



Trees, animals, birds, plants, forests, mountains, lakes and rivers — everything that exists in Nature are in desperate need of our kindness, of the compassionate care and protection of human beings. If we protect them, they in turn will protect us.

- Amma

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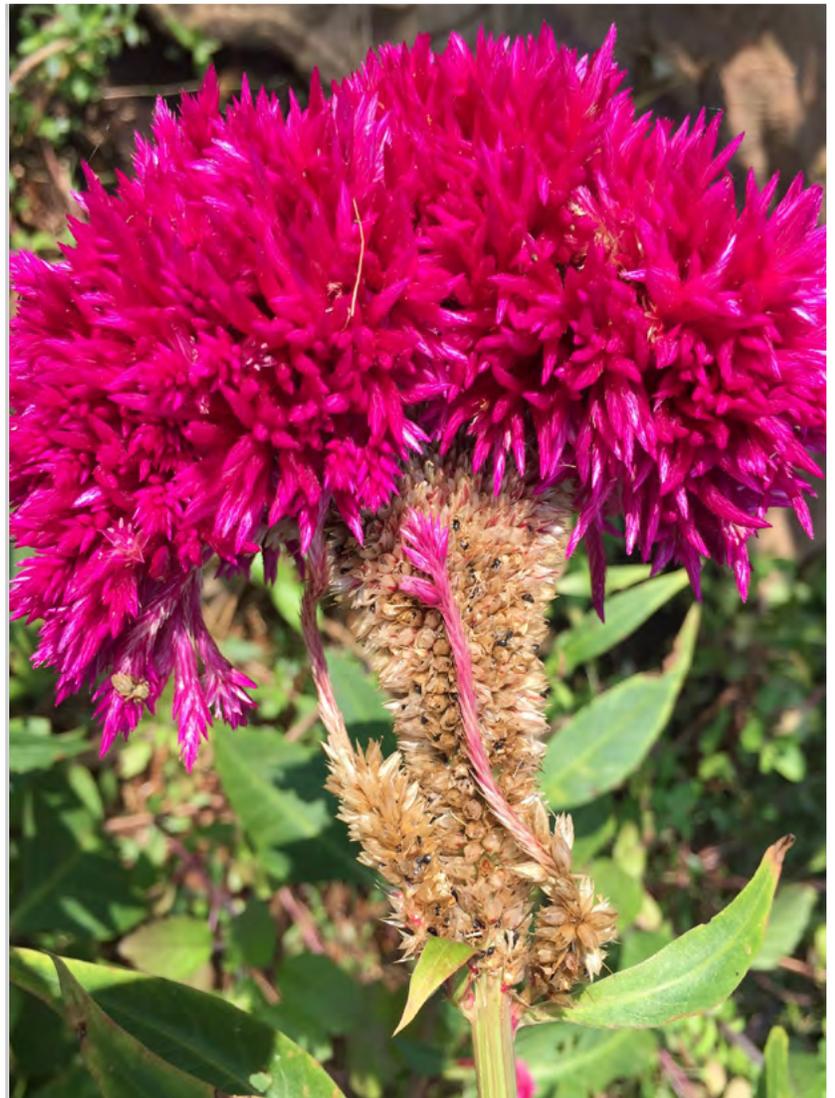
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GreenFriends is a global grassroots environmental movement which promotes environmental awareness and local participation in conservation efforts throughout the world.

GreenFriends is one of the projects of [Embracing the World](#), a not-for-profit international collective of charities founded by internationally known spiritual and humanitarian leader, Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma)

To join the Pacific Northwest GreenFriends Litter Project, write Karuna at [karunap108@comcast.net](mailto:karunap108@comcast.net)

## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

### A New GreenFriends Project is Coming!

by Karuna Poole

Al, my former husband, and I purchased a home on Beacon Hill in Seattle in 1973. The next year, we bought the adjacent lot. I sold that lot in the mid-80's. It changed hands again about ten years later. When Seattle formed the Cheasty Greenbelt, that owner sold it to the city.

When Al and I bought the lot, it was terraced and had numerous fruit trees. None of the subsequent owners did anything with the property, so blackberries, ivy, morning glories and bamboo took over. Smothered by the invasive plants, many trees died.



## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

I woke up one morning in August of 2016 with the thought that I wasn't going to watch another tree die. I headed out that morning with my shears and started to work. I enlisted my friend, Ramana, to clear some of the land. This picture shows piles of some of the blackberry vines he cut down.



While Ramana worked on the major clearing, I focused on freeing specific trees.



## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

In the past, our GreenFriends Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project members have joined other groups' projects. It occurred to me that we could take on this lot as a GreenFriends project, thereby giving us an undertaking of our own.

I called Ananya and Kalavathi, the coordinators of that arm of GreenFriends, and told them about my idea. They were both very excited. When Ananya came to look at the land and was even more enthusiastic. We decided she would call the Green Seattle Partnership, the group that works with the City and volunteer groups who are clearing the Greenbelt of invasives, to see if they had an "Adopt a Lot" option. The person that she reached was thrilled about our interest. Hearing that news, I gave her a call myself to provide additional information about what we had in mind.

We learned that we would need to become Green Seattle Forest Stewards by taking an orientation class next March. We were also told that a botanist from the City Parks Department would need to look at the work we had already done.

During the next few weeks, Ananya, Kalavathi, PA and I spent short periods of time removing invasives in the lot. We would need to wait until after the Forest Steward training to host big work parties, but this gave us experience in working with the land and in considering how we would organize the future GreenFriends work parties.



## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

Around this time, Swami Dayamrita visited Seattle. He came to look at the land and approved the venture as a GreenFriends project.

When Lisa, the City botanist, came to visit she was impressed by how much work we had already done. She answered my many questions and offered a lot of information. She said that once the lot has been cleared of the invasive plants, the City will provide saplings and other native greenery for us to plant.

Removing the invasives uncovered a lot of interesting trash. I wondered if the baby buggy was from the 50's or 60's, and I am curious about the purpose of the 2 ft. high x 8 ft. long cinder block.



## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

As I worked, I discovered many magical shapes created by nature.



## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

I am so excited to have our GreenFriends volunteers working in this section of forest, restoring it to its natural condition. I am even imagining that, since this is a four-lot strip of Greenbelt, we might choose to continue into the other Cheasty lots!

### **From Ananya:**

Unbeknownst to Karuna, Kalavathi, PA, and I were already planning to restart the Habitat Restoration work. It seemed somewhat like a "divine" intervention that our idea and hers came together at the same time.

From the first time that Karuna showed me the Cheasty Greenbelt area, it felt as though Amma was there. An effortless peace seems to permeate the space. The beauty there reminds me of Amma's wonderful quote reminding us that "Nature is so optimistic." I love that quote. It is so true. It seems that no matter what we humans do, Nature just finds a way to keep going. From the little mushrooms in the boggy area, to the little cedars and hawthornes that had been planted long ago and then forgotten, optimism is apparent there. The forest restoration "work" we have done in the Cheasty Greenbelt so far has been effortless. Amma's grace is there.

### **From Kalavathi:**

I had so much fun working in the greenbelt behind Karuna's house. I was given the job of taking the ivy off of one particular cedar tree. I happen to love cedar trees, and have heard they are seen as very "auspicious" in many cultures, so it felt like an honor to work with this tree. I was feeling a bit tired and worn out that day when we arrived, but it turns out the act of liberating trees is a very uplifting and fulfilling experience. I honestly felt like I could feel the relief of the tree once it had been freed from ivy.

Karuna took us around the property and discussed each of the specific trees and the invasives that were threatening their existence. We were introduced to many different kinds of beautiful trees: cherry, willow, dogwood, hawthorne, cedar, maple and hazelnut. It felt like we were meeting friends. As we met each of the trees we studied how each one had so far survived the onslaught of invasives (specifically blackberry, ivy and bamboo), each through their own unique determination to grow.

## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

I was deeply inspired by each tree's fierce commitment to growing despite the obstacles. What were the odds someone would come free them from the ivy and bamboo before they were utterly swallowed? But one could see in studying the trees that each one had been uniquely and creatively and determined. Amma says, "Look at the optimism of nature. Nothing can stop it. Only ego makes humans pessimistic and causes suffering." When one studies the life of a tree, this optimism is so apparent. I was deeply inspired by their commitment to grow despite the seeming hopelessness of the situation. They didn't know someone would eventually come and tear down the ivy choking them, but they just kept growing anyway. Then one day Mother's Grace appeared to reward their faith and determination in the form of Karuna and her shears. What a special honor to get to be a part of that. It is a wonderful feeling to uncover a forest that already exists and to help be a part of saving it. It seems to me that saving trees is as important a task as planting new ones. Surely the trees being saved think so!

