



GreenFriends North America NEWSLETTER

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Embracing the Trees is underway, in regional groups all over North America!

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

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

For more information,
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website

AMMA'S TEACHINGS ON MAN AND NATURE



AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOKLET “MAN AND NATURE,” COMPRISED OF AMMA’S ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NATURE

Question: *What caused the break in the relationship between Nature and human beings?*

AMMA: Because of his selfishness, man today sees Nature as being separate from himself. If a person receives a cut or a wound, it is certainly the awareness that both the left and right hand are “mine” that prompts the one to comfort the other. We don’t have the same concern when an injury happens to someone else, do we? This is because of the attitude that “It is not mine”. The wall of separation between humans and Nature is created mainly by the selfish attitude of humans. They think that Nature has been created only for them to use and exploit in order to fulfill their selfish desires.

This attitude creates a wall, a separation and a distance. It is a frightening truth that modern man has lost his broad-mindedness as a result of the tremendous growth of modern science. Man has found methods to produce a hundred tomatoes from a plant that could otherwise bear only ten fruits. He has also succeeded in doubling their size. While it is true that due to increased production, poverty and starvation have been reduced to a certain extent, man is not very aware of the harmful effects caused by artificial fertilizers and pesticides, which get into his body through the food that

**Only through
love and compassion
is the protection and
preservation of Nature
possible.**

he eats. But it is also a fact that such chemicals destroy the cells of the body and make him an easy victim of disease. The number of hospitals have also had to increase, as scientist artificially force plants to yield fruit and seeds in quantities which are far beyond their limits. Science has reached unimaginable heights, but owing to his selfishness, man has lost the clarity to see the truth of things and to act with discrimination.

It is the selfish thought of wanting more that prompts man to use artificial fertilizers and pesticides. It is because of his greed that he does

not care to love the plants. A balloon can be inflated only up to a limit. After that it will burst if you keep blowing air into it. Likewise, a seed has a certain limit to the yield it can give. Without taking this into account, if we keep on trying to increase the production by the use of artificial means, it will badly affect the strength and quality of the seed. It also does harm to those who eat it. In olden days only water and natural manure were sufficient for cultivation. But today the situation is different. Pesticides and fertilizers have become part and parcel of farming. So much so, that the immune systems of plants and seeds have become very weak, and have lost their power to fight disease. Through natural methods we can strengthen their power to resist disease. Religion tells us to humbly love everything with reverence. Scientific inventions have managed to vastly increase our production, but at the same time, the quality of everything has decreased.

To cage a bird or an animal is just like putting a human being behind bars. Freedom is the birth right of every living being. Who are we to take that freedom away? By injecting hormones into a hen, we try to make the size of the eggs bigger. We make hens lay two eggs a day, by shutting them in dark cubicles which are opened periodically, in order to create a false impression in the hen that one more day has passed. But by doing so, the hen's life span is shortened by half, and the eggs lose all their quality. The thought of



profit has made man blind and destroyed all his goodness and virtues. This does not mean that we shouldn't think about increasing production. Not at all. The point is that there is a limit to everything, and crossing that limit is equal to destroying Nature.

It is high time to give serious thought to protecting Nature. The destruction of Nature is the same thing as the destruction of humanity. Trees, animals, birds, plants, forests, mountains, lakes and rivers – everything that exists in Nature – are in desperate need of our kindness, of the compassionate care and protection of man. If we protect them, they, in turn, will protect us.

The legendary dinosaur and many other living species have been completely wiped out from the face of the earth, because they could not live in the changing climatic conditions. In a similar manner, if man is not careful, when his selfishness has reached its peak, he too will have to succumb to the same fate.

Only through love and compassion is the protection and preservation of Nature possible. But both these qualities are fast diminishing in human beings. In order to feel real love and compassion, one must realize the oneness of the life force that sustains and is the substratum of the entire universe. This realization can only be attained through a deep study of religion and the observance of spiritual principles.



