



GreenFriends North America NEWSLETTER

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

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

For more information, write info@greenfriendsna.org

To subscribe to the GreenFriends North America newsletter, go to <https://lists.ammagroups.org>

Greenfriendsna.org website

AMMA'S TEACHINGS ON MAN AND NATURE

**AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOKLET,
"MAN AND NATURE,"
COMPRISED OF AMMA'S ANSWERS
TO QUESTIONS ON NATURE**

Question:

What is the relationship between man and Nature?

AMMA:

Children, man is not different from Nature. He is part of Nature. The very existence of human beings on earth depends on Nature. In truth, we are not protecting Nature – it is Nature who protects us. Trees and plants, for example, are absolutely necessary for the purification of vital energy (the life force). Everyone knows that human beings cannot live in a desert. The reason is that there are no trees there to purify the vital energy. If atmospheric purification does not take place, the health of humans will deteriorate. It will cause a decrease in their life span, various diseases, and poor eyesight or even blindness.

Our lives are inextricably dependent on Nature; even a small change in Nature will affect our lives on this planet. Similarly, man's thoughts and actions have an effect on Nature. If the balance in Nature is lost, the harmony of human life will also be lost, and vice versa.

The one factor which connects a human being to Nature is the innate innocence within man. When we see a rainbow, or the waves of the ocean, do we still feel the innocent joy of a child? An adult who experiences a rainbow as being nothing but light waves will not know the joy and wonder of a child who sees a rainbow, or a child who is watching the waves of the ocean.



Faith in God is the best way to sustain this childlike innocence in man. He who has faith and devotion to God, which in turn stems from his innate innocence, beholds God in everything, in every tree and animal, in every aspect of Nature. This attitude enables him to live in perfect harmony, in tune with Nature. The never-ending stream of love that flows from a true believer towards the entire Creation will have a gentle, soothing effect on Nature. This love is the best protection of Nature.

It is when our selfishness increases that we begin to lose our innocence. When this happens, man becomes estranged from Nature and begins to exploit her. Man doesn't know what a terrible threat he has become to her. By harming Nature, he is paving the way for his own destruction.

As man's intellect and scientific knowledge grow, he should not forget the feelings of his heart, which enable him to live in accordance with Nature and her fundamental laws.

***Om Lokah Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu
Om Lokah Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu
Om Lokah Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu
Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi***

SUPPORTING PRAIRIES AND POLLINATORS

**“MOTHER EARTH IS SERVING US;
THE SUN, THE MOON, AND
THE STARS ALL SERVE US.
WHAT CAN WE DO IN RETURN
FOR THEIR SELFLESS SERVICE?”**

- 108 QUOTES ON NATURE BY AMMA



Green Friends Montessori School (GFMS) garden

Like most American children, I learned during my elementary years of the deeply sad story of rainforest destruction. Along with my classmates, I sold “Save the Rainforest” T-shirts and asked my parents to purchase recycled paper in an effort to help. Years later, while pursuing a B.A. in environmental studies, I continued to explore the themes of resource use and habitat conservation. Along my research path, I came across the depressing fact that nearly half of tropical rainforests have been destroyed. However, what shocked me most from my research findings was not what has been happening in the Amazon, but what had occurred in my own Midwest region “backyard.”

Imagine North America, 200 years ago. Tall grass prairies once covered 170 million acres, sweeping across the continent from the Rocky Mountains to east of the Mississippi River, and from Saskatchewan all the way south to Texas. An icon of the mid-western landscape, the tall grass prairie is heralded by ecologists as one of the most complicated and diverse ecosystems in the world. Shockingly, humans have altered this landscape so drastically that experts estimate that only about 1% of tall grass prairie remains. One percent.

Like a scene straight out of Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax*, I suddenly realized what “we,” as collective humans of past and present, have done to the prairie. Here we stand, like the young boy in the story, listening in agonizing captivation to the Once-ler narrating his sad tale. However, in our case the seeds he tosses to outstretched hands in hope are not *Truffula* seeds, but big bluestem, aster, Indian grass, butterfly weed, prairie dropseed...

In the past few years, MA Center Chicago (MACC) has been blessed to catch some of those seeds. As Amma says, “when compassion arises within us, we will sincerely wish to help and protect all beings” (*108 Quotes on Nature*). Directly inspired by how our beloved Amma cares for nature, MACC residents and local devotees have been lovingly planting seeds of hope. One long-term resident has slowly transformed his entire front and backyard into a prairie restoration project, much to the delight of his fellow human, plant, and animal residents.

When a new retention pond was constructed on the ashram property a few years back, care was taken to establish a prairie plant community in a wide swath surrounding the pond. This area is a haven for wildlife, and the strong, deep roots of the prairie grasses and forbs anchor the soil in place and help prevent erosion on the slope.



Retention Pond

In 2020, an additional 2,000-square-foot area was established with pollinator plants adjacent to the pond, and a new 2,800-square-foot pollinator garden was seeded by sevites at the Y road junction at MACC. As one resident said, we wait for spring and new plant growth “with the excited anticipation of expecting parents!”



Retention Pond



Green Friends Montessori School (GFMS) garden

Located on the MACC campus, the **Green Friends Montessori School (GFMS)** has also caught the prairie restoration bug. In the winter of 2020, GFMS applied for and received the Illinois Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant in order to expand the school’s pollinator garden. The grant allowed GFMS to nearly triple the size and species richness of the existing pollinator garden on the school playground, expanding it to over 900 square feet in size. Planting took place during the spring of 2020, with families visiting the site to plant on a rotating basis to remain compliant with local COVID-19 protocols.