Nature is our first mother. She nurtures us throughout our lives.

Our birth mother may allow us to sit on her lap for a couple of years,

but Mother Nature patiently bears our weight our entire life.

She sings us to sleep, feeds us and caresses us.

Just as a child is obligated to his birth mother,

we should all feel an obligation and responsibility towards Mother Nature.

If we forget this responsibility, it is equal to forgetting our own self.

If we forget Nature, we will cease to exist, for to do so is to walk towards death.

- Amma

# Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

## Green Seattle Day



On November 12, the Green Seattle Partnership hosted 14 work parties, scattered throughout the Seattle area, for the purpose of planting trees and other plants as well as removing invasive vines such as blackberries and ivy. The [Green Seattle Partnership](#) is “a collaboration between the City of Seattle, Forterra, community groups and non-profits, businesses, schools, and thousands of volunteers working together to restore and actively maintain the City’s forested parklands.”

Nine hundred and fifty-eight volunteers participated in the 14 work parties. Even though some of the work parties had to be shut down early because of high winds, 4,392 trees and other plants were planted.

Four GreenFriends members decided to go to the work party at Camp Long in West Seattle.

### From Ananya:

The morning was a blustery cool one in November, and I was contemplating whether or not I should head out to the planting party to work as I had originally planned. As I was pondering this, a fellow planting partner called and asked if I wanted to carpool to the event. My decision had been made for me -- I was going. This was good, because I had told myself at the renewed start-up of our GreenFriends work that this time I was going to "go with the flow." It was going to be no stress and no expectations -- just going with the flow. So off we went to the planting party to get down to work!

## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

We arrived at Camp Long under somewhat sunny skies accompanied by pretty breezy conditions. After enjoying a series of interesting coincidences, we came to find out that it was too windy for any more planting under the huge conifers. The work party had been cancelled. We were invited to have a cup of coffee and a snack. So we did.

While we were waiting to see what would come next, we found ourselves being serenaded by two wonderful musicians who asked me to join them. What fun playing music in the wind.



Next, we were informed that lunch would be coming soon even though the planting had been cancelled. Okay, lunch sounded good. As we were eating our catered lunch, an announcement was made that names would be drawn for prizes. I immediately knew that my name would not be called -- it never was for that sort of thing. As I took my next bite of food, I heard my name being called. I had won some of the prizes! Very nice surprise. All-in-all, I've decided that going with the flow is the only way to go.

### **From Karuna:**

I looked forward to participating in my first Green Seattle Partnership activity. I had hoped we would meet some of the people that have been helping us formulate the GreenFriends Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration project we will be leading on Cheasty Blvd on Beacon Hill in Seattle.

When we arrived, a woman walked up to us. I said something about our project. She looked at me quizzically and then asked if I was talking about the Cheasty project. I soon learned that I was talking to Andrea, who is a Green Seattle Partnership coordinator and is the person that Ananya and I had talked to when we first asked how to get in-

## Tree Planting and Habitat Restoration Project

involved with their program. It was so nice to meet her in person. I introduced her to Kalavathi and PA. I was so happy that one of my major goals had been met within the first minutes I was there.

The second person we ran into was Lisa, the City Botanist who I had recently met with to discuss our new project. I also introduced her to the rest of our leadership team.

We arrived as the winds were getting strong, so the physical work ended before we even started—but to me this experience was about getting acquainted with the leaders and volunteers. I felt very comfortable there, and sensed I was among like-minded souls.

### **From Kalavathi:**

As a person who is in recovery from severe social anxiety, I don't always relish going to big social events with lots of people I don't know. However, I heard a pastor once say, "Don't wait until you feel well to help others." That rang as powerful advice to me. It turns out that challenging myself to go beyond my comfort zone, in the name of service to nature and other humans, has in fact been big part of my recovery. So I went to the November 12 event.

The wind was strong and the organizers didn't want to risk someone getting hurt by a falling tree or branch, so we didn't get to do any actual work. But even though it wasn't the physically demanding (and rewarding) work party-day that we had imagined, it was a party, and a fun one at that.