AMMA SHOP

ADVENTURES IN REDUCING PLASTIC



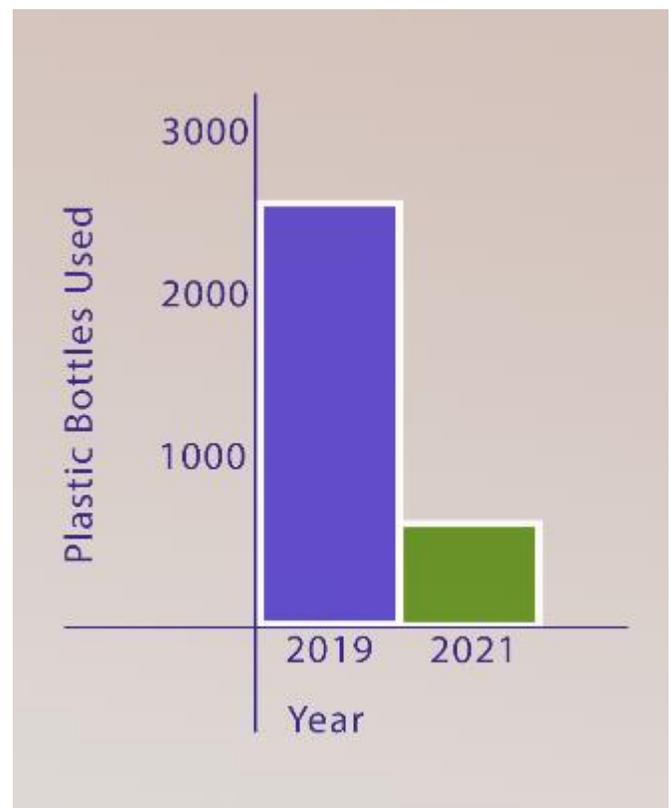
THE
**AMMA
SHOP**
love · care · serve

INSPIRED BY AMMA'S TEACHINGS ABOUT CARING FOR MOTHER NATURE,

Swamini Ambikamrita Prana asked Sharani, a fellow GreenFriend and Amma Shop sevite (volunteer), to look into the reduction of plastic packaging in the Body Care, Aromatherapy, and Ayurvedic departments of the bookstore. This was in 2019 at the MA Center in San Ramon, CA, where these products are managed and shipped for Amma's tours and satellite bookstores around the world. Since these departments make, bottle, and label the majority of the products they offer, it was a practical and realistic goal because choosing and designing the packaging is part of this Amma Shop seva.

Diya, a GreenFriend who also has experience in the cosmetics industry, volunteered to help Sharani research sustainable packaging options. Diya was passionate about this seva as she was well aware that the cosmetics industry adds over 120 billion pieces of plastic to landfills every year. She was able to find a few packaging options (there weren't too many!) and they finally settled on a company that was interested in more natural packaging solutions. A pleasant surprise and special bonus was that glass and bamboo options were super elegant and there were plenty of options for the variety of products currently offered at The Amma Shop.

Over the past year and a half, as the plastic packaging supplies have been used up, the



bamboo and glass bottles and lids have been phased in. Not all products had the packaging converted to glass, as it would not be safe to have glass in the shower. However, the face creams, facial oils, body lotions, massage oil and face wash were all successfully converted.

We are excited to share that over the past year and a half over 2000 plastic bottles and lids have been eliminated! The Amma Shop will continue to find ways to further reduce plastic waste, AND this was a huge step in the right direction.

May we all increase our awareness of how our purchasing decisions affect Mother Earth. May we do our best to find ways to express our gratitude and love for Nature by reducing our use of plastic and other environmentally damaging materials. May we put effort in finding ways to live more harmoniously and healthily with all beings. May all beings be happy and peaceful!

Please check out some of the Amma Shop offerings - they make great gifts!



