of an acre). On one level, growing our own food helps the environment and encourages our health. On another level, I am finding there are deep spiritual lessons available in the practice of mindfully tending to these plants.

Amma is teaching me attention with providing daily water, devotion while picking off cabbage worms, and surrender with each lost seedling. I'm still learning as I go, but I'm already planning on tripling the number of beds next year, and adding more containers indoors and out. I've even started re-growing store-bought scallions and yellow onions.



Transplanting store-bought scallions

I know so many around the world are facing real threats to their lives and livelihoods, and that so many have been or are sick. I know many people who are afraid right now. I know people are also worried about when we will see Amma again. I confess I don't share their fears for myself. Carrying out her request to grow vegetables has helped me feel a physical connection to her. Increasing my spiritual practice and watching all the live satsangs has increased my awareness that she dwells in our hearts.

I feel closer to Amma now than I ever have. I feel like I'm living a householder's life at an ashram. And that may be one of the biggest blessings of GreenFriends: that we can encourage each other to do practical things that benefit the world while aiding our spiritual progress.

May all of Amma's children feel her warm embrace.

~ NANDA, AUSTIN, TX

TRENCH COMPOSTING



Lilikoi (passionfruit) flower

I HAVE A DEVOTEE FRIEND WHO SHARES A LOVE OF GARDENING

I owe this article to her encouragement and inspiration. Over the years, each time I visit her we always end up in her garden, which is my favorite place to be. In fact, I love all gardens. I have helped this friend dig up and move plants around her garden, we have planted flowers to attract honeybees, harvested berries, and she has even taught me about solar cooking (cooking food in a simple, portable oven using sunlight).

A few years ago this friend taught me about trench composting, where you bury organic food scraps straight into the ground. It seemed too good to be true. She said to dig a large hole in the ground (a few feet wide and deep) and bury your compost. Cover it with some soil and water the area a little bit, and in time you'll get richer soil. It is so simple. I started doing this daily. I was unable to dig as wide and deep as she suggested but I found digging 8-to-10-inch holes was sufficient. I began doing this and burying our daily food scraps in my yard. I buried food scraps for a year. I simply covered the compost with a few inches of soil and stepped on the soil, or compacted it down with a shovel. Then I watered the area. There was no odor, no need to turn anything.

You can trench compost anywhere you can dig a hole in your garden. If you trench compost near plants it will benefit those plants. As long as the buried compost is a few inches away from the plant, the plants will be fine. I dig holes



Papaya

wherever it is convenient to do so in my garden. I have never had problems with any animals digging up the buried organic matter.

ANYTHING CAN BE BURIED

The rule of thumb is anything that was alive can be buried. This includes fruits, vegetables, egg shells, coffee grounds, leaves of any sort, even tea bags. I would not recommend burying meat products because it could attract animals.

At the time I began trench composting, I was starting a new garden per Amma's instructions, trying to grow vegetables in

my tropical climate. We planted thirteen fruit trees that year as well. I started burying my compost daily, and I did it for a couple years. In a year's time, the entire area became covered with beautiful green vines from sweet potatoes.

Now I have incredible soil in the areas where I buried food scraps. What happens underground is incredible. Microorganisms, beneficial bacteria, fungi and small creatures such as earthworms and grubs are attracted to the food scraps. They break them down into nutritious compounds that enrich the soil and whatever is planted there.

BURIED TREASURE

One unexpected perk for us - many surprises have come up over the years from the buried treasures. This includes cherry tomatoes, papayas, several passionfruit vines, lime and guava trees, and different potatoes. This year we dug up loads of delicious purple potatoes. We also got a beautiful cantaloupe that started with a tender green vine that crept on the ground.



Our first cantaloupe

In my experience when you notice plants growing from where you have trench composted it is best to leave them where they are. When I have tried to move plants they don't thrive. If they are in bloom, they are happy there and should be left alone.



Purple potatoes ready to cook

For maximum use of space, you can combine square foot gardening with vertical gardening. You can also try using pots and planters in the same way, expanding their growth upward to increase harvests.