Most of the plants flowered during this first summer, and an abundance of pollinators were observed in the garden, including a variety of bees, wasps, butterflies, and more. When children returned to school in August, they began exploring the garden with great enthusiasm and interest. In spite of some challenges related to COVID-19, the project went very smoothly, the plants grew quickly and are healthy, and care of the garden is incorporated into the classes’ regular visits to the garden.

Prairie gardens and restoration efforts not only help restore a vital ecosystem, they also provide important habitat and food sources for pollinators. The dominant flora in a prairie ecosystem includes grasses, which are wind pollinated, and wildflowers (or forbs), which are pollinated by

animals including bees, beetles, flies, butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds.



Monarch caterpillar

Even establishing a small backyard pollinator garden will help support healthy insect and hummingbird populations in your area. Migrating monarch butterflies and ruby-throated hummingbirds also rely on finding rest stops along their migration routes—maybe your backyard will be visited by them next fall!

Pollinators and prairies are inextricably linked. Healthy pollinator populations support ecosystem health, leading to increased biodiversity and resilience and decreased encroachment of invasive species. Pollinators are also key components of a healthy human food system, as we have pollinators to thank for “bringing to fruit” approximately one third of our agricultural crops.



Tiger Swallowtail

By now you may be wondering... what can the average citizen do to support prairies and pollinators? Here are a few tips to get started:

- Plant a garden in your yard comprised of native prairie species and select a variety of plants to ensure blooms are available for pollinators from spring through fall.
- Opt for natural methods of pest control and reduce or eliminate pesticide use in your yard and garden.
- Volunteer with a local conservation organization to help with prairie restoration projects and invasive species removal.
- Support local, organic agriculture through your food choices.
- Create a “[bug hotel](#)” in your yard to provide a nesting structure for solitary bees and other pollinators

As Amma says, “**Look at the beauty of nature. Living harmoniously with nature will in itself bring happiness and contentment**” (*108 Quotes on Nature*). May we all strive to care for the earth and see unity and beauty in all of creation.

Aum Amriteshwaryai Namah

~ PAURNAMI ENGELKING,
MA CENTER CHICAGO



SEE THESE LINKS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES:

ON PRAIRIE GARDENING: [HTTPS://PLANTNEBRASKA.ORG](https://plantnebraska.org)
ON POLLINATORS: [HTTPS://EXTENSION.ENTM.PURDUE.EDU/](https://extension.entm.purdue.edu/)

NURTURING WELL-BEING WITH MOTHER NATURE'S LOVE



WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A WINTER LIKE NO OTHER.

For many of us who struggle with depression, especially at this time of year, the current circumstances only add to the severity of the experience.

I have found that Mother Nature, like any loving mother, has ways to nurture us even through these difficult times. Here are some ways in which I have found solace and comfort this winter and, I hope you may too.

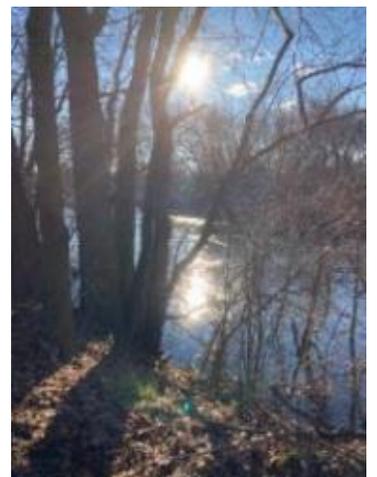
“Look at Nature. Nature is a book from which we must learn. Each object in it is a page of that book.”

~ Amma

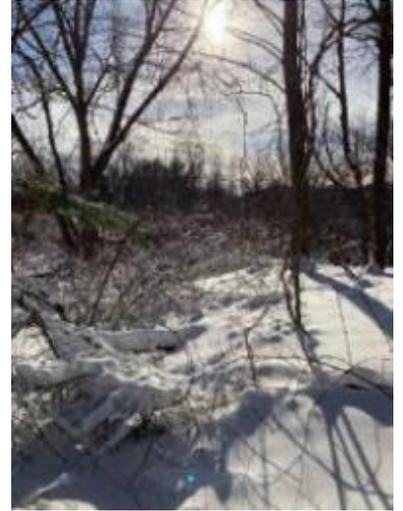
SUNLIGHT

I have found exposure to sunlight makes a huge difference in my mental state. I have lived in the Northeast US for all of my adult life. During that time I have lived in places where my bedroom window got direct morning light and in some that got very little or no direct sunlight.

I have suffered from low-level depression for most of my life. When circumstances and karma brought on difficult situations, I sometimes had severe depression to the point where I could not get out of bed. At those times, I had to be on medication. One of the side effects or perhaps contributing factors of the depression was going to bed very late at night and waking up late in the mornings. During the winter months, with the very limited daylight, this meant that there were many days when I did not have any exposure to sunlight especially if my bedroom or apartment did not get any direct sunlight.



Recently I moved to an apartment where my bedroom gets morning sunlight, and I realized what a huge effect it has on me. I find it is easier to wake up with the sun streaming into my bedroom. It helps me feel optimistic. Based on this discovery, I decided to get out and be in the sunlight every day if possible. Even if it is cold, I bundle up and step outside for ten minutes unless it is raining. Some days, I get in my car and go for a drive just to be outside and exposed to sunlight. I drive to a local park or a body of water and always feel rejuvenated afterwards. And if I remain in my car for most of that time, I am not exposed to anyone else or the cold weather. I also happen to live close to a river and walk by there regularly. The sunlight reflecting off the water really lifts my spirits.



Modern construction designs create buildings where several apartments on one side of a building will only have northern or north-western exposure, meaning that whoever lives there will never get any sunlight in those apartments. If you are deeply affected by depression and find that sunshine helps, consider moving to a home that has windows facing south, south-east, and east.

