



# GreenFriends North America NEWSLETTER FIRST QUARTER 2022 JANUARY - MARCH



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### **AMMA'S TEACHINGS ON MAN AND NATURE** **p. 2**

Excerpt from "Man and Nature": Amma's answers to questions on nature.

### **ETT MID-SOUTH STOPPED TALKING & STARTED PLANTING** **p. 4**

Every tree makes a difference. Read about this community's inspiring resolve to plant trees as part of the Embracing the Trees initiative of GreenFriends North America.

### **CREATING A BIRD-FRIENDLY GARDEN** **p. 8**

We have lost an alarming number of birds over the past 50 years, but small changes can make a big difference when it comes to supporting bird populations.

### **WINTER GARDENING - EXTEND THE SEASON** **p. 11**

Winter is no reason to stop growing. Read about cold-weather crops and winter gardening ideas.

### **LEARNING TO DARN** **p. 15**

In place of traditional gifts, one devotee takes to darning socks. Read why, how, and how it went.

### **REGIONAL HABITAT RESTORATION, PART 1** **p. 18**

From small- to large-scale projects, regional habitat restoration has been identified as a strategy to uplift the state of the natural world.

GreenFriends  
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the importance of  
treating Nature with  
respect and gratitude.

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# AMMA'S TEACHINGS ON MAN AND NATURE



## EXCERPT FROM *MAN AND NATURE*, AMMA'S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS POSED TO HER IN 1994

### **Question:**

*What is the connection between spiritual practices and the protection of Nature?*

### **AMMA:**

Everything is pervaded by Consciousness. It is that Consciousness which sustains the world and all the creatures in it. To worship everything, seeing God in all, is what religion advises. Such an attitude teaches us to love Nature. None of us would consciously injure our own body, because we know it would be painful. Similarly, we will feel the pain of other people to be our own when the realization dawns within us that everything is pervaded by one and the same Consciousness. Compassion will arise, and we will sincerely

wish to help and protect all. In that state, we won't feel like plucking even a leaf unnecessarily. We will pick a flower only on the last day of its existence, before it falls from the stem. We will consider it as very harmful to the plant, and to Nature, if the flower is plucked on its very first day due to our greediness.

In days gone by (in India), every house had a family shrine room. People used to grow flowers in the yard surrounding the house. Devoted care would be given to the garden. The flowers from those plants which were planted and grown with loving care by the family were offered to God during worship.

Whatever is provided by Nature, the very source of flowers and plants, should be lovingly returned to it. This is the symbolism behind the offering of flowers to God. It also helps to enhance our devotion to God. Worship performed with one-pointedness helps to diminish thoughts, and this in turn will cleanse and purify the mind.

Some years ago, the garden or surrounding land of each home contained a wood or a tree grove, with a small temple. The wood or grove contained highly medicinal trees such as the banyan, fig, and bilva (wood apple). The shrine and the grove was the common worship place of the entire family. At dusk, the family used to gather at the shrine to chant the divine Names and offer their prayers in front of lighted oil lamps. Modern science has recently discovered that music will enhance the healthy growth of plants and trees. Besides the bliss that devotional singing gives to all creatures, if it is done with love, it bestows purity and peace to our minds. The wind that filters through the leaves of medicinal trees and plants is also good for our health. The smoke from both the oil-soaked wick burning in the brass lamp and the pure beeswax candle will kill the germs in the atmosphere. But over and above all, prayers done with concentration will restore the lost harmony of Nature.

If an ordinary person can be compared to an electric lamp, a real sadhak (spiritual aspirant) can be compared to a transformer. By making the mind still and conserving energy, which otherwise would be dissipated through overindulgence and pleasure seeking, the sadhak awakens the infinite source of power within him. Having no likes or dislikes himself, even his breath becomes beneficial to Nature. Just as water is purified by a filter, the prana (vital force) of the tapasvi (ascetic) is a filter that purifies Nature. Ayurvedic physicians will use a certain natural stone to purify the oil that has been boiled with medicinal herbs in the preparation of some remedies. Likewise, the tapasvi's pure vital energy can purify Nature by correcting the imbalances created by man.

