



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.

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[Greenfriendsna.org](https://www.greenfriendsna.org)





AMMA'S C20 CHAIRMANSHIP



BACKGROUND:

This year, 2023, India has the responsibility for the G20 Chairmanship. The G20 or Group of Twenty is an inter-governmental forum comprising 19 countries and the European Union (EU). It works to address major issues related to the global economy, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development.

Amma, Mata Amritanandamayi, was selected as the Civil Society (C20) Engagement Group Chair of this year's G20. C20 collaborates with hundreds of civil service and non-governmental organizations from around the world to represent the concerns of the common people. Amma's C20 Working Groups include the following:

-  Sustainable and Resilient Communities: Climate, Environment and Net Zero Targets
-  Integrated Holistic Health: Mind, Body and Environment
-  Education and Digital Transformation
-  Gender Equality



AN EXCERPT OF AMMA'S SPEECH WHEN ACCEPTING THE C20 CHAIRMANSHIP:

FULFILLING THE PRINCIPLE OF VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM: FOSTERING UNITY AND HARMONY

Amma bows down to all of you—embodiments of Pure Love and the Supreme Self.

This is an auspicious occasion. We have embarked on a mission to restore the dwindling light of the world. This is a historic year in which India has received the opportunity to assume the presidency of the G20 nations. The Indian Government and Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi have given us the tremendous responsibility of successfully facilitating the process of Civil Society 20 (C20), an official engagement group of the G20 Forum. May we be able to do justice to this endeavor. On this occasion, I express my sincere gratitude to the Indian Government and to the Honorable Prime Minister.

The human body, along with everything sentient and insentient in this world, is comprised of five elements—earth, water, fire, air and space. These five elements originate from Nature. This is why humankind and Nature are one. Knowing this truth through direct experience, the ancient rishis of India declared *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*—“The world is one family.” So, it is only apt that the theme of India’s G20 presidency is this statement from the Upanishads: “One Earth, One Family.”

The main duties of the C20 Forum are resolving issues people face in their fields of work, understanding public opinion, studying the problems people face in different areas, bringing them to the attention of the Indian Government and to the G20 nations, and suggesting solutions.

Humankind is always trying various ways to make life easy and comfortable. It depends on many sources of power. As such, every nation is constantly striving to develop their strength as a nation, in terms of their military and arms, economics, as well as in terms of science and technology. From the perspective of security and progress, all are necessary. However, in our haste to strengthen ourselves in these areas, we have forgotten the force of Nature, which is even more powerful. We have forgotten the great truth that we are a part of this vast universe. Lately, Nature has been giving us a succession of “shock treatments” to remind us of this truth. Even so, we continue to behave as if we have Alzheimer’s—incapable of remembering our lessons.

Humanity should strive to reach the peak of knowledge. Whatever research is required, it should be conducted. However, Amma feels that we should also be ready to investigate the power of spiritual thought and of a lifestyle established in spiritual principles. We should understand the necessity of this from the hints Nature and the universe keep sending us. Only then will we be able to fulfill the principle of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, at least to some small extent.

Today our situation is such that, while we have everything, we really have nothing. One thing is very clear. As humanity grows more and more distant from Nature, our problems only increase.

NATURE IS GOD'S FACE REVEALED.

Humankind has the wrong understanding that Nature is our obedient servant and insentient, and therefore we can treat Her however we please. However, the truth is that Nature is a unified body—a single entity. Just as the parts of a body are indivisibly connected, all aspects of Nature, sentient and insentient, are also interconnected. They are all parts of Nature's body. This is why development is unsustainable unless it is tied to environmental protection. If we truly want sustainable development, holding conferences and summits, awarding prizes and creating policies and laws are not enough. Humanity's attitude has to change. If we can change our attitude, we can change our surroundings.



A farmer in Sadivayal, Tamil Nadu sows organic rice.

How can we live without earth, water, fire, air and space? These five elements are the basis of our body. So, Nature is both within and without. Living on this earth, we often ignore or reject our fellow beings and Nature; we strive only to fulfill our own selfish desires and greed. At the same time, we pray to God to give us heaven. What a contradiction!