EXCERPTS FROM AMMA'S TEACHINGS COMPILED BY TEAM AMRITA YOGA, AMRITAPURI

"In the olden days, people would wake up in the morning, bow down to mother Earth, and then, facing the sun, chant prayers and perform Surya Namaskarah. Today, in many countries, six or seven people out of ten have vitamin D deficiency from lack of exposure to sunlight. It is postulated that vitamin D deficiency may be one of the precipitating factors for Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. Some may argue that even people with normal vitamin D levels get Alzheimer's disease. This is true, but studies have shown that a majority of people with this condition have a vitamin D deficiency. It is also thought to be a cause of depression, a higher incidence of which is found in countries that have less sunlight.

"Yoga is beneficial for our health, physical beauty, and mental discipline. It helps reduce our cholesterol and maintain cardiac health. It increases our bone strength. This is especially important as the incidence of arthritis and osteoporosis is on a steep rise. It even helps improve our memory power.

"It is important to do balanced exercise for at least ten minutes a day. Along with this, we also need at least 10 minutes of sun exposure a day."

<https://amritayoga.com/yoga-talks>

INDOOR LIGHTING

[*Psychology Today reports*](#) "A new study reports that staring into an artificial source of bright light for 30 minutes every morning for eight weeks helped people with major depressive disorder (MDD) feel better."

Inside my apartment, as soon as it starts getting dark, I make sure to have bright lights on in rooms where I spend most of my time. While I understand that it is important to conserve electricity, I find that it is also important for my mental and emotional health to have good lighting.



“Amma has also said that the flame from the wick of the lamp represents pure consciousness that always rises up. Flames always point upward, even if you turn a candle upside down. When we focus on God, or our innate goodness at dusk, a time when the ambient atmospheric energy is more polluted, it is a balm to our psyche.”

- Swamini Ambikamrita Prana

“At dusk, the atmosphere is full of impure vibrations. This is the time when day and night meet and is the best time for sadhaks (spiritual aspirants) to meditate because good concentration can be attained. If sadhana is not done, more worldly thoughts rise up. That is why bhajan should be sung loudly at dusk. In this way, the atmosphere will also be purified. Children, at dusk sing bhajan while sitting in front of a burning oil lamp. The smoke produced by the wick burning in oil is a *siddha oushadha* (perfect medicine). We inhale the smoke and the atmosphere is also purified.”

~ Amma

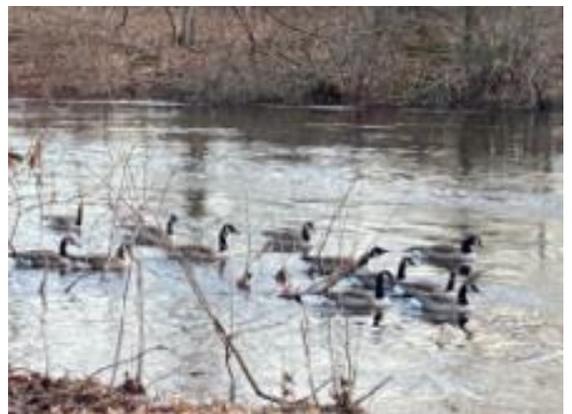
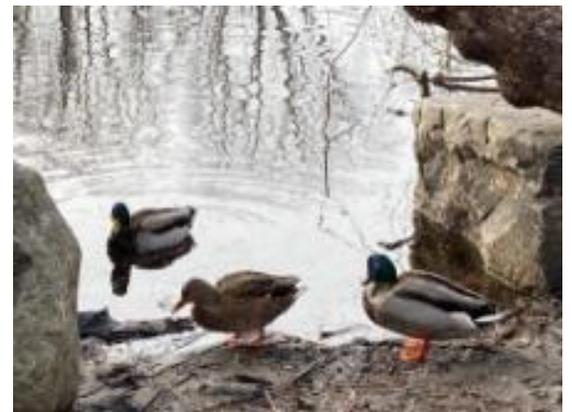
TREES, BIRDS AND ANIMALS

Isolation can have a catch-22 effect on depression. If we are isolated, we may slip deeper into depression. And if we are depressed, we may tend to withdraw and isolate ourselves further. During my walks along the river, I found that Mother Nature is teeming with life and She shares it with me joyously. I get to see ducks, geese, other birds and sparrows. I listen to them singing, chirping, honking, and squawking loudly and festively as they talk to each other across the river.

The Japanese practice of forest bathing promotes spending time among trees with the aim to slow us down and immerse all of our senses in the natural environment. [As the NPR article states](#), “There is a growing body of evidence that the practice can help boost immunity and mood and help reduce stress.”

I talk to the trees I pass by and have seen many interesting tree stalks such as white birches and bushes with bright red stems. Some trees are full of bright red berries this time of year.

When I cannot get outside to connect with life and Nature, I make efforts to bring that connection inside. I watch uplifting videos or



documentaries of wildlife or pets. I have even started doing jigsaw puzzles with Nature themes to help me stay connected.



Having indoor plants is yet another way to connect with Nature during the winter months. I have a small pot of golden pothos which is easy to care for. It only needs to be watered every few days or when the soil is close to dry and does not require a lot of light to thrive. These two articles, [The Healing Benefits of the Humble Houseplant](#) and [Houseplant Care: Tips from Chicago](#) from the GFNA newsletter provide more information on the benefits of having houseplants and tips for their care.

WATER

One area that can suffer when you are struggling with depression is self-care. On some days even taking a shower can be a challenge. I make an effort to take a shower or bath every day. The warm water feels nurturing and is a gift from Mother Nature that we may take for granted. Using soaps and moisturizing lotions with natural ingredients also brings in Nature and nourishes my body and soul.