Looking at Nature and observing its selfless way of giving, we can become aware of our own limitations. That will help to develop devotion and self-surrender to God. Thus, Nature helps us to become closer to God and teaches us to truly worship Him. In reality, Nature is nothing but God's visible form which we can behold and experience through our senses. Indeed, by loving and serving Nature, we are worshiping God Himself.

Just as Nature creates the favorable circumstances for a coconut to become a coconut tree, and for a seed to transform itself into a huge fruit tree, Nature creates the necessary circumstances through which the individual soul can reach the Supreme Being and merge in eternal union with Him.

A sincere Truth seeker, or a true believer, cannot harm Nature because he or she sees Nature as God — he doesn't experience Nature as being separate from himself. He is the real lover of Nature.

Mother would say that a real scientist should be a real lover — a lover of mankind, a lover of all creation and a lover of life.

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

# EMBRACING THE TREES: MID-SOUTH COMMUNITY MEMBERS STOPPED TALKING AND STARTED PLANTING!





## AMMA'S EMBRACING THE TREES (ETT) INITIATIVE

**ARRIVED AT THE PERFECT TIME DURING THE PANDEMIC, GIVING US ALL A VALUABLE SERVICE WE "CAN DO" DURING A TIME OF SO MANY "CAN'T DOS."**

The MidSouth region is growing trees from seeds, seedlings, and cuttings. These trees will be planted at MA Center Dallas and community member homes. Sharon in Wichita, Kansas, has already planted over 80 seeds and seedlings and shared this photo of a baby white oak seed that sprouted in two weeks during our unusually warm fall weather.

The maple tree below grew from a 10-inch seedling to over 20 feet tall in five years! (Maple trees at a local nursery this size would cost \$300 and take a crew and machinery to move and plant.)



The ETT MidSouth tree-growing and planting team members are learning so much about trees that thrive in our area and are amazed at how quickly seeds can grow into fruit-producing trees. Pecan nuts, which are plentiful at MA Center Dallas, can grow into a pecan-producing tree in just 6-10 years!



White oak sprout

The ETT team has found many innovative ways to grow trees for future planting. Varada and Triptta are growing fig tree cuttings, and Anaswara has a small orchard growing in 5-gallon recycled buckets donated by local restaurants.

Over 40 of Anaswara's trees were donated by a friend who has yet to meet Amma. He is now interested in visiting MA Center Dallas, and he has many willow trees to donate next spring. Talking about our seed and seedling project with friends has created interest among non-

devotees who find themselves with many seedlings on their property in need of adoptive homes.

Our ETT seed and seedling planting team is having fun learning to recognize trees by their leaves using a free cell phone app called LeafSnap. We guess what tree the leaf is from and then take a photo with the app. The LeafSnap app identifies the tree and provides the tree name and information about the tree species, including its growth patterns. Maha Devi and Anaswara enjoyed this fun guessing game with the seedlings growing wild at MA Center Dallas and realized that using the app to check your guesses would be fun for young people and adults everywhere.



Trees donator

The MidSouth ETT team aims to plant trees at MA Center Dallas in 2023 after a master planting plan is developed, which will include plans for adequate watering and permanent placements for the trees. Any trees that are not planted will be available for purchase to plant or give as gifts.

Triguna, Abhaya, Amala, Siva, Andre, and other teammates are busy researching the best trees for our area and locating power and water lines at the ashram so we won't have any unwanted surprises when we plant.

After past shovel digging to plant trees at MA Center Dallas, we realized the hard clay soil warrants a small backhoe to dig holes, which will save time and our backs. Thankfully, our neighbor will provide this helpful equipment. We'll amend the soil after the machine does the hard part of digging. In the Texas heat, planted trees benefit greatly from irrigation, so this is another goal our ETT teams are working on.



After hearing about MidSouth's planting seeds and seedlings, an LA-based community member committed to starting 1,000 trees on his property. And we know many other MA Centers already had begun tree-planting initiatives as well. Every tree makes a difference, so, let's all:

**PLANT TREES!**



Seed and seedling trees

To learn what Embracing the Trees is doing in your region and get involved, contact your regional coordinators!