IMPARTING THE RIGHT AWARENESS IS ESSENTIAL

Amma often mentions that we should meet people at their level when interacting with them. We have adopted 108 villages. During their initial visit to one of the villages, the ashram volunteers learned that all the farmers in the village were contemplating suicide. Why? Their crops had failed repeatedly, and they had lost everything. The seed money they had borrowed was lost, and they could not even pay the interest on the loan. The only way out they could see before them was death. The crops had failed five years in a row.

Our volunteers looked at their process. Where were they buying their fertiliser from? They discovered that the farmers were paying an exorbitant amount for the fertilizer. They were getting cheated. The volunteers intervened and helped them buy it at a fair price. They made the farmers aware of modern agriculture practices. The following year, these farmers had a bountiful crop. They were able to repay the loans that

had been pending for five years, and they made enough profit to live on for the year. That year, all those villagers came to see Amma with bright smiles lighting up their faces, to offer Amma some paddy from that crop. We were able to uplift them physically and mentally. So, imparting the right awareness is essential. This is why Amma always says that we should meet people at their level.

(end quote) Amma's speech continues and includes some important and relevant suggestions.

Amma ends with, quote:

ONE MIND AND ONE GOAL

Let us all proceed, with one mind and one goal, to work selflessly for the world's welfare. May our acts become a noble ideal for those who will come after us. May the tree of our life be firmly rooted in the soil of love. May our good actions be its leaves. May our kind words be its flowers. May peace be its fruits. May this world grow and prosper as one family, united in love. May the ethos of vasudhaiva kutumbakam – "The world is one family" – awaken, be put into practice and bear fruit in everyone. May we realise a world where there is endless peace and harmony. May divine grace bless us all.

OM NAMAH SHIVAYA.

To read the complete speech, go to: <https://www.amritapuri.org/83515/23c20inaug.aum>



A GARDENER'S PRAYER

Shoveling and hoeing and raking all day....
While butterflies and hummingbirds and bumblebees play.

The body toils and the mind toils, too
Constantly bringing the thoughts back to You.
Impressions of a thousand lifetimes smothering,
O please help me break through this subtle covering.



As I shovel and hoe and rake all day
And the butterflies and hummingbirds and bumblebees play,

Your Feet, Your Eyes, Your Smile I can see!
Yet the next moment's memory is a past misery.
Reaction upon reaction at each helpless failing,
Most Precious Mother, won't you end this child's wailing?

Shoveling and hoeing and raking all day
While the butterflies and hummingbirds and bumblebees play,

Rhythms of movement, rhythms of season
Rhythm of mantra endures beyond reason.
I pray, reveal Yourself, Primordial Sound,
Striking illusion, may You, in me, be found!



~ SWAMINI AMBIKAMRITA PRANA, 1992

MANAGING INVADERS AND PESTS IN THE GARDEN



Rabbits can dig under fences!



“IT IS THE DUTY OF HUMAN BEINGS TO SERVE AND TAKE CARE OF NATURE. IN RETURN, NATURE WILL RETURN ALL THE GOOD.” — AMMA

We always like to encourage other creatures to enjoy the gardens here at MA Center San Ramon, and to share the harvest with them, in moderation, of course. For the most part, we are comfortable losing the occasional apple, tomato or pepper to a hungry bug, bird or squirrel, however, when the creatures become a nuisance and do not practice discretion (i.e. wasting fruit with just one bite!), then they need to be managed. To help you identify what animal has taken to eating excessively in your garden, you can use this [helpful resource](#).

In the M.A. Center garden beds, we have wrapped each bed with wire mesh fencing, about 3 feet above the ground, and this helps keep rabbits out. Each bed is also lined with mesh on the bottom to deter burrowing animals such as voles and gophers. So far, this technique has proven effective in deterring these mammals.



Raised beds wrapped in heavy mesh at the M.A. Center in San Ramon.

To deter birds, we tried lightweight mesh over the plants, but this became perilous for the birds, so we immediately removed them. In the orchards, we hung old CDs from the branches of the trees as the shiny, spinning motion in the wind was an effective deterrent for birds. This also worked well in the vegetable beds, particularly on the tomato vines.