Drinking warm teas or soups helps us stay hydrated and feel nourished when the heat starts to make the air and our bodies feel dry.

I keep a spray bottle with distilled water and drops of some essential oils I like such as orange, cinnamon and clove. I spray my apartment regularly with this spray to make it smell nice and bring in scents from Nature.

AIR AND TEMPERATURE

As the temperature outside and inside gets colder, I tend to take fewer deep breaths. I find that shallow breathing has the effect of cutting me off from life force, further reinforcing the isolation and depression. In [a study](#) evaluating the effects of deep breathing exercises in subjects with bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic depression), the results indicated that the deep breathing protocol was effective in reducing anxiety levels in patients with bipolar disorder.

To help me breathe more deeply, every morning, I make it a point to open the slider to my deck even if only a slight crack, stick my face out the door and take 3 deep breaths. This small step of getting even a little bit of fresh air helps to bring me back into my body and feel more connected.

Even if you only have a window, you can try opening the window just a crack and taking a few deep breaths. I also practice Amma's Ma-Om meditation on as many days as I can, sitting in bed before I start my day. Breathing deeply, connecting to Amma and to my heart are gifts I am learning to give myself as I continue to heal.

We do also need to protect ourselves from the cold during this time. Being cold all the time can make me feel depressed. While turning up the heat can be expensive, sometimes we can find other ways to make our homes warmer. We can look for and seal drafts in doors and windows. We can add insulation. We can buy warm clothing to keep our hands and feet warm. I use my winter jacket as a lap blanket to keep my feet warm. You may be able to knit or buy warm socks and mittens. Small steps can go a long way to making you comfortable through the winter months.

Before you know it, you will start to see signs of new life outside. The days are already getting longer and crocuses, tulips, hyacinth and daffodil shoots will soon be sticking their heads out of the ground.

No matter how difficult things may get, we can always count on the rhythm of Mother Nature to once again return warmer, sunnier and brighter days back to us. Until then, may you stay warm and uplifted with the help of Mother Nature and Amma's everpresent Grace.

~A DEVOTEE IN THE NORTHEAST, USA



“Life is filled with God’s light, but only through optimism will you experience that light. Look at the optimism of Nature. Nothing can stop it. 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, whole-heartedly.”

~ Amma

HOUSEPLANT CARE: TIPS FROM CHICAGO



Poinsettia. that started from a 6" plant and is now 2 years old. Loves light. Water twice a week.

A RESIDENT OF THE CHICAGO ASHRAM ADDS HER THOUGHTS AND TIPS ON LIVING WITH HOUSEPLANTS

In response to the article, [The Healing Benefits of the Humble Houseplant](#) in the Fall 2020 newsletter, a reader shares her experience.



Two plants that love indirect light. They are on top of a bookshelf away from windows. Better to let the soil dry between

I have had house plants most of my adult life. As explained in the article, they thrive if they have enough light, the correct amount of water, and some added nutrients, on a regular basis, especially during the spring and summer seasons. I would like to mention three points to help plants stay healthy and thrive:

1. **BOOST OF ENERGY IN A PUJA ROOM**
2. **LAVENDER TEA TO CLEANSE PESTS**
3. **PLANT LIGHT FOR THE WINTER MONTHS**

BOOST OF ENERGY IN A PUJA ROOM

As many of you have an altar or a place to meditate, you may have experienced how your meditation room or meditation corner is charged with spiritual energy. Plants love that energy and thrive in that environment. A long time ago, before meeting Amma, I lived in the Sivananda Yoga Center in Paris, France. There were lots of plants in every room. One of my sevas was to care for the plants, and to buy fresh cut flowers for all the altars situated in the Puja Room plus the three Yoga rooms. Every week, before the Saturday evening satsang, I would buy fresh cut flowers and prepare them into smaller bouquets for each room: the Puja room, the Yoga rooms, and also the registration desk, where we welcomed the yoga students.

After doing this same seva for some time, I noticed that the flowers placed on the reception desk always withered first. In contrast, the bouquet sitting in the Puja room thrived and lasted longer than all the other ones. I wondered about it, because each of these small bouquets originally came from the exact same larger bunches of flowers, which I had purchased myself on the same day. Why, I wondered, was there such a big difference?

As this pattern was consistent, I deduced that flowers love the meditation energy much better than the chatting at the registration desk! Later, I used this principle to help when one plant was not doing well. I would place it near the altar, in the puja room, for some time. Almost every time, a sick plant would heal if placed near an altar.

LAVENDER TEA TO CLEANSE PESTS

Lavender is a strongly-scented, bushy evergreen plant, widely used for its fragrance. Since ancient times it has been used for its medicinal properties. This herb thrives in some of the toughest conditions. I saw them growing wild in very arid soil in Provence, southern France. The tradition of placing a lavender sachet with your clothes is not just for the nice fragrance, but mainly to repel moths. Contemplating this information, I thought the lavender could repel other kinds of pests. I tried essential lavender oil during my Yoga Teacher Course, where so many mosquitoes were taking advantage of the quiet meditation times. It was fairly efficient for about one hour; therefore, I could enjoy a short, worry-free meditation.



Succulents and cactus all love light.
Water some twice a week, every week or only every 2 weeks.



Two-year old Mejold Date Tree grown from a date pit. It can grow to 6'. Needs light and warmth. Do not expect dates, but with Amma's Grace anything is possible!!!