REGIONAL CENTER	REGION	EMAIL
Amma Foundation of Canada	<b>Canada</b>	<a href="mailto:trees.ammatoronto@ammagroups.org">trees.ammatoronto@ammagroups.org</a>
Amma Center Iowa	<b>With Midwest Region, MAC Chicago</b>	<a href="mailto:trees.ammacenteriowa@ammagroups.org">trees.ammacenteriowa@ammagroups.org</a>
Amma Center New Mexico	<b>Southwest Region:</b> New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming	<a href="mailto:trees.macnm@macenters.org">trees.macnm@macenters.org</a>
MAC Atlanta	<b>Southeast Region:</b> North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida	<a href="mailto:trees.macatlanta@macenters.org">trees.macatlanta@macenters.org</a>
MAC Chicago and MAC Michigan	<b>Midwest Region:</b> North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan	MAC Chicago: <a href="mailto:trees.macc@macenters.org">trees.macc@macenters.org</a> MAC Michigan: <a href="mailto:trees.macmi@macenters.org">trees.macmi@macenters.org</a>
MAC Dallas	<b>Mid-South Region:</b> Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana	<a href="mailto:trees.macdallas@macenters.org">trees.macdallas@macenters.org</a>
MAC DC	<b>East Central Region:</b> Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, DC, Pennsylvania	<a href="mailto:trees.macdc@macenters.org">trees.macdc@macenters.org</a>
MAC Los Angeles	<b>Southern California Region:</b> California (Santa Barbara and south)	<a href="mailto:trees.macla@macenters.org">trees.macla@macenters.org</a>
MAC New England	<b>Northeast Region:</b> Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine	<a href="mailto:trees.ammane@ammagroups.org">trees.ammane@ammagroups.org</a>
MAC New York	<b>Greater New York Region:</b> New York, New Jersey, Connecticut	<a href="mailto:trees.macnyc@macenters.org">trees.macnyc@macenters.org</a>
MAC San Ramon	<b>Northern California Region:</b> California (Northern), Nevada, Hawaii	<a href="mailto:trees.macsr@macenters.org">trees.macsr@macenters.org</a>
MAC Seattle	<b>Northwest Region:</b> Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska	<a href="mailto:trees.macseattle@macenters.org">trees.macseattle@macenters.org</a>

# CREATING A BIRD-FRIENDLY GARDEN



Red Bellied Woodpecker courtesy Paul Nistico

“Everything in Nature is a wonderful miracle. Isn’t the little bird flying through the vast sky a miracle?” — Amma



**IN THE PAST FIFTY YEARS,  
WE HAVE LOST ONE-THIRD OF THE BIRD  
POPULATION OF NORTH AMERICA.**

That is about three billion birds. Gone. It would be like waking up one morning and realizing that one-third of the homes in your neighborhood had vanished.

This did not happen suddenly, but slowly over time. There are many causes, but there are standouts:

- Habitat loss due to over-development and the filling-in of natural wetlands.
- Climate change affects habitat, migration, and the availability of food.
- Pesticide and herbicide use, both in agricultural, residential, and public areas. Birds eat bugs; if there are no bugs, there are no birds. As my favorite entomologist, Dr. Doug Tallamy, says: “If there are no birds, there is no us.”
- Other big issues leading to this loss are bird-window collisions. Here in the U.S. alone, we lose approximately one billion birds each year this way.
- Outdoor cats, both feral and domestic, are responsible for approximately 1.4 billion bird deaths annually in the U.S.
- The use of non-native plants, especially invasive species, is another factor. Using plants that are not native to an area means that there are fewer bugs for the birds.



Florida Scrub Jay courtesy Michele Reyes

- Other issues include hunting, fireworks, road trash, cigarette butts on beaches, and fishing lines in lakes, rivers, and oceans.

The list of issues is daunting, but take heart, there are solutions. Some are easy and others will take time, energy, and effort. I will discuss some of them in this article and include more in future articles.