The organizers of the event were super friendly and welcoming and immediately made us feel like we were part of a wonderful community. A huge catered lunch was served in a big field surrounded by trees (thankfully, with vegan options). We were given cool green tee shirts. There were so many young people hanging out and having fun, serving food, laughing, and playing football together in the field. It was very uplifting to me to see how many young folks were there, choosing to spend their free time working together to help take care of nature. When I heard there was a drawing with prizes, I had a strong feeling that one of us from GreenFriend's would win something. My first thought was, "Oh I hope it's me!" Then I scolded myself for entertaining such a selfish thought. When Ananya's name was called, I laughed to myself. It was fun seeing her delight as she received a nice outdoor mug and emergency kit. We left maybe not having done much to help restore nature that day, but with bellies full of food, new tee-shirts, and feeling uplifted by meeting new friends.

## PNW Gardening

### The Inspiring Volunteer



Common Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) in its first-year rosette, in fertile soil up against a fence. I find volunteerism among plants to be one of the most useful and enduringly exciting aspects of earth care. One prepares fertile ground, and the plants populate. I've been watching the seeding habits of plants, now that the "little spring" has hatched them, and am inspired by their fecundity. If plants can be this enthusiastic about living in nature, and they like what I do, then I will follow their example, go outdoors, and reciprocate!

### Harvesting Amaranth

Harvesting golden amaranth for seed. This is probably the easiest garden-to-table grain that can be grown, requiring no fancy preparation to make into delicious cereal which is more sustaining than anything you can get out of a box.

[Richo](#)



## PNW Gardening

### Windowsill Herb Gardening

Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor, University of Vermont



An indoor kitchen herb garden will add flavor to your meals and color to your window sills...and help satisfy that gardening desire during the cold, wintry months.

Most culinary herbs require at least five hours of sun per day. You can use a sunny window, provided the reflected heat is not too intense. If you don't have a window with direct sunlight, put your pots of herbs in a spot with plenty of light, then move them into the sun for a few hours whenever possible. Winter is a good time to start herbs as the sun is getting brighter and the days longer as the plants grow.

Fluorescent lights, or special grow lamps, also work if left on about 14 to 16 hours per day. Place the lights 6 to 12 inches above the tops of the plants, if possible. If the light source is too far away, insufficient light will reach the plants, and they won't grow. If using fluorescent lights, alternate warm and cool white bulbs in the tube fixture, or use ones listed for "natural" light. If you just have a pot of herbs or two, you can use a spot lamp near them.

You must also consider temperature and humidity. Most herbs need daytime temperatures of 68 to 70 degrees F with 30 to 50 percent humidity. To increase humidity, place a dish of water near the plants, or place the pots on a tray of pebbles you keep moist.

Pot your herbs in a mix of vermiculite or equal parts peat moss, garden loam, and coarse sand. Or buy a potting mix

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with such ingredients, but not the heavy garden loam. The potting mix should be slightly moist before sowing. Any container will do, as long as it has good drainage. You may want to start seedlings in a small flat or pot, then transplant as they grow. Sow the seeds according to the package directions, but no deeper than two times the diameter of the seed.

After planting, lightly water with the spray nozzle on a sink, or mister. Place each container inside a plastic bag to create a “greenhouse,” leaving the top slightly open to allow some air and moisture to escape. Set in a fairly warm location (65 to 75 degrees F) out of direct sunlight until seeds germinate. Don't place on a wood stove or too near, as the soil may stay too warm. If near forced air heat vents, check often as this can dry out the soil and seeds.

Germination should start in two to three weeks. At that time, remove the plastic, and move the container to a cooler area (60 to 70 degrees F) where it will receive good light but not direct sun, unless for only a few hours in the day. Gradually increase the amount of sunlight if possible, and rotate pots for even exposure to sunlight. Continue to water, but don't overdo it or the plants may rot.

Thin your herbs when the seedlings have two sets of true leaves. If you started herbs in flats, this is the time to transplant them to individual pots. Use a similar potting medium as used for germination, or as for potting houseplants.

Herbs generally need little fertilizer, but will respond to some. Use a soluble liquid or dry fertilizer, and apply at half strength based on label directions. Liquid seaweed works well on many. Over-fertilized plants often have a poorer flavor than those grown at a more moderate rate.