Please try trench composting. It's super easy, fun and often magical!

~ THERESA, MAUI, HI

THE HEALING BENEFITS OF THE HUMBLE HOUSEPLANT



CARING FOR HOUSEPLANTS CAN GIVE A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND AWAKEN DEVOTION.

The Covid-19 pandemic has left many of us feeling frustrated, isolated and at times, lonely. Caring for houseplants can give a sense of purpose and awaken devotion. Like people, plants require love and attention and have different personalities, needs, likes and dislikes.

The great thing about plants is they aren't too needy and tend to be very forgiving, which makes them wonderful quarantine buddies! They offer a sense of consistency and comfort in this ever-changing world and provide a simple way to connect with Mother Nature right from the comfort and safety of our own homes. Take it from a proud plant Mom who has 13 and counting!



HERE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVORITES:



Houseplants do so much more than jazz up the décor! Although they add a touch of vibrancy and beauty to our living and working spaces, they provide many other benefits as well. Scientific research has shown that plants can uplift our mood and improve physical and mental well-being. Studies reveal lower stress levels in people who green the inside of their homes.



Plants can combat colds by increasing humidity in the air and by decreasing dust and removing airborne toxins and contaminants. This helps to improve respiratory function. Many plants also provide medicinal remedies. All are certainly redeeming qualities, in a humdinger of a year like this one!

~ DIYA HEAL,
OREGON



SOME HELPFUL HOUSEPLANT CARE TIPS FROM GREENFRIENDS

WATER

One main area of houseplant mortality is due to over or under watering, causing stress and even death of the plant. Because of the variations in indoor temperature and humidity, it is difficult to gauge the soil moisture of a potted plant. The surface tends to dry out much faster than the soil below.

Your gardening store or an online gardening store will have a variety of moisture meters that can be used for this. They have a probe that goes into the soil and a meter that tells if the soil below is dry, moist or wet. Some will even gauge the pH as well.

For plants that you have completely forgotten about watering, and then discover the soil has become bone dry, rather than throw the poor plant into the compost, first try to revive it. When the soil is so dry, it is difficult for the soil to absorb the water you add to it from the top of the pot. The soil can become seemingly impermeable to the water, similar to a very dry sponge. It needs to be slowly coaxed to absorb water again.

One method for this is by placing it in an open bin and adding water to the bin up to half the height of the pot. Then water the pot from top as well. Give some time for the soil to absorb the water, which could take up to an hour or two depending on the size of the pot. Be sure not to leave it soaking for several hours. When the soil is moistened, remove the pot, allow it to drain fully and put it back in its place. Then use the moisture meter mentioned above, before watering again to reduce the chance of overwatering.

HUMIDITY

Indoor humidity during winter is often an issue, due to household heating systems. One way to provide more humidity for a plant that requires it, is to fill the pot's drip tray (saucer) with pebbles and add water. However, don't allow the pot to sit in water, because it could cause rot in the bottom of the pot.

LIGHT

Each plant will have a care tag with it when you purchase it, which tells the amount and quality of light the plant requires for healthy growth. Consider the light available in the areas in your home and where you would like to put a plant before shopping, so you can be more confident that it will have the light it requires.

FERTILIZING

There are many organic fertilizers for plants. One is kelp meal, which can be diluted with water. Periodic watering with kelp meal maintains the nutrients that are required for healthy growth.

PESTS AND FUNGUS

Your organic gardening center will have organic options to choose from, to treat occasional issues with pests or fungus. However, if watering and light are adequate for the plant, then these issues are very rare.

There are many organic gardening websites which can be reviewed for advice as well.

In the previous article, Diya gives examples of many easy to grow, fairly trouble-free plants that you can start with.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR INDOOR GARDENING EXPERIENCE THIS SEASON.

PLEASE WRITE TO US AT INFO@GREENFRIENDSNA.ORG.

"All plants are our brothers and sisters and they talk to us and if we listen we can hear them." ~ Native American proverb

CONSCIOUS SHOPPING

by AYUDH Diksha



DURING AMMA'S SUMMER TOUR A FEW YEARS AGO,

Swami Shantamritananda Puri reminded us that we are living in a "throw-away" society here in North America. Many products here are one-time use and/or may be inexpensive, yet only short-lived before they break.

