



GreenFriends North America NEWSLETTER

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During Amma's North American tour, many people are called upon to do seva, otherwise known as 'selfless service'. One example of a seva shift is Dish Monitoring.

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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GROWING TULASI



 Tulasi, also known as Holy Basil or *Ocimum Sanctum*, is a highly medicinal herb that has been revered since ancient times as one of the most sacred plants in Indian culture.

“Tulasi leaves are highly medicinal. In ancient India, it was a daily practice to water Tulasi each morning for her blessings, bowing down with reverence and devotion, and worshiping her as an embodiment of the Goddess. Reviving such practices can help us restore the lost harmony in our lives.”
~Amma (*Man and Nature*, p. 4-5).



Transplanting a Tulasi seedling into the ground.

For over twenty-five years, Amma has encouraged the cultivation of Tulasi worldwide through the GreenFriends initiative, offering practical guidelines on growing the herb. Caring for Tulasi will nurture a deeper connection to Mother Nature in our hearts and can help us to awaken the experience of the Divine in all creation.

Amma says, "Nature is nothing but God's visible form, which we can see and experience through our senses. Indeed, by loving and serving Nature, we are worshiping God directly."

Tulasi literally means "The Incomparable One." When you consider the herb's numerous medicinal benefits, it truly lives up to its name. The list of its healing properties and uses could fill an entire book. In Amma's biography, we learn that during her sadhana leela, she would live for months at a time, subsisting solely on Tulasi leaves.

Amma shares a beautiful story: Once, Radha was plucking Tulasi leaves to weave a garland for her beloved Lord Krishna. Suddenly, she was overcome with compassion and asked, "Oh Mother Tulasi, do you not feel pain when we pluck your leaves?" Tulasi replied, "Yes, Radha, I do feel pain. But when I see your happiness as you offer a garland of my leaves to the Lord, all my pain disappears."

This story powerfully symbolizes nature's self-sacrifice, as it constantly gives of itself to sustain and support us. Growing Tulasi offers us the opportunity to return that gratitude, love and service to Mother Nature. For all she gives us, what can we offer in return? We can offer our hearts. This love and awareness will reflect

in each of our actions. Through the simple act of growing Tulasi in our homes, may we receive the blessings of Mother Nature and Amma—bringing harmony, well-being, and grace into our daily lives.

“We should grow plenty of trees and medicinal plants, as they cleanse the air. Many diseases can be prevented by breathing air that has come into contact with medicinal plants.” – Amma



Sowing Tulasi seeds.

GROWING TULASI: PRACTICAL TIPS

Native to India, Tulasi requires special care to thrive in non-native climates. Start seeds indoors in the spring. The seeds need high temperatures to germinate—ideally a consistent 78° F (26° C). Seedlings may emerge within 1 to 6 weeks, depending on the consistency of heat and other factors. For extra warmth, use an electrical seedling mat (easily available online) or place the seeds above a heater. For a mini-greenhouse effect, use trays that come with a clear plastic lid, or create your own by covering the trays with clear plastic bags or a pane of glass. These methods will trap heat and humidity. Place your tray on the mat in a sunny window.

Amma has given a simple suggestion for sowing the seeds: Cup the seeds in your hands and hold them in the golden rays of the setting sun for 5 minutes. Then, immediately sow the seeds. Sow them directly on the surface of fine, organic seedling soil mix or sifted potting soil mixed with one-third non-salty sand. Moisten the soil before planting. Sprinkle the seeds thinly or space them one inch apart. Using a sifter, sprinkle a very thin dusting of soil, just enough to cover the seeds. Water with a gentle spray. Keep the soil evenly moist during germination.



Lightly cover seeds with a very thin dusting of fine dry soil.

If sown in individual cells or containers, gently separate the seedlings when they have four sets of leaves and transplant them into individual pots. Water well during transplanting and take care not to disturb the roots. As Tulasi grows, continue transplanting into gradually larger pots. Always use pots with good drainage holes and organic, well-draining potting soil mix.



Gently separate seedlings before transplanting



Transplanting into individual pots.

Gently pinch off the top of the plant when it has about 6-10 sets of leaves. This will encourage branching. As the plant grows, continue to pinch the tip of each stem after 5-6 pairs of leaves have grown. Also, pluck the flower buds as soon as they appear to redirect the plant's energy toward producing new leaves. Regularly removing older leaves, tips, and flower buds will help maintain a fuller, healthier plant.

