



2019 NEWSLETTER

EARTH ALMANAC



Earth Education



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TRANSFORMING THE WORLD THROUGH EDUCATION



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STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS, CREATING HOPE

WINTER MEDITATIONS

BY LAURA PETERSON

LIVING EARTH CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Greetings friends of the Living Earth,

Being a transplant from Sunny Colorado to Snowy Minnesota, I loathed my first few winters out here in Mankato. I remember thinking one day as my eyelashes froze and cold lashed at my face, that the wind seemed angry with me... with us... with

everything and the Winter here was just plain cruel and dark. What can I say? It was not love at first sight.

True. The environment needs Winter. The numbing cold that freezes our fingers not only keeps invasive pests and bacteria at bay and a good frost and snow pack insulates the soil helping it to keep and store moisture for the summer months. The same ice that crashes our cars and threatens to break every bone in our body with one slip, prevents erosion and keeps water levels higher. The darkness that seems to blanket everything for months, keeps the animals still in their hibernation, not waking them until it is warmer with more stores of food available. Winter is as essential to life as the light is for the seed to burst forth.

As the years have worn on and my relationship with Minnesota and her Winter has deepened, I now understand that what I mistook as cruelty was actually powerful life energy creating friction and movement. The darkness, not the shade of malice, but the obscurity of rest- a time for hibernation and rejuvenation.

And fine, I admit it. I need Winter too. The numbing cold brings me in closer (literally and figuratively) with loved ones. The wind lashing at the window- reminds me of the warmth inside me and of the love that surrounds me. The dark invites me to venture deep to the caverns of the soul where I find myself, an old friend, and learn about her still. My love for Winter now is not the passionate kind of new lovers, rather the kind of longtime friends that who (though occasionally annoyed with a "cold" shoulder or two) accept

BOARD OF DIRECTORS UPDATE

- Board Meetings are scheduled for the second Monday of every other month.
- Next Board Meeting is Monday, March 11th
- Board Retreat scheduled for March 22-23
- Welcome New Members - Melissa Martensen and Joyce Prahm!

and understand each other without condition while honoring the essential purpose each one brings.

Winter has something to teach us. That just as in nature, in life there are seasons. Some of those seasons stun us with their force and discomfort, others serenade us with their warmth and song. But all seasons come with a beautifully essential life force that welcomes us to the rhythm of all things.

And just when we think we cannot take one more inch of snow, one more degree lower, one more ice shard, the cloud breaks and the sun peaks through thawing the ground and beckoning bird song.

We are excited to celebrate new seasons as the Living Earth Center and look forward to connecting and sharing common ground with you throughout all seasons of life. Please visit our website at livingearthcentermn.org to catch up on news and events and remember to like our social media sites on Facebook and Instagram!

Warm regards,
Laura

LIVING EARTH CENTER SNAPSHOT 2018

Total Funds Raised: \$10,644.97 (Our biggest fundraising year ever! Thank You!)

Total Volunteer Hours Given: 306 !!

Total Pounds of Produce Donated: 958 lbs !!



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Laura Peterson

PROGRAM DIRECTOR
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Crunch.

Though I can't see her, I know that my three year-old daughter has made her way into the apple orchard. I think to myself how lucky we are to live on a farm where when hungry, my daughter simply goes to the nearest fruit tree picks the biggest, fattest, sweetest apple and eats it to her heart's delight. The value of having freshly grown food not only reflects in the overall health and wellbeing of her body, but also her spirit.

The smile that comes with the satisfaction of picking and eating the best apple is as beneficial as the nutrients that come with it. Unfortunately, my daughter is in a small population of children that have access to fresh fruits and vegetables that are minimally processed.

According to *Lessons from the Lunchroom, Childhood Obesity, School Lunch and the Way to a Healthier Future* (2015), the average U.S child eats only one-third of the fruits and vegetables recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. For children

coming from lower income backgrounds, this is especially true as they often lack access to healthier goods and produce. Traditionally, the USDA has administered school meal programs that provide funding to support free and reduced meals for these students.