One way to benefit Mother Nature and our beloved Amma, is to try to end any dependence we have on throw-away or limited use products, as far as we are able. These products are sometimes recycled, it is true, but the U.S. recycling system is in a bit of a crisis. As such, it is best to reduce purchases, or consider the life cycle of the items we buy, and think about how they will contribute to the well-being of Mother Nature, in the long term, before buying them.

Following are a few points to consider when buying items, to help us shop consciously.



DO I REALLY NEED THIS ITEM?

CAN I ADJUST OR MAKE DO WITH SOMETHING SIMPLER OR SOMETHING I ALREADY HAVE INSTEAD?

Let's say I'm thinking about buying a room divider, so that people don't see my bedroom when I have virtual meetings. Not only does this new purchase come with a price tag, it also comes with:

1. an item that requires storage space and
2. one more thing in the house that could potentially break and needs to be thrown away!

Another creative solution could be to use a tension rod and a bedsheet to create a curtain or backdrop behind me for meetings - or simply to move to another room that doesn't necessitate buying a room divider. We can try to think of many such solutions to our purchasing needs and try to improvise whenever possible.

Amma says that we humans have lost the ability to discriminate between necessities and luxuries - that the real air conditioning we should turn on is the AC of the mind, allowing us to adapt to multiple situations peacefully. I do not feel I am very far along this path, but I do think that Amma's lesson to adapt applies when we are looking to buy something new. Can we adapt with what we already have? If yes, then we can save ourselves the cost and worry that comes with owning one more item, benefit Mother Nature with one less thing to possibly throw away, benefit society by donating some of our money, and build our capacity to adapt to situations cheerfully.



CAN I BUY IT USED?

If the answer is "Adapting will be difficult, it will be hard to improvise, and it indeed is practical to buy the item," let us then try to look for a good quality, used version of the item. If looking online, one can

type in the item one would like to purchase into a search engine, and filter for "Used" items. One can use this same "Used" filter on many other shopping sites, too.

If you would prefer to buy local and lower any carbon footprint from shipping, consider looking for the item you would like on local, used item sales websites, or at local stores, if it is possible to shop at them safely and with COVID-19 precautions in place, such as masks. Ideally, we should buy "Used" whenever we can, to help save something that's perfectly usable.



WHAT ADDITIONAL ACCESSORIES OR CARE DOES THIS ITEM REQUIRE?

ARE THESE REQUIREMENTS ECO-FRIENDLY?

Another consideration in deciding to buy something is thinking about what it takes to maintain it. For instance: does the item run on electrical power, or does it use batteries or gas? Electronics that run on batteries invariably generate battery waste which we may or may not be able to recycle depending on where we live and what programs are offered.

A good quality plug-in electronic likely produces less waste than a battery-powered electronic. Consider minor adaptations to items as well. For example, we have a wreath at home that we can light up using batteries. We've opted not to use any batteries at all and leave it unlit, saving on battery waste.

Finally, think about whether you have the mental energy to clean the items you buy - will I be able to maintain it, or will I simply throw it away when it gets dirty? Hopefully the former, but it's wise to think about whether we can care for an item before we add it to our collection.



HOW LONG WILL THIS ITEM LAST?

CAN IT BE FIXED IF IT BREAKS?

Regardless of other considerations, there's always the likelihood that any item breaks. Amma always

tells us that everything on this earth is finite! We can try to purchase relatively high-quality items that can be fixed if they break. For instance, if we can afford to buy a pair of shoes with good soles, it will pay for itself over its lifetime. If it is not possible to buy a long-lasting item (or we are not sure how long it will last), let us pledge to buy used or try to recycle items we buy.

WHAT DOES "END OF LIFE" LOOK LIKE FOR THIS PRODUCT?

We might also want to consider what "end of life" looks like for a product. It might be best if we could buy items that are compostable, recyclable or for which we see a clear reuse purpose after they break or are no longer usable.