One shining example of a bird-friendly community is Amma's Amritapuri Ashram. I visited in 2004 and 2008 and loved seeing and hearing the local birds. Now, each morning during live streaming from the Ashram, I am enthralled by the cacophony of bird song. Clearly, the birds are thriving there.



Limpkin courtesy Sandra Maraffino

Here are a few steps you can take to create your own bird-friendly community, right where you are; your yard, your garden, your patio, your apartment balcony, your front or back porch. They are small scale but powerful.

Skip the manicured lawns and the pesticides and herbicides. Research native plants that will thrive in your area. Connect with your local Audubon Chapter and Native Plant Society for helpful information on this.

When you trim plants and trees, save the clippings and branches. You can use the clippings as mulch (no cost!) and stack the trimmed branches in a safe spot. You have created habitat. Dead trees, called snags, create habitat and nesting areas.



Louisiana Waterthrush courtesy Tom Hince

Two helpful websites are <http://www.nationalaudubon.org> and [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu).

Watch Dr. Doug Tallamy's webinar "[A Guide to Restoring the Little Things that Run the World](#)" from 9/22/2020 on YouTube.

If we all do something small, we can make something big happen for the birds!

On January 3, 2022, my local Audubon chapter, Marion Audubon Society, participated in the National Audubon Society's 122nd Annual Christmas Bird Count. This annual count is done nationwide on any chosen date from mid-December through the first week in January. This allows each area of the country to choose the time that is best for bird counting.

We had a total of 12 teams that covered the southwest corner of Marion County and a total of 37 birders counting in such diverse areas as the Rainbow and Withlacoochee rivers, the Halpata Tasthanaki Preserve, and the Oak Run and On Top of the World communities to name a few.

We counted 102 different bird species and a total of 5,621 birds! Due to the pandemic, we were unable to do the count for 2020; so this was doubly exciting.

The data from each team is compiled and sent to the National Audubon Society. It is then submitted to the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology where it is used to track the migration and population of our country's birds. This is the value of 'community science'. Ornithologists, scientists who study birds, cannot be everywhere. We are indeed the boots on the ground. To find out more about how you can support community science and the Audubon Society's annual Christmas bird count or view the results from this year's count, visit [audubon.org](http://audubon.org).

Small changes can make a big difference when it comes to supporting bird populations. With the small steps outlined above, we can contribute to creating bird-friendly habitats that help birds thrive in our own yards and communities. With a little effort and grace, the natural beauty birds bring to our world



A Merlin on the lookout, Courtesy Nancy Stephens.

will increase and create joy for others, just like the birds we hear in Amritapuri when we tune in for Amma's programs.

"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, wholeheartedly." - Amma

~ SUSHANT AND VALLABHA,  
FLORIDA

# WINTER GARDENING: EXTEND THE SEASON



Rainbow Swiss Chard



## END OF THE SUMMER INTO FALL/WINTER

So, summer has come to a close, and one would normally think: ah, all of the harvest is in, and I can now relax. But no, in reality, there is no relaxing if one wants to enjoy produce from a winter garden. Planting cold-weather crops can provide an additional source of organic produce, and these crops would not have fared so well during the heat of the summer. It is also a time to store your root crops such as beets, sweet potatoes, yams, onions, garlic, carrots, and potatoes in a root cellar, or the coolest, darkest place in the house, such as a mudroom.



Turnips

You might also wish to pickle, can, and freeze some of your crops for later use, such as canned tomatoes, pickled beets, pickled rutabaga, pickled turnips, etc., if you haven't done so already.

### **TIMING AND CHOICES FOR COLD-WEATHER CROPS**

In August-September (even early October here in North Carolina) one can plant a host of veggies that prefer the colder temperatures: arugula, beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, carrots, cauliflower, collard greens, fava beans, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, parsnips, radishes, rutabaga, salad greens, spinach, and turnips are among the most common. These can be grown even in northern parts of the country where they are aided by row covers which consist of hoops covered with a specific type of cloth that allow sun and rain to penetrate but protect plants from severe cold, wind, snow and ice. Row-covers are also useful during the spring-fall months. They deter insects from eating your plants and produce, and for plants that don't tolerate harsh sun, will protect them from intense heat and sunlight.