California weasel

The most distressing pest we have experienced in our garden are rats. They are tenacious, can climb over the raised bed fences, and have proven to be quite wasteful in their foraging. Grinding up bars of Irish Spring soap and scattering it around the outside edges of the raised bed deterred some rat activity, but we still lost a lot of vegetables. This year, we will be proactive with planting lots of mint in pots inside the beds (to control the spread of mint) and hope this acts as another deterrent. Fortunately, it seems this year a weasel mother and babies have moved into the area of the vegetable garden, so we are hopeful they will greatly diminish our resident rat population.

A note on live traps: in California it is illegal in urban areas (such as ours) to trap an animal and then release it in another location without a specific permit. So, purchasing live traps, catching your problem squirrel, then releasing it in a park nearby is highly illegal. The best thing to do, if you have a severe problem with mammal pests, is to wrap your entire raised bed in wire mesh, sides and cover. The only other option is to contact your local pest control, but understand that they will likely euthanize captured animals. Also, chances are others may still find their way to your garden. Before you consider purchasing live traps, make sure it is legal to do so in your state or county.

Insects

One of the best ways to discourage insect pests is to encourage beneficial birds and insects into your garden! You can plant certain companion plants to encourage these beneficial creatures to move into your garden, and you can even purchase insects, such as lady beetles, and have them shipped to your home. [Here is a helpful article](#) on how to attract beneficial critters into your garden.



Lady beetle nymph



Adult lady beetle laying eggs with nymph

Another effective way of reducing damaging insects in your garden is keeping it clear of debris, and well-aerated. Decomposing leaf litter on the ground, thick bush plants lacking aeration, and dark and damp areas all encourage detrimental pests to move in and thrive. So, pruning, keeping your garden clean and free of debris is essential, along with promoting good aeration among the plants. This will also help prevent bacterial diseases in your plants.

If all of these methods fail, you can try applying a mix of neem oil and biodegradable dish soap ([recipe here](#)) to spray on your infested plants. This will also help heal and deter pathogenic diseases on your plants. Neem oil is a potent fungicide that can help with diseases on vegetable plants like powdery mildew (common on zucchini for example). That being said, science has recently found that some bees can be moderately affected by neem oil, so use with caution, especially during bloom season.

Here are a couple of common vegetable plant diseases and their solutions:

Powdery Mildew - this is a fungal disease that affects some vegetable plants, especially in the squash family, such as cucumbers and zucchini. It looks like the leaves have been dusted in white powder. To solve this, you need to remove the most affected leaves altogether and discard with your compostable garbage, not in your compost pile. Then you can spray neem oil mix directly on the remaining leaves preventatively.



Powdery mildew on zucchini plants.

Blossom End Rot - this is in fact not an infection, but an abiotic disorder. The most common cause for this is a calcium deficiency, mostly combined with fluctuating weather and temperature patterns. To remedy this, you can add a natural calcium supplement like limestone powder or bone meal. Make sure you do not give the plants other fertilizers while treating as these will compete with the calcium for plant nutrient uptake. Blossom end rot can affect tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squashes and melons.



Blossom end rot on tomatoes.

Similar to humans and animals, plants can become immune-compromised under certain conditions. Damp, litter-full gardens with little aeration definitely can negatively affect plants, as these conditions are perfect for harmful bacteria to move in. Poor soil with only few beneficial microorganisms can also impact plant immunity, as can stress. To improve plant immunity, you can use foliar sprays of compost tea (stay tuned for a wonderful workshop here at the M.A. Center San Ramon called Liquid Compost for Healthy Gardens). You can also ensure the soil is healthy by applying clean organic compost regularly to encourage beneficial microorganisms to thrive in your soil, thus supporting plant growth and immunity. Amma also says we should communicate lovingly with our plants as they too can sense emotions, and this can be a mood-lifting exercise for us as well!

The best step in plant maintenance is just to walk around your garden daily or at least a few times a week, inspect each plant, look under the bottom leaves for pests or signs of disease, look at the health of the plants and their fruit. Prune back heavy foliage to allow for aeration between the plants, and make sure plant branches and leaves are off the ground. If you see something that doesn't look right, here is a robust, science-based online diagnostic tool from University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources to help you diagnose plant diseases and their recommended solutions.



A well-aerated garden at M.A. Center San Ramon

Wishing you a happy and fruitful summer gardening experience!