Room divider sourced from Craigslist

For instance, that might mean trying to only buy natural fabrics or home items. Clothes that are cotton or linen or baskets and furniture made of untreated wicker or wood are compostable. If possible, only buy items that are compostable or recyclable. If not possible, let's try to buy used, adapt with what we have, or try to buy a product that will last a very long time. Also, if we decide to stop using an item before it's all used up or broken, we can sell it as a used item online, give it away for free, or donate it, rather than throwing it away.

CASE STUDY

Shown below is a room divider that I ended up sourcing from Craigslist, as I did not have a serene, empty space to teach yoga classes virtually. The room divider indeed has a hole and some tears in it. I patched the missing pane up with some packing tissue, and nobody on camera will ever see the defects. I feel I have saved this divider from the landfill and it will likely last many, many years to come with a little tender, loving care! At the same time, the divider has helped create an affordable, conducive environment to teach yoga classes to young children, who might otherwise be distracted by my surroundings.

May Amma bless us all
in our efforts to spread joy
and live gently,
with regard for our
fellow beings and Nature,
taking one step at a time
to greater harmony in
society and the world!

~ DIKSHA, MARYLAND

THE PIGEON CHRONICLES



THE PIGEONS FIRST CAME INTO OUR LIVES BACK IN MARCH, 2020.

They were featured in a gardening story in the [May 2020 GreenFriends edition](#). If you read that story, it may have sounded like the pigeons left. Well, they didn't.

It was just a brief moment in April when we thought they had left for good. It made me realize that I'd actually miss them when they did go. In reality, they were only gone for about an hour. The babies had merely taken a longer-than-usual stroll, and ducked under a railing that connects to the neighboring balcony to explore next door.

We were delighted when our little Frankenbirds (as I affectionately liked to call them, with their mismatched-looking wings and fuzzy, clumsy bodies) came back. So did their parents.

They were funny little creatures. I liked them more and more as time went by, and, watching the bond between siblings, or between babies and parents, they appeared to be quite affectionate, too.

For a long time, the babies slept in their nest. Slowly, they got more mobile, and took walks around the balcony. They started to explore other garden pots within reach. Their favorite was a tiny pot, barely big enough to accommodate one baby pigeon, but the little guys would squish themselves together in that tiny pot. Frequently we'd find them both sleeping together in their too-small pot for the night.



Two grown babies snuggled in a big pot



Mama in the nest, babies crammed in a tiny pot



Two grown babies enjoying their newfound ability to get into the highest garden pots

As they grew bigger still, they would practice flapping their wings and jumping. They would flap and jump, making it into gradually higher and higher garden pots. Hopping from one pot to the next, they'd reach the peak of pots. Inevitably, they would come down, flapping their wings till they hit the ground with inept landings.

They really were quite amusing to watch. I enjoyed very much seeing them learn to fly and practice their new skills every day, within the safe confines of our balcony. They would flap and flap, lifting themselves off the ground, hovering in the same spot for a few seconds before plopping back down again. Like a hummingbird, but not nearly as graceful.

To my own surprise, I actually grew quite fond of them, with their awkward movements and funny antics. It was a bit like having pets. Three times in the early spring, those silly baby birds managed to overturn a garden pot full of soil and seeds. I caught my husband laughing in an exasperated manner, as he found the upside-down pot for the third time. He'd tried to secure it in a way that they couldn't possibly knock it over. But nope, they did it again. Similar to when puppies or kittens make a mess, one can't be mad; it's an animal, and a baby one at that. You just clean up the mess and smile at the mischievous little creature that created it.

One day we decided to clean the area around their nest. No sooner had we cleaned, than the female pigeon laid another egg!

Many times we asked ourselves: what would Amma do? We could not imagine her kicking the pigeons out. Would she allow them to nest in the garden pots? Why not? So the pigeons stayed. Again.

While the parents busied themselves with the new eggs, the first generation of growing babies wandered the balcony. While the parents busied themselves with the new eggs, the first generation of growing babies wandered the balcony.