Unfortunately, even in schools that in recent years have attempted to provide well balanced meals, much in part due to the Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 that that required the USDA to update its nutritional standards for school lunch, there still remains a gap in how and where food is sourced. Many school districts are locked into strict contracts with distributors that only offer cheap produce that is frozen or highly preserved.

The sad reality is that in addition to never knowing the satisfaction of picking and

eating an apple right off the tree, many children also may never know what an apple that isn't four months old and coated in wax tastes like.

You would think living in a rural environment such as Southern Minnesota with some of the highest number of acres devoted to cropland in the nation, that access to fresh produce would not be an issue. However, as farms grow bigger, smaller family owned farms that provide diversified crops such as fruits, vegetables, and livestock are at risk.

Producers who focus much of their resources on edible crops with smaller yield struggle to connect with local consumers and to compete with larger multinational producers that have a monopoly on local grocery and convenience stores.

Here you have a convergence of two incredibly important issues. The solution is both intertwined and collaborative. There is a national

movement that is gaining momentum known as the *Farm to School Movement*.

Farm to School integrates core elements of allocating funds and resources for districts to expand curriculum to include education activities for students to learn about food, agriculture and nutrition, purchase, serve and promote local foods within their own cafeterias, and most importantly to provide opportunities for students develop a stronger relationship with food by growing their own in school gardens.

The cool thing about the Farm to School Movement?

Everyone wins.

Children have access to fresh nutritious meals in addition to learning about the

value of farming and agriculture in their community, small family farmers gain access to an immediate and stable market, and the local food economy grows, strengthening the community at large.

Our friends at Land Stewardship Project are currently organizing a number of producers and advocates in a campaign for state legislators to pass a bill this year that creates our own statewide Farm to School Program.

The bill would create a program in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. This program would reimburse schools for their local foods purchases. It would create support positions to help our schools connect to the program and our local farmers.

In joining the Land Steward Project in their support of a Farm to School Initiative, Living Earth Center advocates for a collaborative community effort to build stronger local communities starting with food. I hope that much like my daughter, other children have the ability to not only bite into an apple that was grown a few miles away, but also feel the joy of eating a sun-ripened tomato plucked directly off the bush.

What can you do?

- Reach out to your local representatives to ask for their support for a state wide Farm to School initiative.
- Sign the Land Stewardship Project's Local Foods Petition, found on their website: www.landstewardshipproject.org
- Participate in discussions with local school boards about incorporating more local foods into their cafeteria menus.
- Have children contact their own administrators about seeking grants and funding to start their own school garden.
- Stay in touch through social media and Living Earth Center's website for advocacy alerts that keep you up to date about local and state wide issues.

In joining the Land Stewardship Project in their support of a Farm to School Initiative, Living Earth Center advocates for a collaborative community effort to build stronger local communities, starting with food.

SAVE THE DATE

Please check our website at livingearthcentermn.org for more details and registration information for these and other upcoming workshops and events

Sunday, February 17th, Mankato Area Seed at Food Swap followed by screening of *Seed: The Untold Story* – Good Counsel Conference Center



Saturday, April 13th, 10:00-4:00, Shaping our Future: A Timely Community Conversation on Our Future Community – Good Counsel Conference Center



Saturday, April 27th, 10:00-2:00, Annual Community Day of Service and Friendship in the Garden – Big Red Barn

Tuesday, April 30th, 6:00-7:00, Native Bee Workshop - Big Red Barn

Tuesday, May 7th, 7:30-8:30, Night Hike - Big Red Barn

Friday, May 17th, 5:00-7:00, Wine and Cheese Pairing Workshop – Big Red Barn

Friday, June 21st, 5:00-9:00, Summer Solstice Celebration. We will have live music, drum circle, and fire dancers! Plan to attend and celebrate the sun's longest day with us! – Big Red Barn and Community Garden Grounds



Little Sprouts and Living Earth Gardeners Summer Garden Classes
Select dates May – September
Register through Community Ed at:
www.mankatocer.com

Tuesday, July 9th, 6:00-7:00, Wild Edibles Workshop - Big Red Barn

Saturday, September 28th, 10:00-11:00, Monarch Tagging - Big Red Barn

PARTNER WITH US ON OUR GOOD WORK BECOME A LIVING EARTH CENTER SPONSOR!