Water as needed, but avoid overwatering, as this can lead to disease. Tulasi requires plenty of oxygen in the soil for healthy roots. Check daily by pressing your finger into the surface of the soil. Allow the soil to dry between waterings, but do not let the plant remain dry for more than 1-2 days. Tulasi enjoys lukewarm water and misting with a spray bottle to increase humidity. Feed occasionally with organic fertilizer, following the product's instructions, or use well-decomposed compost or dried cow manure with a little wood ash.



Gentle watering seedlings after sowing.



Trays with mini 'greenhouse' lids

Tulasi needs plenty of sunlight and warmth, so it is usually best to grow the plant indoors near a sunny window. In warm climates, the pot can be kept outside in direct sunlight during the warmer months. Tulasi thrives outdoors in hot, humid climates. In winter, the plant will require special care, and you may need to use plant lights, such as full-spectrum bulbs found at gardening centers. Alternatively, you may choose to grow Tulasi as an annual plant.

Consuming just 1-2 Tulasi leaves daily is sufficient to receive both the medicinal and spiritual benefits.

When the plant is fully grown, you can allow a few branches to flower and produce seeds. However, avoid letting the entire plant flower at once.

TRADITIONAL PRAYERS OR MANTRAS WITH TRANSLATION FOR TULASI WORSHIP:

*Vrindayai tulasi devyai
Priyayai keshavashya cha
Vishnu bhakti prade devi
Satya vatyai namo namaha*

I offer my prayers to Tulasi Devi,
Who is very dear to Lord Krishna.
Oh Goddess, you bestow devotion
And possess the highest Truth.

CHANT WHILE CIRCUMAMBULATING THE TULASI PLANT THREE TIMES:

*Yani kani cha papani
Brahma-hatyadikani cha
Tani tani pranasyanti
Pradakshina pade pade*

By circumambulating Tulasi Devi,
All sins committed are destroyed at every step.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Tulasi Devi, Goddess of Devotion, [available at theammashop.org](http://theammashop.org).

Amrita Virtual Academy's excellent tulasi growing workshop available at this link:

<https://www.amritavirtualacademy.com/courses/tulasi-workshop>

~ SARVAGA,
AMRITAPURI, INDIA

AMRITA NATURALS SOAP & BODYCARE PRODUCTS



MA Center Chicago farm.



THE BLESSINGS OF NATURE - STRIVING FOR HARMONY IN ALL WE DO

Nature gives all of her wealth to human beings. Just as nature graciously serves, protects and helps us, it is our responsibility to return that dedication and service by helping her. Only then can harmony between nature and humanity be preserved.

~ Amma

IN THE BEGINNING

In the early beginning of Green Friends here at MA Center Chicago, two of us were co-ordinating the projects. As setting up beekeeping and other projects were costly, we realized

that to be a viable ashram program there needed to be funds coming in, and not just going out. Somehow the thought came forward from the recesses of my mind – “Oh! I made handmade soap once back in the 80’s with my friends!” And I decided to give that a try again.

So, I researched, found a nice recipe online, bought ingredients, and made soap in my room. To put it nicely, it was not very attractive! I did continuous research and experiments, an AYUDH project, and with Amma’s grace, it slowly got better. Finally in the fall of 2015, we took samples to Amma and she gave her permission for space to be made available for us to officially make products for sale.

A bit later, I was shown an array of salves and lotions brought over with the question, “can we make these here?” I took a look. They were lovely, but had some ingredients that could be more naturally derived and certain other ingredients could be added that would make them more effective. This led me to explore the wilder parts of the property more, and to start farming the most important herbs to use, such as calendula.



THE FOUNDATION OF THE BODYCARE PRODUCTS IS UTILIZING THE HEALING PLANTS THAT GROW HERE IN ABUNDANCE.

Some of the most maligned ‘weeds’ have important jobs in nature. Deep rooted and ‘pesky’ yellow dock and burdock root serve the purpose of breaking up compacted soil. These two roots are very healing as well for skin, hair and blood. Dandelions, besides being highly healing and

nutritious, pull toxins like pesticides out of the soil. All of these plants help the soil here at the ashram but are not included in any of the products.



Some of the most humble ‘weeds’ are very healing – plantain, yarrow, and comfrey are good for skin and injuries; and herbs such as nettle, red clover, mullein, elder, and violets are nutritious and healing.

We sometimes blame a plant for something it didn’t do!