It is generally a good idea to keep a garden journal (believe me when I tell you that your memory will fail you once spring rolls around!) so that you know what you planted in each segment of the garden so that you can rotate your crops. This is done essentially to avoid depleting the soil. Each plant uses different combinations of minerals from the soil. Some plants—like fava beans—are “cover crops,” which help to replenish certain minerals in the soil. They are a useful multi-purpose crop used to create “green manure” by feeding the soil with green matter before maturity, as opposed to compost, which is decomposed matter.

Fava beans may be allowed to mature in order to harvest leaves, flowers and pods for consumption throughout the winter and spring. They are a particularly tasty and hearty bean with high protein and a wonderful alternative to meat. There are many other cover crops that one can grow that provide a world of benefits to the garden.

### **COVER CROPS**

Cover crops may be planted in summer or fall and then left to overwinter. Cover crops improve soil organic matter and fertility, suppress cool-season weeds, prevent soil erosion, and create a better seedbed for spring planting.



Fava Beans

There are two types: Winter-killed cover crops (which are killed by cold, but have sufficient biomass to protect the soil) such as oats, field-pea, oilseed radish and rapeseed. The second type of cover crop is winter-hardy, which as you may have already surmised, survive the winter and resume growth in the spring. Some of these are winter-rye, winter wheat, hairy vetch, winter peas and crimson clover.

You can also make notations in your garden journal indicating the last frost date experienced in the spring and the first fall frost date as a guideline for planting and harvesting. Note what you had success with and what you didn't. You may want to make other notes for yourself so that you can have greater success in following years, although this isn't a guarantee by any means.



Bok Choy (it's even flowering!)

Of course, one must tidy up the garden a bit before planting; which means removing the debris from previous summer plantings, pulling weeds, and reshaping beds that may have been disturbed by harvesting and weeding.

Plan to plant your seeds according to the directions on the packages, however, you may insert seeds just a tad deeper to protect them from cooler temperatures, and then water as needed depending upon your climate. It is also recommended that you source your seeds, if possible, from a regionally local source so that you are planting seeds that will be most likely to succeed in your area with your specific climate and soil conditions. It is likely too late now to plant a winter garden for most areas of the country, however, you can plan to do so next year. And, remember to have fun — researching what to grow, how to grow it and then getting out into the soil and getting your hands dirty by preparing beds and then planting seeds or seedlings.

Gardening is fun, a true adventure, a gift from Mother Nature (Bhu Devi), for us to explore, engage in and enjoy. (I call these the three e's!) It is also an opportunity for families and friends to plant, water, weed and harvest together. It's a wonderful way to teach children about Nature, and where their food comes from which helps to

endow in them a sense of wonder, appreciation and respect for Nature. An added bonus is that you are teaching life-long skills that will help them to feed themselves at least to some extent in the future if they so desire.

“Life is like a garden. Quite naturally, leaves wither and flowers fade. Only if we clear the decay of the past then and there can we really enjoy the beauty of the new leaves and flowers. Likewise, we must clear the murkiness of the past bad experiences from our minds. Life is remembrance in forgetfulness. Forgive what ought to be forgiven; forget what ought to be forgotten. Let us embrace life with renewed vigor. We should be able to face every moment of life with renewed expectation, like a freshly blossomed flower.”

~ Amma

Here is what Mother Nature bestowed upon us at the end of our summer harvest (end of November!). We feel so grateful to have so many veggies — such as eggplant (Japanese and Italian), tomatoes (cherry and heirloom), watermelon, Swiss chard (rainbow), red, orange and green peppers, and some produce from our cold-weather crops such as radishes (multiple variety) and bok choy.

~ SATYAVRTAN AND RAJA SRI RUTENBECK  
NORTH CAROLINA



# LEARNING TO DARN, AND OTHER SUSTAINABLE GIFTING IDEAS



A completed darning grid.