Potential problems growing herbs indoors are pests that you don't see outdoors, due to natural predators there and the rain washing them off. You can simulate the latter by regular gentle showers or baths for your mature plants. If you wash them in soapy water, make sure it is quite dilute, otherwise the soap may injure the leaves. If using organic sprays such as insecticidal soaps, make sure to read the label and check if herbs and edible plants are listed. Watch, in particular, for aphids and spider mites.

Some easy-to-grow annual herbs that can be transplanted to your garden next spring include basil, parsley, dill, oregano, chives, coriander, tarragon, and anise. I like to have a pot of mint handy for adding to peas (English style

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serving), or hot tea. Mint, of course, is a vigorously spreading garden perennial that you may want to keep in a pot next summer.

Some herbs are more commonly started from cuttings, so if you didn't do so last season, you may want to look for these at garden stores or in catalogs. Bay is a woody plant that does well in containers year round, and of course its leaves are common in Italian sauces as is thyme—another one to look for as a plant. Rosemary is another woody plant, growing as a shrub in hot and Mediterranean climates. Yet I find it will tolerate cool, but non-freezing, conditions.

If planting your herbs outdoors this spring after frost, or starting an herb garden this summer, mark your calendar now to dig some plants next fall to bring indoors before frost for next year's indoor herb garden.



# PNW Litter Project

## PNW Litter Project Stats

In November, **32** litter project members and their friends picked up litter for **68** hours. (Average **2.1** hours; Median **1** hour; Range **1** minute to **11** hours) In December, **37** people picked up litter for **64** hours (Average **1.7** hours; Median **1** hour; Range **1** minute to **10** hours).

Members of the project have picked up litter for **8246** hours since the project began in July 2011.

TerraCycle credited us with turning in **139,534** cigarette butts in **2013** and **55,200** in **2014**. Our **2016** count stands at **25,400** butts, bringing us to a grand total of **300,124** butts since we started sending them to TerraCycle in January 2013. (In addition to the butts we turned into TerraCycle we also have a 5 gallon jar of cigarette butts we use for the litter project display)



## PNW Litter Project

### Litter Project Stories from the Past



These stories came from one of our 2011 cigarette butt cleanup work parties.

#### **From Deepti in Bothell:**

When I dropped my plastic bag, a man just strolling through the park, picked it up and handed to Kartik. As Kartik went to say, "Thank you", the man cut him off saying, "No, thank you for doing this." Later as the soccer players were leaving, two of them watched Kartik picking up the cigarette butts and asked each other, "Is there really any use in picking up discarded cigarettes?" My first thought was, "Is there any use not to?"

#### **From Nirmala in Seattle:**

This experience let me know what a difference a "group" of people can make in a few hours of trash collecting. I was especially happy to be detoxifying the earth given the toxic chemicals in cigarettes. I would like to see that data go out to everyone so everyone knows how really toxic cigarettes are to our Mother Earth.

One very shy guy walked by as I was picking up trash at the park and didn't look anywhere but straight ahead and kind of blurted out a simple, Thank YOU! Another man with his two daughters said he was trying to teach his girls to pick up trash whenever they see it if there is somewhere nearby to throw it away. He said that cigarette smokers must

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still be some of the biggest offenders of littering. Another man saw me counting butts and stopped to see what we were doing and said that it was truly gross that we even had to do such a thing and he thanked us for being willing to do it.

I also noticed that after I left I was MUCH MORE aware of trash on the sidewalks everywhere I went. I went to Traveler's and picked up a bunch of trash all around the outside of the store. Luckily there were trash containers nearby. I noticed in Paris recently that there are trash receptacles on many street corners, something which is absent in Seattle.

### **From John in Seattle:**

As someone who smoked once upon a time, it took me right back to then. I felt like an opportunity in a way to make amends for the butts I tossed without thinking. The experience also put me in touch with the gratitude I feel for quitting over 20 years ago. People in general were curious and appreciative. I especially enjoyed the satsang with other devotees and it felt to me like we were bringing awareness to folks at the park and a nice energy in our efforts to clean things up.

Of course, this dovetails with my ongoing efforts to pick up trash when I am out walking. I was aware of Amma's presence, teaching and guidance throughout our time at the park.

### **From Radhika in Seattle:**

One man was walking with two of his friends. He came over to me and whispered, "Thank you."