At one point, when a plant at the Yoga Center in Paris was infested with pests, I decided to try lavender. The essential oil might be too strong and may kill the plant, so I made a tea with dried lavender flowers and it successfully healed this plant. Since then, I have used homemade lavender tea often, for sick plants, with a high rate of success.

Homemade lavender tea is an efficient and inoffensive way to rid a plant of pests. Here are instructions on how to make it:

1. Bring to a boil 1 quart of water with 1 tsp of dry lavender flowers. (DO NOT use essential oil, even diluted; it is too strong and will kill the plant!)
2. Simmer for 15 to 20 minutes. You may enjoy the wonderful, calming aroma spreading through the whole kitchen.
3. When the tea is done, let it cool down to room temperature. (NEVER POUR HOT TEA ON A PLANT, it could kill the plant!)
4. Strain the tea and save in a glass bottle.

There are 3 ways to use the lavender tea, depending of the kind of plant and the severity of the pest infection.

- Water the infected plant with some lavender tea instead of regular water, and as often as you would water this plant, not more, not less often.
- Using a spray bottle, spray lavender tea on the plant's leaves, both on top and under the leaves.
- Wash the leaves with the lavender tea, using a soft cotton cloth (like from an old T-shirt). DO NOT do that for plants with tiny or delicate leaves; instead, just use the spray bottle.



This succulent prefers shade and dry soil, water every other week.

This treatment may need to be repeated regularly for some time. It may take several weeks, but if you watch the plant closely, you will notice an improvement. Continue as needed until the plant heals completely.

Nowadays, I also like to first use a mix of Amma's Holy Water and Bach Flower Rescue Remedy, to boost a plant's energy; especially after a plant is moved to a new home, or just a new location, or is being re-potted.

PLANT LIGHT FOR THE WINTER MONTHS

I lived for many years in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I had to adjust the care for house plants in that particular location. During the summer months, the dry and hot climate allowed many house plants to thrive outdoors. In contrast, as early as mid-October, or during the cold winter months with snow outside and temperatures dropping below freezing, I would move all the house plants back indoors. I had to choose the best spot for each one of them.

I often did not have enough window space for the ones craving direct sunlight. One spring, I received a big hibiscus plant, which can grow very tall. This plant thrives outside, blooming continuously throughout the summer. In the fall, in spite of being brought indoors, it began to lose one leaf after the next. I did not know what to do. There was no place I could find with direct sunlight for such a big plant. I finally resorted to buying a plant light. Placing the plant in my bedroom, I set up the light with a timer, for eight hours of light. It did not take long for the plant to sprout new leaves. Later, I had the wonderful surprise of seeing a flower bud blooming on this hibiscus bush. I enjoyed several blooms in the middle of the winter, and in my bedroom!

This hibiscus lived many years in this rhythm: outdoors in the summer months and indoors with a plant light in the winter months. Some years later, I moved to California near the San Ramon ashram. I was not allowed to take any plants with me per California State Regulation. At that crucial time, with Amma's Grace, each of my thirty plants had found a new home at several Santa Fe devotees' residences!

My love for plants has grown over the years, and by caring for them, each one has taught me where it likes to be, and how much water it needs, which changes with the season. Amma had said to kiss the plants. This has become a natural way to talk with them. I now live at the Chicago ashram in a basic studio, currently with eighteen plants! I had chosen a studio facing South-East mainly for that reason.

May your love for Mother Nature grow by caring for plants, indoor or outdoor, and especially within your heart.

~ PRANAVA, CHICAGO



Many plants thrive on a sunny window

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

**PLEASE WRITE TO US AT
INFO@GREENFRIENDSNA.ORG**

VENTURES IN CARING FOR MOTHER NATURE



GREENFRIENDS WASHINGTON, DC

In 2020, as a result of COVID shelter-in-place measures, GreenFriends DC was only able to complete one group project. With the help of AYUDH, we undertook the Bamboo Control Project to protect the ashram garden from the spread of invasive bamboo from the neighbor's property. The project was labor-intensive and involved the use of a "ditch witch", a trench-digging machine, as well as lots of hand labor. This underground barrier protects the ashram garden by preventing the spread of invasive bamboo onto the ashram property.



In the fall, DC GreenFriends did a Serve Nature Project, during which individuals cleaned up litter from public areas near their own neighborhoods. Over an eight-week period, we cleaned up and collected more than 18 kitchen-size trash bags of litter.



In past years, an ashram vegetable/flower garden supplied vegetables for purchase at our weekly satsang and yielded enough produce for us to share with a non-profit agency that feeds the homeless in Washington DC. Given the different situation this year, we needed another approach, and the ashram residents expressed an interest in growing vegetables in the garden.

INSPIRED BY AMMA'S TEACHINGS ON NATURE CARE, M.A. CENTER OF DC RESIDENTS AND LOCAL DEVOTEES SHARE THEIR STORIES OF ORGANIC VEGETABLE GARDENING, TREE PLANTING, RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING, AND MORE!

"I am an ashram resident and have helped with the ashram garden. This year, residents asked for a garden, and our ashram gardener shared space with us. Amma's encouragement to grow our own vegetables has always been on my mind. Since this was my first gardening experience, I began with one crop: greens. I planted seeds for a kind of turnip greens, in which only the leaf is edible. Since the ashram was already composting, I used that compost. With Amma's Grace the greens grew nicely, and I ate them all summer!" ~ **PRASEETAA YOUNG**



"While I was in recovery from a health-related surgery, I weeded the garden and discovered many volunteer plants (plants that grow from seeds that have been left in the ground from last year's garden or from the compost which has been applied to the garden). I transplanted about 20 volunteer long bean plants in one bed and found many volunteer red spinach plants which I transplanted to another bed. There were also many tomato plants, which I transplanted to sunny areas. It turned out that there were four different kinds of tomatoes: cherry, multicolored grape, round large, and oval large.