Goldenrod is thought to cause allergies, but it is actually the healing remedy for allergies. The real cause of this particular suffering is its look-alike neighbor ragweed – which dumps copious amounts of pollen into the air, making you sneeze.

Goldenrod makes a gorgeous golden yellow natural dye as well.

When harvesting wild herbs, it’s important to approach them as our friends and neighbors instead of ‘crops,’ being mindful of their purpose for being there, and harvesting only small amounts.

THE OTHER ESSENTIAL PART OF BODYCARE PRODUCTION IS THE FARM.

We are so grateful for our incredible farming staff and volunteers, for production couldn’t happen without them. Many volunteers and devotees come together when there is a large job to do.



Early on in our project, soil expert Faith Reeves came and evaluated and amended our soil. She chose specific groundcover plants to protect and restore the soil between uses, as we rotated areas. The soil quality continues to be incredibly good without further treatments. Furthermore, no chemical amendments, fertilizers or pesticides are used anywhere on the ashram property.

Another expert who has supported us is our neighboring farmer who has helped us wonderfully many times. One year there was an issue with laying down the protective row covers and getting the plants in. The farmer himself came out and ran the huge water wheel transplanting machine that punched holes in the rows and released water. We sat on two seats just barely off the ground – giggly and laughing as we struggled to plop the plants in place. Others helped with guiding the machine, and one followed behind tamping the plants.

Most likely the jolly and fun atmosphere was not usual for this task, and the next day the farm owner said – ‘It was like church!’ Amma does say to do our seva with joy and laughter – it was a good example that day!

BESIDES PLANTS FOR THE SOAP AND HERBAL PRODUCTS, WE HAVE ALSO GROWN A NUMBER OF DYE PLANTS, SUCH AS HOPI BLACK DYE SUNFLOWERS, MADDER ROOT, AND JAPANESE INDIGO. WE USE THE DYE PLANTS TO COLOR THE SOAP AND BODY CARE PRODUCTS AS WELL.



Some of the madder root was sold to a well-known natural dye company – they listed it online as ‘the best madder root they had ever carried.’ Indeed it dyed cloth to a very rich almost cherry red, instead of the usual rust color.

Many devotee volunteers came together to dig, scrub, chop and dry the roots. Later, we sent our five-year harvest to Amritapuri for their dye projects. Through experimentation, we also came to know that tulasi dyes cloth to a beautiful bronzy-green.

THE DYE AND OTHER PLANTS ARE THE ONLY SOURCE OF COLOR FOR THE BODY CARE PRODUCTS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF NATURALLY COLORED CLAYS FOR SOME SOAP. SOME OF THE COLORANT PLANTS USED ARE: INDIGO, MADDER ROOT, AND CHAMOMILE.

As we keep from using water in any formulas (except soap) because that would make chemical preservatives necessary, we use oils infused with the herbs to capture the color and properties. We also use no harmful chemical fragrance oils but only high-quality essential oils to scent the products. Additionally, all our body care products are produced according to stringent standards for sanitation and quality control. The quality and appearance of the soap and body care products improved a lot after experimentation and research and learning how to incorporate plants, to color naturally, and which oils and butters to choose for the results wanted. It's all about the fatty acid profiles!



The handmade soap is currently made in 35-pound batches – the most amount able to be hand lifted. The oils and butters are melted and combined. Then the measured lye solution is made with water, and sometimes with added goat milk or herbs made into a tea.

A face shield, heavy protective gloves and apron are worn for safety. The lye solution fumes are hot and the high pH will burn, so it is placed in the sink with a hood fan running.

Once cooled, the lye solution is carefully poured into the mixed oils that are already scented, and a long whipper is used to mix it together to what is called ‘trace’. Not so little or it might separate out, but not so much that it gets too thick to pour correctly. Some of the batter can have various colors added for a decorative element.

The soap batter is poured carefully into molds - loaf shape or slabs, a large block, or decorative individual shapes. These are covered and sit overnight or so to get just firm enough to cut. Too hard and the cutting wires can snap. Individual molds go into the freezer, so they will pop out of the fancy molds without distorting or sticking.

Soap has to sit in a dry, cool place for a minimum of six weeks, to cure, so the pH becomes mild and the excess water dries out. Soap is a 'salt' with a crystalline structure. The older the soap, the more lather and more mild it gets. The finished soap gets wrapped with Florentine book binding paper and labeled for sale.