Through outreach and educational programs the Living Earth Center touches the lives of hundreds of people right here in the greater Mankato area. Our organization needs your support. We work in the local community to educate about the Earth issues you care about.

We re-connect people to the natural world and their desire to do better. We reach children, elders and everyone in between. We provide a perspective on Earth care, climate issues and community resilience that is unique and much-needed. We work at the grassroots level for systemic change, nurturing others and inspiring their growth.

We invite you to help sponsor our work and make a donation today! Choose your level and know whatever the amount, large or small, you will be aiding Living Earth Center and making a difference in our community.

Donations will go to Living Earth Center's general budget fund. We are deeply rooted and sustained by your support. Thank you!

CUT ALONG LINE

DONATION PLEDGE
CARD

RETURN TODAY!

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

LIVING EARTH CENTER
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MANKATO, MN 56001

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www.livingearthcentermn.org

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A NATURAL EPIPHANY

BY CHERYL LEUTJEN

On this day in early January, my thoughts turn to resolutions, intentions and wild schemes for loving Earth even more in 2019. Yes, I am still mulling over my goals for the new year. I resolutely hold off on setting my goals for each year until Epiphany, which, by common convention, gives me until January 6. Partly it's because I'm just not ready on New Year's Day. The rush of the holiday leaves me feeling so sapped that I need a few solid days of introspection before making any commitment that will shape the entire rest of the year—or as long as my attention span lasts, at least. But I prefer to tell myself that I'm waiting for the Wise Ones to arrive, bringing gifts of wisdom and wealth to inform my aspirations.

I'm an ardent fan (zealot, rabid fanatic, depending on who you ask) of list-making, and the traditions of marking the fresh new year give me ample excuse to start a number of them.

- Top Ten Ideas for Book Promoting in 2019!
- Healthy New Recipes My Family Will Love!
- List of Junk Drawers I will Tackle in 2019! (Yes, there are enough to inspire a whole list. Please don't judge.) And, of course:
- Ways To Get Greener This Year!

It's all very exciting, if you're a list maker like me, involving a flurry of amassing fresh journals, bunches of colored pens and pencils, several stencils, my entire collection of rubber stamps and six acid-free, colored stamp pads. Like a kid on a Halloween candy sugar rush, I have to do 100 jumping jacks just to settle down enough to sit at my desk.

And yet, I hear murmurs from the Magi to take several deep breaths before I relegate my love for Earth to a single page (and 12 brilliant colors!) in this year's edition of the "turn-over-a-new-leaf" journal. Will a frenetic list-making session give me the answers I seek?

This inquiry reminds me of a question at the Earth Conference last November, when I was honored to be one of the presenters. Late in the day, after all the orations and most of the discussions were complete, an attendee asked, "When I walk out of this door today, what should I DO?"

I still remember how much I wished I could recite a "Top Ten to Save the World" list. How I wanted to give a concrete answer like "replace all your lightbulbs with LEDs, and all will be well. World Saved. The End." Because that's what I'd like to hear, too. What's more, I'd like to believe that such a simple solution exists. But the threats to Life on Earth as We Know It seem so dire and spiraling out of control that I find myself doubting there's anything I can do that will make a difference. Will walking to the store, instead of driving, really do anything about the forest fires ravaging my state? Am I even willing to turn off the air conditioning to reduce my dependence on fossil fuels?