~ AMARTYA, CALIFORNIA

EMBRACING THE TREES UPDATE: EARTH DAY IN TORONTO



Brave and soggy tree planters



**IN HONOUR OF EARTH DAY 2023,
A SMALL GROUP OF DEVOTEES GATHERED FOR A CITY-WIDE TREE PLANTING EVENT.**

The City of Toronto hosts tree planting events in the spring and fall, and anyone can join.

This was a great opportunity to kickstart the 2023 planting season, which is pretty short in Canada.

Despite the forecast for 100% rain, four sevites (volunteers) from Amma Canada arrived. The event itself was surprisingly well-attended, and in under two hours, the group planted over 600 native trees, shrubs, and other species.

Shovels and seedlings were provided. We dug holes in the marked off area of the city park, gently loosened the roots, and lovingly planted seedlings in the ground. Each seedling then gets protected with two buckets of mulch placed around the base.

We were completely covered in mud, soaked right through, and one of us even broke a shoe in the thick mud, but the mood was joyful and there was no dampening of our spirits as we looked forward to the next planting event, rain or shine.

Another small group of sevites joined the next weekend's planting event, again planting hundreds of native trees and shrubs in the city's parkland.

We are lucky to live in a city that supports tree planting, as well as other nature-oriented events such as woodland trail stewardship, invasive species removal events, and guided nature walks or bird viewing festivals. Participating in these events builds community and supports nature.



“Look at the beauty of nature. Living harmoniously with nature will in itself bring happiness and contentment.”
— Amma

~EMBRACING THE TREES, TORONTO

YOUTH CAMP PLANTS 75 HIBISCUS TREE SAPPLINGS



TURTLE BARN ORGANIC FARM, IN TULSA, OKLAHOMA, HAS EXTRA SEEDLING TREES THAT SPROUT AROUND THE FARM EVERY YEAR.

The farm is named after our mother turtle, Amma—(if you mispronounce the word ‘Amma’, it sounds like the word for turtle in Malayalam.) In 2022, we were able to give 150, two-foot tall, hardy hibiscus tree saplings to a Unitarian Church Day Camp in Oklahoma City. The camp serves about 75 inner city youth. Elizabeth Muller, Amma devotee and Embracing the Trees team member, helps coordinate the camp and teaches youth how to plant trees.

This year, a team of 75 young people planted 75 saplings at the camp. There were enough saplings to also give one to each camper to take home to plant. A flyer (see below) went home with each sapling that included instructions about planting and care, plus the importance of planting trees. In addition to planting the hibiscus

tree saplings, the youth were also led through two wonderful, guided nature activities about trees, created by Joseph Cornell, an American nature educator. The activities are educational, fun, and help connect participants with nature. To learn more about this, check out the link below.

BUILD AND BECOME A TREE IMAGERY ACTIVITY:

https://youtu.be/yK80_d8tObE

TREE SEASONS IMAGERY ACTIVITY:

<https://youtu.be/JBh-olUj3Q8>

For more activities that focus on nature in a fun and meditative way, visit Joseph Cornell on YouTube or use his book *Sharing Nature with Children*.



The Turtle Barn Organic Farm also gave 75 Rose of Sharon hibiscus tree saplings to an Amma devotee, Betty, who attends a local church. The church gave them to women as Mother's Day gifts instead of buying roses. Please consider sharing any saplings, plants, and flowers in your yard that sprout on their own and produce abundantly. You can share them with neighbors instead of composting them when too many extras show up. Gardeners love being gifted with new plants and going to plant and seed swaps. Sharing is caring!



Elizabeth Muller helps to plant a Hibiscus

**PLANT A TREE TO SUPPORT THE
UNITED NATIONS TRILLION TREE CAMPAIGN!
ROSE OF SHARON HIBISCUS TREE**

The Rose-of-Sharon hibiscus is a perennial upright tree or bush with flowers that provide nectar for hummingbirds, bees and butterflies

EASY TO GROW and FAST GROWING!



Requires no special soil or care!

Plant your seedling in full or semi-full sun and watch it take off.

Water it every day for the first 2 weeks and then
it is semi-drought tolerant.