Our body butters are a big lesson in paying attention to fatty acids. One of the three butters we use is known for leaving a gritty feeling if it's not tempered correctly. The blend of oils and butters has to be heated slowly and thoroughly so the hard element melts, and then cooled really fast so it doesn't separate back out. So it is a game of putting it in the freezer, then whipping it some, re-cooling to thicken, whipping again, repeat, repeat. Soon though, it starts whipping into the silky fluff it's supposed to be and that's a happy moment!



The first 'Boo Boo' (Rescue) salve was made way back in the late 90's for my daughter when she was little and I was in Ayurvedic school. The recipe has evolved, and now contains plants from the ashram. It still has yarrow as a main ingredient, commonly known as 'wound wort.' It also contains bee propolis, which is made by the bees from resins and pollen. Trees weep out resin to heal themselves from any wounds in their bark, and to prevent disease from entering. So it is very healing for us too.



The 'Relieve' Pain Balm contains a hard-to-find but amazing ingredient – Balsam Poplar buds. These get harvested in the early spring from fallen branches (the trees are very tall). The buds would develop into new leaves, so it is also the most sustainable way to harvest. The buds are quite gooey and have an intoxicating maple-y scent. They contain salicin, the pain reliever in aspirin. It is a complex formula, with ingredients meant to address the various causes of pain.



Nasya is a well known Ayurvedic remedy that goes in the nose. It can be formulated for different uses. In Ayurveda the nose is also considered a channel to the brain, so it can be used for brain health and memory. A main use is for respiratory health and issues. Ours benefits both. In Panchakarma, the nasal channel is filled with oil and snuffed up, but we can simply put a couple drops on the back of our hand and dab the inside of the nostrils. This helps lubricate the tissues especially in the dryness of winter, and helps keep out allergens and germs. Our Nasya Oil contains both Ayurvedic herbs and those grown here.

I'm so very grateful for Amma allowing me to do something useful. It is amazing how Amma is able to pull together the mish-mash of everyone's abilities and experiences into something new and unexpected.

My deepest thanks to Amma, Swamis and Swaminis, devotees, experts, helpers and ashram brothers and sisters who have made everything beautiful and full of love.

Om Amriteshwaryai Namah.

~ RAJASHREE,
MA CENTER CHICAGO



ORGANIC HOME GARDENING: A HUSBAND'S SURVIVAL GUIDE



I call my wife the goddess of butternut squash.



“AMMA SAYS.” TWO INNOCENT SOUNDING WORDS THAT WHEN APPLIED BEFORE ANY SENTENCE, CAN REALLY GIVE ANY HUSBAND A NIGHTMARE, ESPECIALLY WHEN THESE WORDS ARE FOLLOWED WITH SOMETHING LIKE “WE MUST DO...” THESE WORDS ACT AS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON THAT A WIFE CAN USE TO RENDER HER HUSBAND COMPLETELY POWERLESS.

It was in 2020 when my wife used these powerful words and told me, “Amma says we must grow our own vegetables organically.” And as you can expect from any good husband, I vehemently opposed the idea that requires me to do any more work than I usually do.

But it wasn't just my laziness, you see I have a recurring problem of selective amnesia where I forget anything that Amma advises me to do as a couple. It's either that or Amma tells me such things only when I am not paying attention. Whatever may be the case, the end result is that I don't have any recollection of Amma ever telling me to grow vegetables. I used this as my argument against gardening. Bearing in mind what Lord Krishna tells us in the Bhagavad Gita, I argued my case without any expectation of a winning outcome. After all, can there be any winning argument against what Amma herself had asked us to do? But thanks to my wife who is always attentive to what Amma says, she was able to lovingly remind me and convince me that Amma indeed had asked us to grow vegetables at home. And this is how my journey into organic home gardening started.

But before I get further into gardening itself, let me tell you about the second major problem I have. Amma made me a real simpleton. She didn't give me enough wisdom to decipher her words. So, I was really struggling to understand what Amma actually meant. Thankfully, I am blessed with a wise wife who was able to break down the words "we must grow our own vegetables organically" into simpler terms for me to understand easily. What Amma actually meant was:

- Abhinav should make his own garden beds from scratch using untreated wood.
- Abhinav should apply linseed oil to the wooden beds.
- Abhinav should rip out the lawn, dig soil and put garden beds into soil.
- Abhinav should carry several yards of soil and compost to fill the beds.
- Abhinav should prepare a wired fence around the garden and make a wooden gate to get into the garden.
- Abhinav should mulch the whole area surrounding the beds.
- Abhinav should set up the drip irrigation system.