## LIKE MANY OF US IN THE WEST, I CELEBRATED CHRISTMAS IN DECEMBER.

I'm pretty committed to reducing my waste year-round, but the holiday season brings additional challenges - challenges that persist long past Christmastime. How to give gifts, without adding to the waste burden on Mother Earth?

Of course one can use reusable wrapping, but what about the gifts themselves? A big focus of GreenFriends is source reduction, in other words, reducing our waste at the source as opposed to after the fact.

I like to make gifts wherever possible. Or give gifts of time (presence over presents!) such as attending a show, a favorite activity, or offering a special service. Intangible gifts are my favorite.

This year, my husband wanted socks for Christmas because all of his socks had holes. Knowing the impact of new clothes on our beautiful planet, both of us already tend to wear our clothes till they're threadbare and no longer useful. Well, his socks were in rough shape, and by most standards, he needed new ones.

I reflected on the idea of replacing his socks with new ones... and I didn't like it. The majority of the sock was fine. There were just a few holes in the heel or the toe. Could I really toss all that perfectly good material in the garbage? No, I decided, I could not.

We ourselves are full of good qualities, mixed in with some ugly ones. Does Amma toss us out when we show our 'holes'? No. In fact, she lovingly embraces us and helps to soften or repair all those rough spots in our personalities.

With this in mind, I looked at the socks. Though the holes were big, there was still more good material than not.



Beginning the horizontal grid lines over a threadbare sock.

Yes, the sock can be reused or repurposed as a cleaning cloth, but one only needs so many of those. Our cleaning cloths are reusable: we wash them and use them again, so there is no need to replace them with old socks.

The sock should be reused as a sock, I thought. It was time to learn the art of darning.

For context, I never learned how to sew as a child. Actually, as an adult, I had a sewing machine at home for 2 years before I found the courage to turn it on and use it. I tried numerous times and failed to get that thing working. In other words, this kind of handiwork does not come easily to me. If I can do it, you can too!

I searched online and watched some YouTube videos that explained darning. I went to the dollar store and picked up some cotton yarn (my online teachers recommended a 2 or 3-ply yarn). I practiced on my own socks first to get a feel for my new project. And then I set to work, stealthily removing ‘holy’ socks from my husband’s drawer and weaving a colorful grid pattern into them.

Darning is simple. One weaves over, under, over, under, along a horizontal line, back and forth until the entire threadbare area is covered. If there’s a full hole that’s okay, the yarn will just stretch across the hole, with a few over/under stitches on the edges of the hole. Then it continues in a vertical pattern, weaving over and under the horizontal lines you just made.

The work is methodical, and within a short time, the yarn was sliding through my fingers like the beads of a mala, allowing me to chant my mantra easily as I worked.

The work is methodical, and within a short time, the yarn was sliding through my fingers like the beads of a mala, allowing me to chant my mantra easily as I worked.

In the end, I had a gift that was thoughtful, practical, and sustainable. It was the thing my husband had asked for (new socks) but presented in an unexpected way (repaired old socks). I also felt like it was a gift to Mother Nature, extending the useful life of an item that requires so much effort and resources to produce. Thus, we avoided adding material to the landfill and avoided buying a new item. This is source reduction.

“It is the duty of human beings to serve and take care of Nature. In return, Nature will return all the good.”

— Amma

I should add: this is not quick. It’s a labor of love, and based on the amount of time invested, we joke that these are now the



Almost done - weaving the vertical lines into the grid.

world's most expensive socks. But as Amma says, where there is love, everything becomes effortless.



This was a LOT of darning for one sock

While on the topic of sustainable gift ideas, I can hardly pass up the opportunity to share an advent calendar I made for my son. Advent calendars are fun for kids; they get to open a new door each day in December, finding a little chocolate inside, until the 24th. It builds their anticipation for Christmas Day.