"Now that it's cold out, I am growing many plants inside the ashram to decorate the altar, provide a natural indoor air cleaner, and to grace our space. I believe we all have had a loving and learning experience through our gardening activities. I want to thank Amma for giving us this wonderful garden to play with this year." ~ **GUNAVATI MILLER**



“I have been nurturing a garden plot with a friend this summer, and maintaining garden boxes in my windows. Growing vegetables and flowers, and for the first time starting my plants from seed inside. I have enjoyed taking abandoned or discarded plants, reviving them, and sharing them with others. The focus for 2021 is rebuilding the garden dirt!” ~ **CAROLINE MITCHELL**

“My contribution to Mother Nature this year includes: picking up bags of litter.” ~ **SPIRIT MADDEN**

“I have recycled since childhood and used reusable bags for more than a decade (I can’t remember how long). I walk everywhere possible, so I use my car less than 2000 miles a year under normal circumstances; this year, because of COVID-19, I have hardly driven.

During COVID-19 I have made new best friends forever.... I would go for a walk in the woods every day, to see these lovely orange fungi, which I found at two opposite ends of the woods. When they turned black and died, I was so very disappointed. Nonetheless, I found other BFFs to visit and photograph. You could say that I am One with them.”

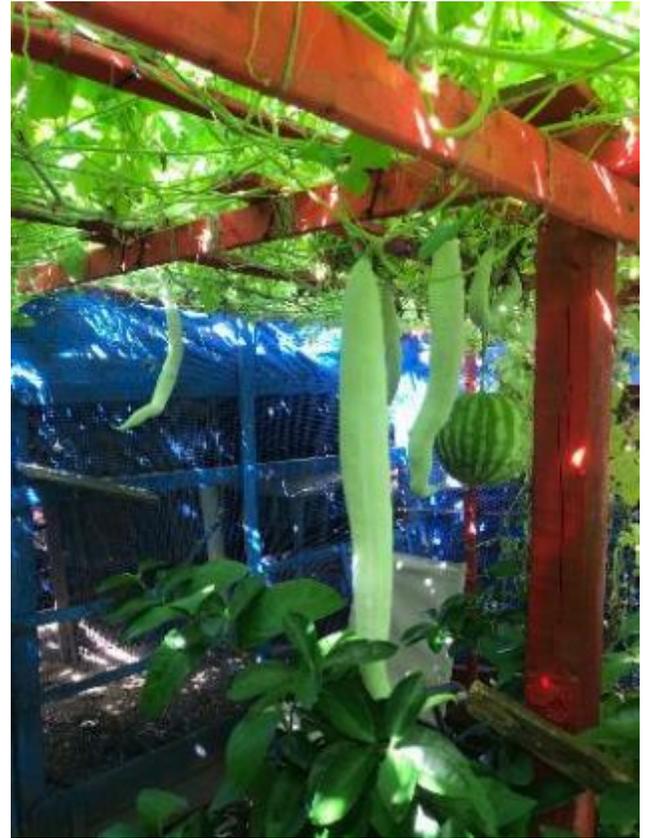
~ **JYOTIAATMA FINESILVER**





“My parents have cultivated a vegetable and flower garden at our home.”

~ ANAGHA SREEVALS



- Inspired by GreenFriends’ efforts and Amma’s direction, I have started picking up other people’s trash when I go on my walks around my neighborhood. I am trying to leave it looking better for the people who come next and to prevent the trash from ending up in the drainage system.
- I discovered that my town has a city-wide food composting program. I now collect my food waste in a plastic bag in my freezer. When I have a goodly amount, I take it to the compost bins, dump the contents and bring the plastic bag back home to wash and reuse.
- I carry reusable bags with me to the grocery store and all other stores!
- I put my produce in the plastic bags that my grapes come in (there are no bag-free grapes available at my grocery store!). I save the grape bags, wash and dry them and then use them to put my fruit and other produce in when I am shopping. That way at least I am not using an additional plastic bag to put my produce in.
- I continue to limit my water usage as much as possible. For example, I keep my used dishwashing water to pre-soak my dishes. The pre-soak allows me to make much more use of my fresh dishwashing water.
- In the summer, I harvested the water from my dehumidifier and used it to water my plants. I would love to have an outdoor garden, but my landlord hasn’t been too keen on that as yet. Perhaps that will change in 2021!

~ MARTHA MILLER

“More than a century ago, nearly four billion American Chestnut trees were growing in the eastern U.S. They were among the largest, tallest, and fastest-growing trees. The wood was rot-resistant, straight-grained, and suitable for furniture, fencing, and building. The nuts fed billions of wildlife, people and their livestock. Almost a perfect tree until a blight fungus killed it when Chinese Chestnut trees were introduced to the U.S. at the beginning of the 20th century. The chestnut blight has been called the greatest ecological disaster to strike the world’s forests in all of history. The American Chestnut tree survived all adversaries for 40 million years, then disappeared within 40.



“The American Chestnut Foundation, founded in 1983, has been working to develop blight-resistant American Chestnut trees and to begin to plant them in their former native range. In the spirit of Amma's teachings to plant trees, and wanting to help revive the American Chestnut, we got seeds from the American Chestnut Foundation and sprouted them over a three-year period. We planted 14 small saplings in our field. We’re hoping some of them will survive and grow into full trees.”

~ KEN AND WENDY STEBEN

“For right now and since COVID, I compost regularly in partnership with my neighborhood garden, I had a balcony garden in the summer and fall with plants and herbs. I participated in the MA Center DC ashram trash collecting project promising a collection of 4 kitchen bags full of trash with an actual collection thus far of 1 and 1/2 yet I continue to do this picking up trash in my neighborhood during my walks.”