CLICK ON THE PRODUCTS BELOW TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:

<p>ROSE TULASI CALMING BLISS MASSAGE OIL</p>	<p>ROSE PETAL SOFT HYDRATING FACIAL OIL</p>	<p>UPCYCLED PRODUCTS</p>
<p>GET GROWING BOOK</p>	<p>LET'S GROW SEEDS BOOK</p>	<p>BAMBOO UTENSIL SET</p>

OUR LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN ON EARTH



Our early harvest featuring Swiss chard, eggplant, tomatoes, green beans, radishes, yellow squash, cucumbers, zucchini...

BEING AVID GARDENERS,

Satya and I searched far and wide for a perfect property when we moved from southwest Florida to western North Carolina. One of the most important criteria was that it be flat land to allow for the planting of trees for an orchard, vegetable and flower gardens and have abundant water. Also, we sought our home and property to be our offering of love, and selfless service (seva) to the Divine Mother who is Bhu Devi—Mother Nature. So, we consider our gardens the Divine Mother Herself manifest.

We have chosen to live in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. It is less humid, and a bit cooler than the eastern part of the state; blessed with plenty of rainfall, hot summers, and somewhat milder winters than more northern states of North America—and certainly less hot and humid than the tropical part of Florida that we had recently moved from. It is also less densely populated than the rest of the state and quite rural, another bonus for doing our sadhana and that of being in a more natural and nature-filled environment. We wake daily to the sounds of many birds chirping their sweet songs before sunrise, due to the vast variety of songbirds resident here. With that in mind, we have planted gardens that support birds, bees and butterfly with many flowering throughout the season to provide nectar, fragrance and later seeds to sustain wildlife optimally.

We built a large 6 foot high fenced area for our vegetable garden to discourage the deer, bunnies, groundhogs, etc. This will not keep the raccoons and opossum out, however. We know that they will arrive as soon as our corn is perfectly ripe, as well as other fruit on the trees, which are not protected in any way.



Rows of yellow, white, and red onions.

ORGANIC GARDENING IS THE ONLY WAY OF LIFE

Our entire orchard and other gardens are organic. There is simply no other way to garden, and we have never gardened any other way.

ORGANIC COMPOSTING AND MULCHING

We are blessed to have a local source nearby where we purchase compost and hardwood mulch, which we use abundantly to help feed our garden and flower beds. We use this compost when building our beds, planting our seeds, plants, bushes, vines and trees. The compost and mulch helps suppress weeds, keep plants cooler and reduce water use and frequency. We add mulch throughout the season, weeding as required and add additional compost to plantings when they

seem to need a boost to their growing. Due to the constant care, the plants seem healthy and robust. Many plants were started from organic seeds, bulbs, or very small seedlings bought on-line. They may seem small to start, but this allowed us to get a lot more variety and a greater selection than what our local nurseries would have had available. We also bought from local nurseries too, when we found things that we liked that were available.

NATURE'S ABUNDANCE MANIFESTING IN OUR GARDEN

During the summer we had corn, beets, green beans, heirloom snap beans, scarlet runner beans, broad beans, bush beans, pole beans, rainbow Swiss chard, cherry tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes, zucchini, yellow squash, heirloom winter squash, acorn squash, green and red cabbage, okra, sunflowers; green, purple and red peppers; red, yellow and white onions, radishes, Japanese and pickling cucumbers, Armenian white cucumbers, and yams, all growing in the garden. We also have the following herbs: lavender, rosemary, several types of mint, thyme, two types of basil, plus Tulsi Basil (Holy Basil), and parsley growing as well.

We started our garden quite late due to building the fence prior to preparing the ground, building the beds and planting. Considering this—we have been blessed to have so much success in such a short time!

PRESERVING OUR HARVEST

I often felt like a squirrel when we were faced with so much abundance; how to preserve all of this goodness from the earth by pickling, canning, freezing and dehydrating what we had grown. Part of the fun is researching new recipes and ways to keep some of the goodness for after the harvest without degrading the quality of the produce too much, and having something put up for the future. We pickled our cucumbers for eating throughout the rest of the winter, and froze some of our zucchini and yellow squash, and both green and wax beans. We have been sharing a lot of our surplus veggies with our neighbors who are enjoying the bounty of our labor and garden.