Several years ago, I couldn't bring myself to buy a new one. It's typically a single-use item, wrapped in plastic, with a plastic tray inside holding each chocolate. In 2015, I had purchased myself a tea calendar, with 24 little tins of loose-leaf tea. I had already repurposed all the little tins (to hold homemade deodorant samples, as a means of encouraging others to try a plastic-free and sustainable deodorant), and the following year, I decided to repurpose the box.

I picked up 24 little foil-wrapped chocolates to put behind each door, and gave it to my young son as his advent calendar. This year, I upped our reusable advent calendar by filling it with two chocolates behind each door: one for him, the other for gifting, because the act of giving can bring even more joy than receiving.

With all the joy I gain from gifting, I pray that I will continue to find ways to give and to serve others in ways that also serve Mother Nature.

“Most people are concerned only with what they can get from the world, but it is what we are able to give to others that determines the quality of our life.” —Amma

~ NATASHA, TORONTO, CANADA



A repurposed advent calendar.



The gift of gifting.

# BRINGING OUR EARTH BACK IN BALANCE: REGIONAL HABITAT RESTORATION, PART 1



**FROM SMALL- TO LARGE-SCALE PROJECTS, REGIONAL HABITAT RESTORATION HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A STRATEGY TO UPLIFT THE STATE OF THE NATURAL WORLD.**

In the last few years, with global climate change issues and theories taking a prominent place in the news, regional habitat restoration has been identified as one strategy for uplifting the state of the natural world.

Since humans started manipulating the world, there have been tremendous changes to Earth's habitats. Stretching back to our ancient history, from clearing trees for agriculture and mining to the building of cities

and roads, Nature has been intensely impacted. By disturbing soil, waterways, geology, and air, plants, animals, and humans have been negatively affected.

Amma says,

“The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the home in which we sleep, the sun that gives us energy — we are indebted to Nature for all of these. Our life on this earth is possible only because of the combined effort of all its creatures. The rivers, trees, bees, butterflies and worms all play their part. If they did not exist, we would not exist. There would be no life. If we were to visualize Nature as one tree, then all the creatures would be its roots, branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. The tree becomes whole only as a totality of its various parts. If one part is destroyed, the rest will also soon perish. Without Nature, humankind would not exist.”

Many ask, how do we restore our habitats to their natural state, and can we really make a difference?

To begin with, let's look at what a habitat is. According to the National Geographic Society, the definition of habitat is, “a place where an organism makes its home, meeting all of the environmental requirements for it to survive. This consists of shelter, water, food and space”. Around the world there are many different habitats you might encounter, including forests, deserts, mountain regions, grasslands, lowland swamps, and estuaries, just to name a few. These are further divided by regions which support these naturally occurring communities of living organisms, known as biomes. Plants, trees, animals, birds and insects live together in harmony in these biomes, creating a balanced environment.

Large habitat restoration projects have been tackled by groups across the globe in many diverse locations to restore these biomes. With planning and funding, along with management plans to continue their health in our ever-changing climate, these projects are making a positive impact. One such large-scale project to restore habitat at an old mining site in the Appalachians was supported by many groups and governmental agencies. Check out the short but impressive [video](#) on [One Tree Planted's](#) YouTube channel, which explains some of the steps involved in habitat restoration.





You might be surprised at the number of restoration projects you will find locally. A huge impact is made in many states by communities giving priority to the natural world around us. Check with your local city parks and recreation departments, state parks, and forest services, as they often accept volunteers if you are looking for a way to contribute. There is a lot to learn and a lot to do.

Though these huge projects feel like we are climbing large mountains, tackling a small backyard habitat restoration project can also have a desirable impact.

Many ask, “Can’t I just plant lots of trees and plants in my yard? Won’t that benefit nature?” Well actually, the answer is complex and varied.

There are numerous steps to turning your backyard into a diverse and functional native habitat. Planting trees and plants in a synergistic manner benefits all who live there. All components of a healthy habitat must be considered.

As Amma says, “The conservation of nature will be possible only when people fully recognize that they are a part of nature.”

So go for a walk. Take a look around you and feel the part you play in your habitat.

Coming next: Part 2 - Backyard Habitat Restoration.

**~ PAUL AND ANANDADEV, FLORIDA**