~ ANASWARA BRESLIN

Amma says,

“Everything in God’s creation has a purpose and a benefit, whatever it is. There is a use for everything, whether it is a dog, a cat, or a hen. No matter if it is an animal or a plant, there is a purpose behind its creation. Even if human beings do not have any use for something, other creatures do. The harmony of nature depends on all things that have been created.”

~ *Awaken Children*, Vol. 3, p.76

GreenFriends thanks all the devotees who shared their activities and photos with us. So many ideas inspire us to find ways, in 2021, to support Amma’s request that we care for Nature!

~ GREENFRIENDS, WASHINGTON DC

TURTLE STORIES OF THE AMRITA NATURE SANCTUARY FOR NATIVE WILDLIFE – PART II



(CONTINUED FROM [TURTLE STORIES OF THE AMRITA NATURE SANCTUARY FOR NATIVE WILDLIFE - PART I...](#))

Over the years, at least 30 of the 100 or more turtles have become regular visitors for occasional snacks and affection. As each has distinct features and very different personalities, we name them and recognize them even after many years. Some turtles even know their specific names and come when we call them. Most come as babies, or young turtles but occasionally we win over the adult turtles who also start to become friendly.

This type of turtle is known as the Indian black freshwater turtle and is known to live about twenty-five years. In some parts of Asia, this type of turtle is a threatened species, but here they thrive in the beautiful sanctuary and enjoy a safe habitat.

After about two years, Amma watched a video of Kurma and his friends and enjoyed it so much she wanted to see it a few times. She asked many questions like what they ate, who feeds them, if they come when we call them, how old they are when they start to lay eggs, and many other questions.

Even to this day Kurma comes occasionally to have snacks. He is full grown, but fearlessly climbs onto our lap to enjoy the most attention. There is high competition for attention amongst the turtles and also the little fish that have started to come to eat the turtle food as well.

The distinct personalities of the turtles have provided us a lot of entertainment. Some are very shy and others are not only friendly, but insistent about getting their snacks to the point that they will come running out of the ponds when they hear us passing by and will crawl on our feet and nibble our toes.

Once a professional film crew sent from the prime minister of India's office came to film Amma's ashram projects. When they came to the sanctuary and discovered the turtles, they spent a long time filming them. The turtles were cooperative and enthusiastic stars!

On another occasion, as I was working in the garden I found a mother turtle that came right next to me. She felt so comfortable that she dug her nest and laid her eggs right next to me - a process that took a few hours.



She even seemed to be comforted by my presence. We discovered that no matter where in the garden the turtles lay their eggs, the newly hatched turtles would find their way to the nearest pond. For this reason we built many small ponds all over the large sanctuary. Amma also told us to protect the turtle's nests with wire mesh so that snakes and other predators would not eat the eggs.

One time I found a newborn turtle in a very small pond and I thought she might like to move to one of the big ponds with the others. She had a very distinct, beautiful yellow face and an inquisitive personality. I named her Uma. I kept Uma in the large pond and she seemed to like it. She was one that would always come when I called her by name. After a year of living in the large pond, one day I found her back in the exact same little pond where she was born, which was very far from the large pond where I had moved her, and one amongst eighteen other ponds spread all over the sanctuary.

Another time it happened when I moved a shy, two-year old turtle named Krishna from a little pond to a big one far away. The very next day he returned to his exact same familiar home. That's when I realized how keen their sense of direction is, and how they can know the exact place they are born, just like the sea turtles that return to the same beaches where they were born to lay their eggs.

Only occasionally we had to treat turtles for injuries. Once a turtle was so badly injured and bleeding it looked like he was not going to make it. We kept him in a dry box and gave him frequent soaks with fresh turmeric root and tulasi leaves. We named him Shakti. He recovered quickly and now is healthy and strong and comes to visit us daily.

Amma recently saw a video of the sanctuary and even said Kurma's name aloud and mentioned she would like a documentary made of the turtles and other animals. She even suggested getting a hidden camera to see what the animals do when we are gone!

The sanctuary has been the home and safe nesting habitat to numerous animals. Each has their own story, but



Click on the image to play a video of Kurma getting a snack

one particular trait that seems common is their general fearlessness. Other occupants include a family of eagles which raises their babies in the same nest every year, a flock of wild, beautiful ring-necked parrots, mongoose, innumerable species of other birds, bats, snakes, butterflies, wild beehives, squirrels and more.

Many young children and visitors come to the nature sanctuary, and everyone loves feeding and petting the turtles and observing the other wildlife. It has been a great gift from Amma to help us all feel the loving connection with Mother Nature and her creatures.

~ SARVAGA, AMRITAPURI, INDIA

KIDS' CORNER



GREEN CONVERSATIONS WITH AN 8-YEAR-OLD

One of the best things about being a parent is getting a glimpse of the world through a child's eyes! It can be an opportunity to reflect on your own childhood and early discoveries, which helped shape your own interests and gifts. After a tumultuous 2020, a new job, a move, and settling into a new home, a wonderful dialog began with our son regarding a new garden, and making our surroundings more vibrant and full of thriving green friends. It may not be the most instructional conversation, but a child's love of Nature comes through with a flurry of colors and whimsical ideas. The imagination is truly a wonderful gift!

Enjoy this peek into Nicolas' dream garden.

Here we go:

Anadi: What have you been doing the last 11 months to keep your heart happy, since a lot of your favorite places have been closed and you haven't been able to see friends?

Nic: Fishing and planting seeds.

Anadi: What have you been planting?

Nic: Beans, lettuce, carrots, and cat grass, of course.