This is how we constructed and laid out raised beds.

Well, there were many more simple tasks to follow, after we constructed 17 beds in total. Luckily, my wife Sujata was always there to tell me what Amma actually meant in her one sentence instruction to us as a couple, and all the things I needed to do.

If it is not clear already to the readers, I must clarify that I, Abhivav, do not like gardening at all; not one bit. To the extent that whenever I have to do something in the garden, the desire to seek liberation from this job and this world increases exponentially. I experience instant detachment from everything surrounding me and I start praying for instant moksha. I will tell you why this is the case for me in a moment. Also, I will tell you how I use spirituality to manage doing any garden work at all. I will tell you about the blessings we have received as a result of gardening, and some survival tips for beginners in home gardening.



The garden at the beginning of the season when we first plant the seedlings.
The planning for this garden was done by Sujata alone.

SPIRITUALIZING THE GARDENING WORK

In all honesty, I would not have been able to do a single task at our garden if I hadn't incorporated spirituality in my actions. And this is how I do it.

Becoming witness to the body and mind: I am severely allergic to dust and every possible weed and tree that grows in our region. Consequently, I am miserable with non-stop sneezing and breathlessness

during spring time when pollen is abundant everywhere and when we also have to do most of our gardening work. So, I hope now you understand why I don't like gardening. And on top of that, I have trouble bending my right knee due to sciatic problems. So, whenever I have to be in the garden, I need to make a conscious decision to be a witness to my body, my mind, and the discomfort I face. While I try doing that, I fail each time to remain a witness for long. After years, I finally succeeded in doing this for a couple of days this year. That's one of the reasons I can really admire how Amma gives a motherly hug during darshan to thousands of her children while her body goes through pain.

Practising Karma Yoga: Gardening gives me the best opportunity to practise karma yoga and be selfless without expectations. Before stepping into the garden, I remind myself that I am doing this for the divine and for my wife. Most of the time, I squander this opportunity by complaining a lot about all the work I need to do. However, with time, I have gotten only slightly better at not making a big fuss. Starting this work with the attitude of being selfless is the key for my being able to do any work at all.

Chanting mantra and being an instrument: Whenever I use any gardening tool to dig into the soil, I end up harming earthworms. Since I don't have an understanding of how this adds up to my karma, I think of myself as an instrument in God's hands and keep doing it while chanting some mantra. I sincerely hope that this approach helps with incurring additional karma. Keeping myself focused on mantra also helps me create a little distance between myself and my body and mind.

A BLESSING INDEED

I might have had my moments of dissatisfaction with gardening but in truth, this gardening project had been a blessing to us. Besides the usual benefits of having a home garden like being able to eat the juiciest strawberries, the sweetest peas, the tastiest tomatoes or the flavorful cilantro right out of the garden, there is an undeniable joy of seeing plants grow and flourish from seedlings to the fruiting stage when we get to enjoy nature's bounty. But I want to talk about something that goes beyond all these.

Making Amma laugh: My wife, Sujata, got a chance to give a talk while she was at Amritapuri last year. In her talk, she mentioned the long list of things that we need to do for our garden, with our planned activities starting from March each year and going until December. Listening to the long list of things, Amma started laughing heartily. Later, Amma gave her a beautiful darshan after her talk. Making Amma smile is probably the



best thing a devotee can do for Amma as well as for oneself, and this was made possible only because of this garden.

FESTIVITIES WITH SWAMINI

In 2023, we were planning to have a Nature's Day retreat with Swamini Ambikamrita Prana in the New England region and we were looking for a venue to host the event. We were looking for a devotee's home with a home garden . It was indeed a blessing when our home was chosen for the retreat.

We had the presence of Swamini at our home, and those four days were as joyous and festive as possible for us and our satsang members. It was a delight to see our New England satsang community come together to make this retreat a success. While we opened our home, the satsang members opened up their hearts to prepare our home for the retreat.



During this time, our days would start with Surya Namaskar and chanting Lalita Sahasranama along with Swamini ji, followed up with fun-filled spiritual activities, informative talks and presentations, and sumptuous meals prepared by devotees. We also had a memorable Q&A session with Swamini ji. And best of all, we now have a flourishing plum tree that was planted on this occasion. All this was made possible only because we have a home garden.