The egg



Generation Two



Pigeons outside, looking in

Eventually they'd get right up close to our sliding-glass door and windows.

They actually knocked on our door with their beaks, as if looking for attention. They watched us with curiosity, just as we watched them.

I proudly cheered them on as they finally figured out flying. They took longer and longer flights away from the balcony, then came back to their home base. Till eventually, one day, they really did fly away for good.



I feel honored to have had the opportunity to watch these little pigeons grow, and to have provided a pretty space for them to experience their first taste of the world. They filled our days with noisy baby bird chirping, and if I closed my eyes, I could imagine I was in a tropical paradise surrounded by birds.

As they grew and got closer and closer to flying away, I found myself hoping that the rest of the world would be so kind to them.

As they land in a parking lot or on a city sidewalk, will anyone realize that they were loved and nourished by their parents when they came into this world, or that they played and stumbled while they learned to fly, or that they snuggled with their sibling in a too-small pot?

I'm quite certain the answer is no, but as I watched them, I couldn't help but think that their parents wanted the best for them, as I do for my child, and that, like me, their parents gave them the best start at life that they could.

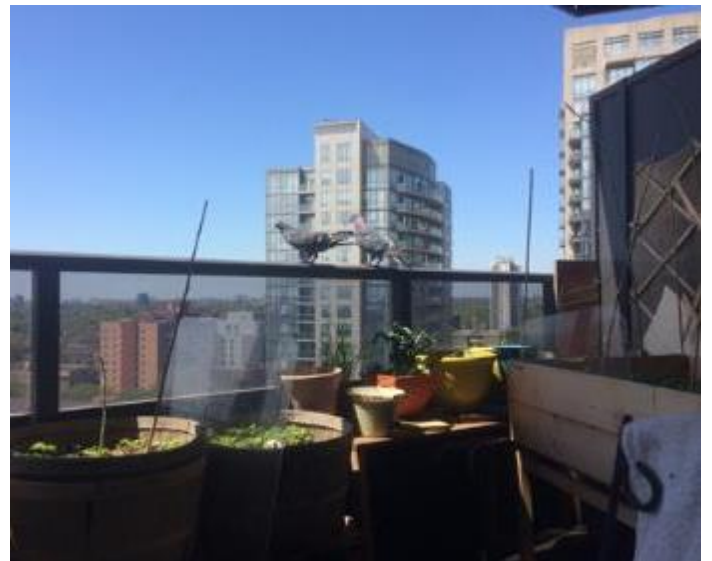
Nature is full of gifts. When we surrender to her and serve her, these gifts become even more apparent and abundant. I, for one, will be kinder when I see pigeons in the future. I surrendered to their presence, and in doing so, allowed them to transform me into a better person.

I wonder what other beautiful gifts nature holds. Maybe just another generation of balcony pigeons, but maybe something else unexpected and beautiful.

~ NATASHA, TORONTO, ONTARIO



Pigeon siblings snuggled up in a too-small pot



Papa pigeon and baby girl, ready to explore the city



The balcony garden, in mid-summer bloom

If you enjoyed these stories, visit
<http://greenfriendsna.org/gfnewsletters.html>
for stories from previous newsletters.



**WITH NO END IN SIGHT TO THE PANDEMIC, AMMA HAS CLARIFIED
THAT COVID IS NOT A PUNISHMENT FROM NATURE,
BUT A WARNING TO HELP HUMANKIND CORRECT ITS BEHAVIOR:**

"We may feel that such times of crisis are a form of punishment from Nature, but don't take it like that. Treat it as a clarion call from Nature for us to mend our ways. Think of it as a shock treatment from God, or Nature, to prevent us from doing worse things. Both Mother Earth and Mother Nature are considered as paragons of patience. However, man has taken this patience as a license to commit all manner of atrocities. It's time to correct this mistake."

- Amma

"Man is dependent on Nature for his very existence. Nature is an indispensable part of life on earth. Without Nature no creature, not man or anything else, can live. Therefore, it is one of our foremost duties to lovingly care for all living things."

- Amma