Anadi: Of course. I'm glad you remembered to plant for your cats, too. Do you think the cats will enjoy the sprouts?

Nic: They help me check on the plants every day.



Anadi: Now that we've moved to a colder region this winter, you've had to start your garden inside. Is there anything more challenging about beginning your seedlings indoors?

Nic: I guess you have to check the soil more often inside. Because it can get dry. Making sure it's moist is important.

Anadi: And since there are two cats in the house, how do you keep pets from sniffing, chewing and digging in the new plants?

Nic: I found one of our laundry baskets has holes in it, so I put it upside down over the planter box. The sunlight can go through the holes and the fresh air, too. And the cats can't get too close!

Anadi: Did that work out? Did the seeds sprout without a problem?

Nic: They sprouted super fast.

Anadi: Do you think you'll migrate the plants outside when they get bigger or keep the garden going indoors?

Nic: I'm going to move some outside and keep the cat grass inside. I really want to find out how big our carrots can get. I can't really do that inside.

Anadi: What's your favorite plant to grow?

Nic: Beans. They sprout fast and get tall. Tomatoes are harder and take forever to get ripe.

Anadi: Do you have any favorite trees or plants at the ashram in San Ramon?

Nic: Not really. But I like to see the sheep, bugs, and newts. There are a lot of newts by the pond.

Anadi: Could the newts survive without the plants at the pond?

Nic: No. They need rocks, minerals and water, too.

Anadi: Just like plants! Since we have a yard for planting now, have you thought about any trees you might like to plant out back?

Nic: Two redwood trees. About five feet from each other so that I can hang a hammock between them. And I want to plant a LOT of apple trees. I got a lot of practice digging holes to plant apple trees in the orchard. I dug four holes!

Anadi: Do you remember apple picking at the ashram last year? What do you remember learning at the ashram that might help your new trees for the backyard?

Nic: There were some wire baskets that were put in the tree holes to protect the roots of the baby trees.

Anadi: From what? I forgot...

Nic: From GOPHERS! (pauses and face lights up!) Oh my gosh. I just had a great idea!

Anadi: What's that?

Nic: I could dig a hole 10 feet deep and make a pit.

Anadi: And what would we do with a deep pit in the yard?

Nic: Make a compost pile! We just need to get a shovel and some worms to make it work; the best gardens have lots of compost.

Anadi: That's an awesome idea. We should research it for when the ground thaws. It's too cold to start that project for another month or two. Hey, what do you think about starting a beehive in our back yard?

Nic: We would need a lot of money to get the hives and the special suits that the beekeepers use. Bees don't like it when you go near their hive. I learned that the hard way.

Anadi: Yes. I remember. But maybe if we grow lavender near the bees, like they do in San Ramon and in Maui, the bees will be relaxed and happy?

Nic: I guess we could try...but it might be better to get chickens instead.

Anadi: Are you going to build the coop?

Nic: I just need bigger tools. I could do it. And I'll name all the chickens, "Chicken 1, Chicken 2, Chicken 3, Chicken 4 and Chicken 5."

Anadi: I like the idea. Let's keep brainstorming this spring and ask around. Is there any other plant you'd like to start in your indoor winter planter?

Nic: Yes! Pumpkins, pumpkins, pumpkins! They're the best. Oh, a lemon tree, blackberry bushes and blueberry bushes. We can make blueberry lemonade!



Anadi: Should we plant a rose garden this spring?

Nic: Why not? I'll just keep digging. And dig and dig and dig and dig and dig and dig and DIG.

Anadi: Anything else we need to add or keep in mind as we get ready for springtime planting?

Nic: Well, there are wolves in the county. If anyone is out in the garden, remember to kneel down to their level and stay very still, so that they know you don't mean them any harm.

Anadi: I'll try to remember that, but I might forget while I'm running away from them and screaming for help.

Nic: Mommmmm!

Anadi: I was remembering that Amma would regularly bless and kiss the new seedlings that were going to be planted in the San Ramon orchard. Since we can't see Amma right now, do you think there's anything we can do to receive Amma's blessing for our new plants and trees?

Nic: Just put a picture of Amma up on the tree. Also, we could water our new plants with Holy Water from Devi Bhava.

Anadi: And that will be just as good as in-person blessing?

Nic: It's actually even better because Devi Bhava water IS Amma. And if we add water from the Sacramento Headwaters where the water comes out of the volcanic tubes, then the plants will be super blessed. We can give the holy water to the chickens too. Chicken 1, Chicken 2, Chicken 3, Chicken 4 and Chicken 5 will be protected and happy.

Anadi: Well, we have a lot of work to do. Are you excited?

Nic: Yeah!

Anadi: And what might you say to someone who may not recognize that kids can make amazing gardens come to life, as you're planning to do?

Nic: Hey, dude! Come and see my garden for yourself! No, really! Come see it for real!

Anadi: Great idea. Hopefully they become inspired to add more beauty to Mother Earth, too.

Nic: And maybe they'll get Chicken #6!

Happy Springtime and Gardening to All!

Aum Amriteshwaryai Namah!

**~ ANADI AND NICOLAS WATROUS ARE
NEW RESIDENTS IN SISKIYOU COUNTY,
NEAR MOUNT SHASTA IN CALIFORNIA, USA.
THEY LIVE WITH NIC'S DAD, JAMES, SISTER, NOEL,
AND TWO GARDEN-LOVING CATS: FLASH AND MAX**



JOIN THE KIDS' CORNER!

GreenFriends North America Newsletter invites Amma's younger children and youth to share their nature activities, thoughts, art, poetry, etc.... All nature related.

Please submit material to
info@greenfriendsna.org