I personally learnt quite a few things from my interactions with Swamini ji; the most important of all was the lesson on how to stay calm and trust Amma amidst all the things going around us. I have a best example in the following: On the day of retreat, the weather forecast indicated heavy rains throughout the day, and we were concerned as many of our activities were planned outdoors. Yet, Swamini ji stayed calm and started our day with group chanting. In all honesty, I was a little anxious at the time of chanting as I had to complete a few tasks for the retreat that was about to start in a couple of hours, and the weather conditions didn't look promising at all. But unsurprisingly, the clouds cleared up right on time and the rain didn't come until we were done with all our planned outdoor activities. Amma says success depends on effort and grace. I believe that the strong commitment from the satsang community to make this retreat a success, regardless of whether or not it rained, attracted Amma's grace and the rain paused to make it so. It's amazing to see how devotion and love towards Amma makes the

community stronger and committed; and how we come together whenever the New England satsang organises any program.

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR HUNTING

Now that I have told you about how I spiritualize the whole gardening process and the blessings we received as a result, let me share a few practical tips on hunting. Yes, I am in charge of hunting in our garden while my wife takes care of the gathering part. Don't be surprised about hunting because you will find innumerable species from the animal kingdom thriving in a home garden. Keep in mind, this is based on my experience in Northeastern USA.



Harvest from the garden. We keep getting more almost every day during the peak season.

DO THE FOLLOWING EVERY WEEK:

Spray all your plants with BT, a bacterium found naturally in soils around the world that upsets the intestines of worms. It is considered safe and effective and has been used for the past 40 years to control the worm population especially on leafy vegetables. Spray under the leaf otherwise BT may get washed off easily or die under hot sun.

Spray your tomato plants and squashes with a mixture of milk and water in 1:10 ratio to control fungal growth. This will save tomatoes from blight. Also, keep the bottom one foot of tomato plants clear of any growth, otherwise those branches will carry fungus from the ground and spread all the way up.

Spray highly diluted neem oil to keep other insects away. Be careful not to use higher concentration of neem oil as the leaves may burn under sun as a result.

Put cups filled with beer a few feet apart in each garden bed. This is needed if you see the growth of slugs in your garden. Remember to clear the trapped slugs each day. Do this until the slug population comes under control.

Don't spray all these things in a single day. You need to wait until the next day before you spray the next item. So, remember to allocate at least three days each week out of your weekends to do this. Hope you get long weekends every week at your work.

Do this to deal with vine borers: Vine borers notoriously attack summer squashes and spaghetti squash, and kill the plant just when you are about to see the first fruits. Once infested, these vine borers come back each year. The best advice to deal with this situation is to plant your squashes one month later than the usual time. Also, you should tightly wrap the lower section of the main stem (about one foot) with aluminium foil to prevent vine borers from laying eggs. You may have to remove the leaves from the lower section of the stem to do this.

Do this to control leaf miners: Leaf miners are really creative pests that burrow into leaves (e.g. beets and chards) and hide there while slowly growing and eating the leaves from the inside. Once you see those miners grow, that image is guaranteed to haunt you for days to come. Using neem oil can be of help but one cannot use too much of that as the neem oil turns edible leaves bitter and harder. So, another approach is to patiently monitor each leaf for eggs and remove those eggs before they hatch. I suggest using the fourth day out of your really long weekend to do this. Harvesting these leaves when these are smaller in size can help too. But ensure to watch out for those eggs while washing the leaves before cooking. This is an important exercise in building patience! Trust me, there is so much to learn from nature.

Do this to control squirrels and chipmunks: Put a fence around your garden with a fine mesh covering the bottom three feet. If these animals still get in your garden, watch them play. They are actually fun to watch.

TIME TO SMILE

Alright, I might have given you enough reasons and tips to pursue organic gardening at home. No matter how I said it in this article, home gardening is indeed a rewarding experience. You can ask my wife who knows more about it. My final advice for any beginner is to do gardening at a scale that you can manage without making it overwhelming for you, and gradually grow your garden as you gain experience. I sincerely hope you found at least one thing useful in this article. Happy gardening!



~ABHINAV, BOSTON, MA

RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING AMMA'S 2024 TOUR



Amma collects waste during a North India Tour.