"WC Fields" tomato!

We are very Blessed to have a property that yields so generously, the energy to work it, the joy and Grace to be willing to do so; and of course we are so grateful to Mother Nature who supports us so wholeheartedly. Gratitude is the best attitude. We are also so grateful for our neighbor's bees who work tirelessly to pollinate all of our fruits, vegetables and flowers, making our property more in tune with Mother Nature/Bhu Devi.

We are so grateful to our Beloved Amma who has made it possible for us to have such an amazing property to call “home.” It is a dream a long-time in the making. It is the literal fusion of sadhana, and seva – worship of Devi internally and externally. Pranams to Mother Earth for bearing us our entire lifetime...

In Her Loving Service on this beautiful Land,

~ SATYAVRTAN AND RAJA SRI RUTENBECK
NORTH CAROLINA

P.S. GARDENING FACTOID

QUESTION:

Do you know how many visits it takes pollinators to pollinate a single cucumber flower to produce even one cucumber?

ANSWER:

It takes between 8-12 visits from bees to pollinate a single cucumber flower to produce one cucumber! We humbly bow down to those magnificent, beneficent, selfless workers, the honey bees! We are so indebted to them...and without them, we would certainly starve.

JAI AMMA MA!



THE WATER BUCKET CHALLENGE



WHAT IS THE WATER BUCKET CHALLENGE AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

You may have heard of the Ice Bucket challenge, an awareness and fundraising campaign for ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) where people pour a bucket of ice water over their heads. Now, the Greenfriends North America team is asking you to take the Water Bucket Challenge!

What is the Water Bucket Challenge and how does it work? The challenge asks that you complete as many of your household tasks as possible in one day using a single bucket of water! This would include the water you use for drinking, bathing, cooking, cleaning dishes, brushing and flushing the toilet!

Water, needed for the survival of all human beings, is a precious commodity. In many parts of the world, women walk an average of 10 miles a day to collect just 3 gallons of water used for all of their family's drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing, washing and other needs. Many young girls drop out of school to assist or take on this responsibility for the family.

Becoming aware of our water consumption is both helpful to save the natural resources of Mother Earth and to increase our spiritual progress.

The natural resources that we consume
is the wealth that needs to be transferred
to coming generations.

If we mindlessly exploit the resources,
we won't be able to leave
anything for our grandchildren.

~ AMMA

Parts of Northern America have been under drought conditions for several years and the droughts seem to be lasting longer and are becoming more widespread. Even if you live in an area that receives ample rainfall and where groundwater supplies have not been depleted, the water you consume is not free. Electricity is used to filter it at the source, pump it to your home and clean the waste water generated by your home. The majority of the electricity in the world is still produced using natural resources like gas, oil or coal.

Recently, I decided to fill a gallon jug with water to use for my dish washing and hand washing needs. I was sure that I would be able to accomplish quite a lot with 1 gallon of water. To my surprise, I used most of that water to wash a few pots and dishes from just one meal! This exercise helped me to start noticing how much water I actually use in a day. I don't have a dishwasher to use for dishes which is definitely more efficient than hand washing dishes.

How much water runs down the drain when I shower? How much water goes down the toilet each time I flush? Even if I close the tap while brushing my teeth, I still run the tap to collect water when washing my face or rinsing after brushing. While water collects in my cupped hands, more water runs down the drain. I read that Amma fills a glass of water and uses that water to brush and rinse instead of letting the tap run.



Modern toilets use around 1.6 gallons of water and older toilets can use around 7 gallons per flush! Having seen how little a gallon jug of water can accomplish, I measure everything in terms of gallon jugs. Each flush would require a 1.5-gallon jug. For reference, milk and water at grocery stores are sold in 1 gallon plastic bottles. If I had to carry water into my home as some communities in drought-stricken areas of the US have had to do, I would need to carry in 10 gallons of water a day just for my basic needs. That would be 3,650 gallon bottles a year!