Information about the United Nations Trillion Tree Campaign:

<https://www.trilliontreecampaign.org/t/united-nations-environment-programme-unep>

<https://www.trilliontreecampaign.org/>

<http://www.greenfriendsna.org/ett.html>

<https://www.embracingtheworld.org/news/trillion-tree-campaign/>

<http://greenfriendsna.org/mid-south.html>

NEW ENGLAND DEVOTEES TAKE AMMA'S MESSAGE TO HEART



For Mother's Day Satsang, devotees brought their own dishes, cutlery, and cloth napkins.



WHAT IS NEEDED TODAY IS THAT WE BEGIN TO VALUE MOTHER NATURE AS MUCH AS WE VALUE OUR OWN MOTHER WHO GAVE BIRTH TO US. - AMMA

On a daily basis, as part of the White Flower meditation, Amma asks us to pray for Mother Nature, for the mountains, forests, rivers, oceans and all creatures of creation. Amma has also regularly requested everyone to grow their own food.

Despite Mother Nature's boundless and unrequited generosity, humanity's actions often lack love and kindness. Over the past two decades, the use of disposable goods has grown exponentially and recycling is limited or not available in many parts of the world. Mother Earth continues to give tirelessly, asking nothing in return, yet we, as a species, have fallen short of extending the same selflessness towards her wellbeing.

Consider these staggering numbers related to the use of disposable items for meals in the US, their contribution to depleting the Earth's precious resources and their toll on birds, animals and marine life.

- Each year **40,000,000,000 plastic forks, spoons, and knives** are used and thrown away and each year 100,000 marine animals and over 1 million seabirds die from ingesting plastic.
- Americans purchase about **50 billion water bottles per year**, averaging about 13 bottles per month for every person in the U.S. 90% of these items end up in landfills as recycling rates are quite low.
- In the United States, **13 billion pounds of paper towels** are used each year. To make one ton of paper towels, 17 trees are cut down and 20,000 gallons of water are consumed. To meet this demand for paper towels and napkins, approximately 98 million trees are cut and over a 100 billion gallons of water are used! If every household in the United States replaced just one package of virgin fiber napkins (250 count) with 100% recycled or reusable ones, we could save 1 million trees.
- The world uses some 500 billion plastic cups every year. Americans alone throw away around 25 billion Styrofoam coffee cups and 50 billion paper cups each year. Production of this many paper cups requires cutting down over 30 million trees and 26 billion gallons of water!

Many people talk a lot about environmental preservation, but true greatness lies in putting these principles into practice and actually doing something about it. - Amma

Amma's New England children are making efforts to honor Amma's wishes and help Mother Nature. During Swami Dayamritananda's recent Mother's Day retreat, held at the Best Western in Marlborough, MA, many attendees made the conscious choice to bring their own reusable cutlery, napkins, cups, water bottles and dishes. This collective effort resulted in preventing at least 50 single-use items from ending up in the landfill. While this is a small start, we hope that these actions will inspire more members of the Amma community to adopt eco-friendly habits, like using reusable dinnerware at future events.



Examples of sustainable actions to replace single-use items.

Additional steps taken by Amma's local children include:

- Carrying a napkin and cutlery in their backpack or bag for use when dining out, in order to avoid disposable utensils.
- Bringing reusable take-out containers to bring leftovers home when dining out.
- Carrying reusable water bottles and travel mugs to avoid single-use cups.
- Using dish towels instead of paper napkins as much as possible.
- Expressly requesting that no disposable cutlery, napkins, or plates be included when placing take-out orders, either by noting it in the online order or directly asking the restaurant.

To honor Amma's vision for sustainable, self-reliant gardening, a devotee, Srimayi, held a plant sale featuring entirely organic vegetable seedlings she personally grew. In addition, Sujata nurtured and donated curry leaf plants, while Victoria generously provided geraniums from her own garden. Furthermore, Srimayi meticulously gathered seeds from select heirloom vegetables in her garden the previous year, offering them for sale to continue the cycle of homegrown produce.



Seedlings for sale, grown with dedication and devotion by Srimayi.

Many attendees at the retreat availed of the opportunity to buy organic seedlings started with love and care. We wish them a wonderful growing season and harvest.

"Even if we only have a tiny plot of land, we should try to grow a few vegetables, using organic fertilizers. Spending some time with our plants, we should talk to them and kiss them. This relationship will give us a new vitality."

– Amma



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