At first I didn't hear what he was saying as his voice was very quiet.... It seems like a lot of people are aware of litter and would like to do something about it. I enjoyed working with the other devotee's, and being with one another, and doing something positive to help heal the earth and make it a better place to live.

### **From Aditi in Iowa:**

Thanks to your much-publicized cigarette stub cleaning project, I'm now hyperaware of these things everywhere here. Have taken to having a glove and plastic bag in the car or stuffed in my pocket at all times!

### **From Shirley in Bellevue:**

While I was picking up cigs from the children's playground, a little boy watched me for a minute and then asked his

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dad what I was doing. He told his son I was tidying up the playground, and wasn't that a nice thing to do. Sometime later, the dad came over to me and remarked that it seemed I was mostly picking up cigarette butts. He asked if I was picking them up as a litter volunteer or doing a study or getting paid. I told him I was indeed focusing on the tobacco related rubbish mainly, and that our community group was getting a grant from the county to pick them up. I said we'd be counting the butts at the end of the day to report the total for the park! He thanked me for cleaning up the playground. I think I picked over a dozen butts from the playground.

### **From Maheswari in Shoreline:**

It appears as though people smoke outside of the building located across from the park and flick the cigarette butts into the street. I am guessing when the blowers clean the street many of the cigarette butts end up on the park side. Although I do not advocate smoking, I wonder if the lack of ashtrays or receptacles for people to dispose of the cigarette butts contributes to the reason why the cigarette butts end up as litter. Who wants to put a nasty cigarette butt in their pocket or purse and the cigarette butt also needs to be completely extinguished.

### **From Prakash in Redmond:**

Felt great to be part of this effort. Everything was so was so neatly organized. Next day when my boss asked me about how I spent my weekend, I told him about the project and he was very impressed. I was able to show him few pictures too. He asked quite a few questions.

### **From Ohkn in Tacoma:**

I think the experience was good for me in several ways. 1) As an ex-smoker it affirmed my resolve to not smoke. 2) It gave me an idea for something tobacco companies need to provide their customers (INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO FIELD DRESS A CIGARETTE and not just flick it when it's done). 3) It reminded me how easy it is to make a difference, even though many won't notice those cigarette butts are gone. 4) It reminded me I was connected to some great people (like minds/spirits seem few and far between in Tacoma/U.P. sometimes).

### **From Kavita in Redmond:**

I liked the experience. It felt like I was doing something for the community and overall I enjoyed it.

## GreenFriends Projects in Amritapuri

### The Amazing Kapok Tree



One of the trees in Amritapuri's Saraswati Garden is a Kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) I have learned that these trees can reach a height of 200 feet. My guess is that the one in the Saraswati Garden is 125-150 feet high. It is the tallest tree in the garden.

When I looked for photos of Kapok trees on [Wikimedia Commons](#) and [Google Images](#), I saw that the trunk of the trees can be gigantic, such as the one in this photo:



Photo Credit: Wikipedia

## GreenFriends Projects in Amritapuri

They can also be small like this one in Amritapuri.



I stood by the Kapok tree in the Saraswati Garden and looked up. Notice how the building's metal roof has been cut away so that it doesn't impact the tree.

## GreenFriends Projects in Amritapuri

I looked for a place to take a photo that showed both the bottom part of the tree and the part that was above the house. I still couldn't see the top of the tree from where I was standing, so I found a different vantage point.



Seed pods, like the one at the top of this post, drop from the tree when they are ready. Inside, there is a substance that is very silky. It also bears resemblance to cotton and wool. Notice the seeds that are scattered throughout the silky material.



## GreenFriends Projects in Amritapuri



A Rainforest Alliance article said this about the Kapok tree:

*The majestic kapok tree has many uses for humans. Its wood is lightweight and porous; good for making carvings, coffins and dugout canoes. The silky fibers that disperse the seeds are too small for weaving but make great stuffing for bedding and life preservers. Soaps can be made from the oils in the seeds. Other parts of the giant tree are used as medicines. In ancient times, the Maya believed that the kapok tree stood at the center of the earth.*

In Amritapuri, the pod contents are being used to stuff meditation pillows. I look forward to telling the devotees who are working in this garden that the oil in the seeds can be used for making soap and that pillows stuffed with the silky filaments will float!