On a recent trip to California, one way I saw to reduce the amount of water being flushed, is to use a water displacement bag (a special bag filled with water) in the tank or a simple bottle filled with water that keeps the tank from filling fully.

After my gallon jug experiment, I run taps on almost a trickle. I have started saving the final rinse water from my dishwashing and using it to soap the next set of dishes. If you have a garden, you could use non-soapy rinse water to water your plants or collect it to flush the toilet. Rain barrels could help collect water for outside use. Turning off the tap between soaping and rinsing during your bath or hand washing would save large amounts of water over the course of your life.



So...are you up for taking the Water Bucket challenge and becoming aware of just how much water you and your family use? We'd love to hear how it goes for you. Please send us a brief line to share your learning or reflection after taking the challenge.

~ A DEVOTEE FROM NEW ENGLAND



REPAIR AND REUSE

IN 2017, A BRACELET THAT I HAD BLESSED BY AMMA BROKE.

It was a small jade bangle, like the one Amma sometimes used to wear. I was very sad and did not want to throw it away. I decided that I needed to both fix it and be careful with it in the future, so as not to break it again. Things break, but with some care and love, we can sometimes fix them.



On doing some research, I found an Epoxy glue that can help attach non-porous things together. Using epoxy and tape to serve as an overnight clamp, I glued the bracelet back together strongly! Given this lesson from Amma on repairing items through Her bracelet, I've tried to fix many more things around the home that I previously thought were not fixable. Below, I am sharing some ideas on how we can repair items around the house to extend their lives and prevent waste. GreenFriends has previously published a lot about buying used items, so I will not discuss that much below. Instead, I will focus on a few ideas for extending the life and use of what we do have -- specifically, clothing, furniture, jewelry, dinnerware and plastic items -- with the hope that these tricks can apply to other items you might want to repair!

CLOTHES

Many of you may know that our Amma is wonderful at sewing. She sewed many face masks during the pandemic, and many ashramites and villages that Amma helps, engage in sewing as seva and trade. Although sewing clothes from scratch and raw materials may be difficult, sewing to repair and resize clothes is less difficult.



Amma sewing as seva after the 2005 Tsunami.

When we find holes in clothing, often we may be able to patch them using store-bought patches. Just lay the patch behind the hole and use a needle and thread to stitch it onto the clothing. You can also find iron-on patches online or possibly at the grocery store in the section that carries light-bulbs and safety pins. Patchwork clothing is in style these days, and you can even buy heart or animal shaped patches to plug up holes. Alternatively, you could cover a hole by using simple stitches in a matching thread color so it's not as visible. To patch holes in woolen items, you could use a product called [Woolfiller](#). It comes in multiple colors and does not require any knitting.

When mending rips or holes, if the fabric is too thin and developed a hole because it was very thin, a hole might pop up again and possibly in a different spot. In such cases, it may be best to reuse or responsibly dispose of the item. To reuse, clothes could be turned into mops or kitchen rags. If you have a sewing machine, which could be a handy tool to have around – even a simple, inexpensive second-hand sewing machine will work – you can “finish” or fold up the edges of the cut pieces to make nice looking kitchen rags.

To dispose fabric responsibly, if it's a piece of clothing made of natural fiber, you can compost it. Take all the elastic out first though, as that often is not compostable. The ability to dispose responsibly is why buying natural clothing is important. If it's not compostable, then consider recycling at a clothes recycling drop off. Many stores have these and you can search for them online.



Thread and button collection

In terms of resizing clothes, it is often possible to downsize clothes that we buy or receive second hand with some stitches, either by hand or with a sewing machine. It can take some trial and error and may not always turn out right the first time, but I can attest to the fact that even a novice can mend clothes! If we are trying to upsize the clothes, this may be possible, too, as there is often extra fabric included in clothing seams for this very reason. All the same, this task of upsizing may need a more experienced seamstress or tailor to help with, as it is more involved. Though we may be able to do many tasks with a needle and thread or a sewing machine, tailors are definitely our friends when it comes to repairing clothes! They can be very affordable, and also need business from time to time.