DURING AMMA'S TOUR THIS SUMMER, RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING TEAMS IN EACH TOUR CITY WORKED TIRELESSLY TO DIVERT AS MUCH WASTE AS POSSIBLE FROM LANDFILLS AND INTO RECYCLING OR COMPOST FACILITIES.

Amma says, "Nature is our first mother. She nurtures us throughout our lives. Our birth mother may allow us to sit on her lap for a couple of years, but Mother Nature patiently bears our weight our entire life. Just as a child is obligated to his birth mother, we should all feel an obligation and responsibility towards Mother Nature. If we forget this responsibility, it is equal to forgetting our own self. If we forget Nature, we will cease to exist, for to do so is to walk towards death."

The amount of waste generated in North America is increasing as populations grow and consumption rises. Per the [US Environmental Protection Agency](#), in the United States, as of 2018, individuals generate an average of 4.9 pounds of waste per day. The [World Bank](#) projects global waste to grow by 70% by 2050, largely driven by population growth and urbanization. High-income regions like North America generate disproportionately high amounts of waste—around 34% of the world's total despite having only 16% of the population.

Producing new materials leads to greater environmental damage from mining, logging and drilling, as well as the depletion of the Earth's finite resources like metals and minerals. Producing goods from recycled materials requires far less energy than using raw materials, such as the 95% energy savings in aluminum production. Greenhouse gas emissions and pollution are also reduced by diverting waste that would otherwise be incinerated or end up in landfills.

During Amma's tour this summer, recycling and composting teams in each tour city took Amma's message to heart and worked tirelessly throughout the programs to divert as much waste as possible from landfills and into recycling or compost facilities.

As part of these efforts, recycling and compost stations were set up in multiple locations throughout the dining areas for visitors to drop off their dishes. Many children and teens participated as dish monitors, directing visitors on which bins to place their waste. Read the report of one young teen of his experience in the dish monitor seva [here](#).

Teams in most cities were small, usually around three sevites (volunteers), and they worked diligently throughout the programs to sort recycling when mixed with trash whenever possible. Here are reports from some of the tour recycling and compost coordinators.

WASHINGTON, DC

The team had a 20-yard dumpster reserved for the program and it was full after the event. During the five days of programs held at the National Conference Center in Leesburg, VA, a total of 3,033 pounds of food waste generated from meal preparation, dining room and staff room bins was able to be composted.

Dish sorting sevites in the dining hall contributed to trash sorting with some sevites diligently helping to sort all incoming waste, mainly leftover food and paper cups and napkins.



TOTAL DIVERSION
3,033 POUNDS
EQUIVELANT TO:



53,976

**SMART PHONES
CHARGED**



2,101

MILES DRIVEN



901 lb

COAL BURNED



13.5

TREE SEEDLINGS



BOSTON

Recycling was very successful in Boston this year. Three days of programs generated an entire 30-yard dumpster (20 feet x 6 feet x 8 feet) worth of material. The recycling coordinator created a fun seva for children to motivate them to learn. They got to be a Recycling Superhero and receive their very own recycling sticker at the end of their shift. Each child was provided with a superhero recycling bag - (these consisted of images of superheroes with Recycling signs on their chest and taped to paper bags saved from prior use). The children went around with an adult to all of the stalls in the bookstore to

collect used paper. The tour staff working at the tables praised the children for their heroic recycling efforts— thus building self-esteem and modeling that they have the power to make a difference.

The Boston team was able to compost 600 pounds from food waste generated during the three days of programs at the Best Western Royal Plaza and Trade Center in Marlborough, MA.

A local supermarket that previously accepted napkins, compostable plates and cooking oil in the past no longer did and they had to locate a new vendor to take these items. The team hopes that next year, Black Earth Composting, the vendor who took the food waste, might be able to pick up directly from the program saving labor and cost to transport the waste to their facility.

CHICAGO

The Chicago team rented two 20 (cubic) yard dumpsters for trash and recycling needs for the three days of programs held at Amma’s MA Center in Elburn, IL. Seventy-five percent of the total non-food waste was recycled (30 yards of waste recycled versus 10 yards that was not recyclable). Ninety percent of all food waste generated from the kitchen, darshan hall, dining hall and staff room was able to be composted. Additionally, four large trash bags of soft plastic bags were able to be recycled.

OAKLAND

The team felt that the recycling and composting seva went well and that they had great success overall. The hotel provided compost and recycling dumpsters.