FURNITURE

When it comes to repairing furniture, a hammer, nails/screws, sandpaper, furniture brackets (like L-brackets), glue, a drill, and online search engines for ideas may all be useful tools to have on hand – and maybe a circular saw, if one is interested in trying out more involved furniture repair. If you're fixing wooden furniture, an L-bracket and some screws drilled in may help attach furniture back together. You might need to sand off some rough edges to make the fix, and be willing to have a less than perfect piece. Wood glue and clamps, or epoxy glue for plastic furniture (more about this below!) can be helpful for gluing together wooden parts that have split.

When we are fixing furniture, it's important to consider why the piece broke, and how to ensure it is safe from breakage in the future. We had a wobbly, somewhat broken, small teak shower bench we bought used on eBay. It arrived unexpectedly broken. We fixed it up with some wood glue, and repurposed it as an outside stand with a bowl of water on top for the birds. Although originally not our plan, we were able to fix it up and find an appropriate use for it – though it would not have been strong enough to be a shower bench, it found a useful home outside!



JEWELRY, DINNERWARE, AND PLASTIC

While stitches and screws may work for fixing up clothes and furniture respectively, for jewelry and plastic pieces not used for food or cooking, making repairs with epoxy glue could be one way to go. Epoxy glue is deemed food safe once fully cured. Some alternative glues to epoxy for food-contact items include aquarium-safe silicone. Aquarium-safe glues are generally very heavy duty and should hold.

Another product that is really useful when repairing items is called [Sugru](#). It is a moldable putty-type glue that hardens when dried. It can be used to repair many different materials. I have used it to repair sheathing around computer cables, patch a hole in my shoe and even repair a tear on the side of my car! The section between the arrows was completely disconnected and flapping around in the wind when I drove. A few packages of Sugru and a clamp, and the fix is barely noticeable. The product can be found at major Home Improvements stores and online.



All the same, once you fix up an item, as mentioned above, consider its post-repair use – if you think it's easy to break or aren't so sure of your fix-up method, consider a less exacting use for it. Also, sometimes an item can still function just as well without being fixed up! We have a couple of mugs at home that have broken handles – it's part of wear and tear sometimes!





PLASTIC CONTAINERS

It is inevitable that even with the best efforts, you may end up with takeout or packaging containers. I used a few of them when my plant needed to be repotted. It's quite exciting to watch the plant grow new roots through the sides of the container.

RENEW ITEMS BY REPAINTING THEM

I had a pair of burgundy vegan boots I loved. They got scuffed up badly from wear and tear. I had a few tubes of acrylic paint which I mixed together to match the color

of my boots pretty closely. Once or twice a year, I would paint my boots and they would be like new again until they finally fell apart beyond repair.

I had a small carry-on suitcase that I got for a bargain because it was almost neon yellow. It was easy to spot on the carousel for sure. Over the years, it got really dirty looking from being tossed around on all my flights. I used acrylic paint again and gave it a new life.

GENERAL IDEAS

I've recently been informed by another devotee that Repair Cafés are part of a cool new venture that exists in multiple countries, including the US. Many states in the US now have Repair Cafés where people can work together and use on-site tools, materials and expertise to repair items while bonding together. It is generally free to enter a Repair Café and fix things up. Find out if you have one nearby on this website: <https://www.repaircafeusa.org>

Finally, budget permitting, let us also be willing to seek out tradespeople to help us fix broken items. Jewelry repair shops, tailors, electronics repair shops and more all exist, and the people who work there will certainly have creative solutions to help us repair and reuse the items we have on hand. Hopefully we will have many repaired items on hand to show Amma in our hearts, and in person over the next years to come!

You could use your cosmetic and other containers to refill products from bulk stores. [This website](#) has lists of Bring Your Own Container (BYOC) stores in every state. However, due to Covid, most of them are most likely not accepting BYOCs. However, it can be a reference for the future.