All food waste was composted! They were able to compost not only the food but also the paper plates on the last day, as well as the compostable cups used for the puja water. Ninety percent of paper plates, boxes, plastic, glass and cans were recycled and all flower clippings were also able to be recycled. 8-year-old dish monitor, Vihaan (and his mom Prasanna) from Connecticut (right), helped visitors sort their waste in the dining room during the Oakland program.

Additionally, 4-ounce paper cone cups were used instead of the plastic cups that the hotel was going to originally provide. This helped prevent water wastage and most of the cups were able to be composted with only some being thrown in the trash.



All in all, the waste management throughout the tour was handled efficiently by tour staff and attendees. While we strive to reduce our waste where we can, properly sorting our waste (compostable food, liquids, trash, and recycling) allows us to further mitigate our impact at these large-scale programs.

These efforts along with those of coordinators, sevites and visitors across all tour cities, demonstrate the impact that dedicated individuals can have when we heed Amma's message and work tirelessly to reduce waste. Not only did they divert large amounts of waste from landfills but they also inspired others to consider their own environmental footprints, a reminder that through conscious action each of us can make a difference.

~ REPORTS COLLECTED BY THE GREENFRIENDS NORTH AMERICA TEAM



PERSPECTIVES FROM A TEEN DISH MONITOR



DURING AMMA'S NORTH AMERICAN TOUR, MANY PEOPLE ARE CALLED UPON TO DO SEVA, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS 'SELFLESS SERVICE'.

As the tours are completely volunteer-run, the seva shifts (normally two hours) are a very important part of a successful tour and also an opportunity for us all to embody Amma's teachings.

One example of a seva shift is Dish Monitoring. The job of a Dish Monitor is to guide people in clearing their dishes after eating. Food goes into the compost, liquids get poured into a separate bucket, and non-food items are sorted into garbage or recycling.

Finally, dishes themselves are sorted onto large trays in stacks of plates, bowls, and cups, to assist the volunteers (or sevites) who are loading them into the dishwasher for washing.

In this short interview, we hear from a young person, age 13, about his experience in this seva. After seeing him dedicate a lot of his time to this role at one of the tour stops, his mom and GreenFriends volunteer, Ayana, decided to ask him more about his experience.

YOU DID A LOT OF SEVA THIS YEAR, DIDN'T YOU?

Yeah, I did.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE SEVA THIS TOUR?

I don't know, I liked them all.

SO DIPLOMATIC. WHAT KINDS OF THINGS WERE YOU DOING?

Well, I spent lots of time in the kids' room, helping with crafts and games, and with the kids at the prasad dinner, and helping with dishes and compost, and cleanup. I can't remember what else.

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE DISH MONITORING, WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT THAT?

It was fun to take people's plates for them. I like helping people, so I just took their plates and cleared them and put everything where it belonged. Initially my parents dragged me into it, and before I started I didn't think it was going to be fun, but I ended up really liking it. I even went back to do that seva again a few more times on my own.

WAIT, HOW MANY TIMES DID YOU DO THIS SEVA?

I don't know, maybe like 3 or 4 times.

WHAT WAS ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECTS?

Seeing people dump half their plate of food. Food waste really bothers me because it's hard to see so much food not being eaten. Also, some people unknowingly put their food in the wrong bin, and even though I didn't have to clean it, I still thought 'oh no' and I couldn't correct it anymore because it was already done.

WAS THERE ANYTHING THAT SURPRISED YOU IN THIS SEVA?



Sometimes just the fact that there was so much food that people were dumping. Some people didn't put garbage in the garbage or recycling in the recycling.

It feels normal to me to put things in the right place because I do that at home, so it was weird to see that not everyone knows how to sort their garbage. Sometimes I could stop people in time to prevent them from putting it in the wrong spot, and sometimes they would be surprised but mostly people were really nice.

It's just watching people clear their dishes, but I think it's an important seva, because when you catch people putting their waste in the wrong bin, you can tell them. And it matters because once it's in the bag, the stuff in the bag doesn't usually get sorted.

DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING?

I guess that not everyone knows what you know or does what you think is normal.

WHAT DO YOU WISH OTHER PEOPLE COULD LEARN FROM THIS?

I hope everyone could learn how to put their food and garbage in the right bin. And I wish that everyone could learn how to not waste so much food.



~ ISAAC, AYUDH, TORONTO





Keep the
child within alive.
A child never tires of
hearing the birds sing,
never gets bored
looking at flowers.

- *Amma*

  /MataAmritanandamayi



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