~ DIKSHA, MARYLAND

* Any reference in this newsletter to a specific product, process, or service does not constitute or imply an endorsement by GreenFriends North America or MA Center.

UPDATE FOR 'EMBRACING THE TREES'



A TREE PLANTING INITIATIVE OF GREENFRIENDS NORTH AMERICA

Encouraged by Amma's continued focus on tree planting, in our last newsletter GreenFriends North America introduced the Embracing the Trees (ETT) initiative to support all MA Centers and satsangs as we work together to plant as many trees as we can.

For the introduction to the ETT initiative, see [here](#).

From the Vedas (between 1200 and 800 BCE):

“The earth provides surface for vegetation which controls the heat buildup. The herbs and plants having union with sun rays provide congenial atmosphere for the life to survive”
(Atarva Veda 5.28.5)

“Do not poison (pollute) water and do not harm or cut the trees”
(Yajur Veda 6.33)

The ETT initiative involves regional resource teams working through the regional MA Center ashrams (including Amma Centers and Amma Foundation of Canada) to support tree planting activities among satsangs and devotees in their region. It is envisioned to be an interconnected web of support and information among the MA Centers and satsangs, sharing information and expertise. The website greenfriendsna.org is building a section to support this web of tree planting activity among satsangs.

During our recent check-in call on December 12th, each regional team gave updates about their research and activities. All the teams are enthusiastically getting their plans together, making contacts with regional organizations, and gathering volunteers to help make it all come together.

There are still ways to be involved, even from home, during these covid times.

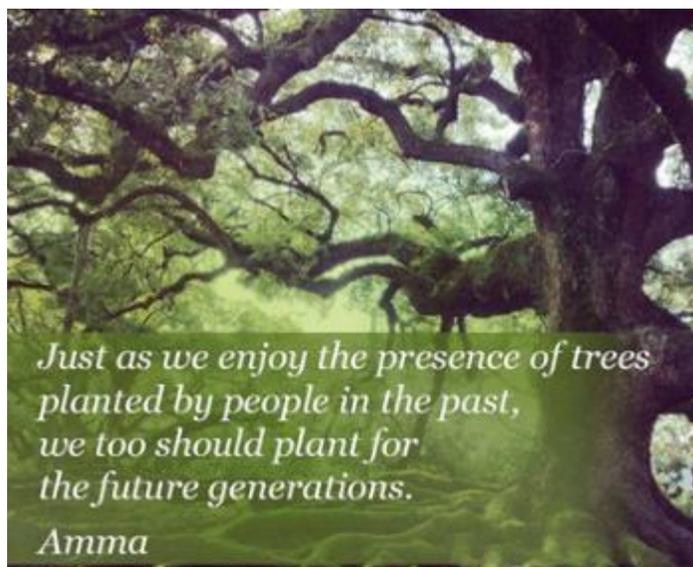
To learn about what is happening in your region and get involved contact your regional ETT coordinators!

Contact List:

REGIONAL CENTER	REGION	EMAIL
Amma Foundation of Canada	Canada	trees.ammatoronto@ammagroups.org
Amma Center Iowa	With Midwest Region, MAC Chicago	trees.ammacenteriowa@ammagroups.org
Amma Center New Mexico	Southwest Region: New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming	trees.macnm@macenters.org
MAC Atlanta	Southeast Region: North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida	trees.macatlanta@macenters.org

MAC Chicago and MAC Michigan	Midwest Region: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan	MAC Chicago: trees.macc@macenters.org MAC Michigan: trees.macmi@macenters.org
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MAC San Ramon	Northern California Region: California (Northern), Nevada, Hawaii	trees.macsr@macenters.org
MAC Seattle	Northwest Region: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska	trees.macseattle@macenters.org

With Amma's grace, may we join together as an interdependent cooperative web of life-sustaining actions for Mother Earth and future generations.



**Swamini Ambikamrita Prana
and GreenFriends North America**

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Vishwan Wingard, Santa Fe
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