But when I plant my despairing self under a blossoming pomegranate tree and discover a buzzing swarm of bees overhead, I'm rapt. I'm blissfully free of the seemingly nonstop tide of Bad News for Life on Earth. I'm simply witnessing these busy creatures,

whose industry makes possible a good chunk of the human food supply, hard at work. None are bemoaning the fate of their kind, with so many dying in droves. Each of them showed up to do what bees do, employing all the skills and abilities that Nature has given them. The bees remind me that I have the skills and abilities to do my own work—and to surrender the travesties that are not mine to address.



From this state of nature-inspired reverie, I gladly get myself to the farmer's market to purchase locally-grown, in-season produce—without any of the resentment I feel when I force myself there because it's on my To-Do list. When I hold a golden-flecked, crimson apple in my hand, I see the weathered hands that tend the 100-year-old orchard. I smell the musk of earth fed by a hundred years of moldering leaves. I honor all whose labor delivered this heirloom package of deliciousness to me. And I'm grateful for this simplest of fruits. My heart swells with hope, a rare and precious experience in these days of too much awful news.

So that was my response to the plaintive question at the Earth Conference—and I offer to anyone else who's wondering what on Earth any of us can do that will make a difference. Walk out your own front door or stop on the side of the road to admire the plucky robin foraging for food on a snowy morning. Allow your thoughts to quiet and embrace stillness. Be present. Notice. Breathe. Give your senses full rein to take in the experience. What do you see, feel, hear, taste, touch? Release, if you will, any expectations of instantaneous, mind-blowing divinations.

Because I don't mean to imply that the winter robin will share any insights on the paper-or-plastic dilemma. What I am suggesting is that witnessing this courageous featherweight just might inspire your own tenacity to tackle a challenge that's been in the back of your mind. Or perhaps you'll carry the image of the courageous robin with you, and lean into his strength when you falter in your own endeavors to fill your heart with hope. Or perhaps, like that time I stopped to commune with Nature on the side of the freeway (not advised or legal, as it turns out), you'll make a new friend in uniform when a car with flashing lights pulls up behind you. That's the thing I've discovered about contemplative time in Nature; you just never know who or what's going to turn up.

In any case, I hope you experience a moment of Wonder. Because that's the best antidote to despair and doubt that I've ever experienced. Wonder and its cousin Awe give me the spaciousness and the delirious audacity to believe that, yes, indeed, picking up this piece of litter means I'm making a difference. And that belief is what I need to commit to greater challenges, with a smile on my face and love in my heart.

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NEW GARDENER SPOTLIGHT



Mary Walker has lived many places throughout the US but most recently came to Mankato from Michigan. Though she enjoys growing tomatoes in her community garden plot, she really loves eating them with basil, a little olive oil and mozzarella cheese on a plate next to vase of freshly picked flowers.

Mary came to the Living Earth Garden in the Spring of 2018 and in addition to enjoying the community aspect of the Garden- sharing gardening tips, exchanging plants, weeding and debugging potatoes, talking recipes, and swatting mosquitoes in unison, she also has much to offer the Community.

As a master gardener in Michigan, she worked with a group designing and planting large flowerbeds along a biking/hiking trail. There was no irrigation, only a water spigot a half a mile away. During the project, she became very interested in native plants that, once established, needed minimal watering and took on

the challenge of creating a flowerbed that had something in bloom from spring through fall. Through experimenting with new plants and incorporating herbs into the beds, and enjoying the fall grand finale of several varieties of sunflowers, she and the group were able to attract birds, butterflies, and all sorts of pollinators as well- a lovely bonus. Mary has brought her experience to the Garden volunteering her time and resources to plant a designated Pollinator Plot in the North Garden Area and helping to maintain the Children's Peace Garden.

At the moment, she is reading *The River of Consciousness* by Oliver Sacks. In it he says plants and animals, humans included share 70 % of their DNA. In her mind, this little prayer says it all: May we always walk gently upon this earth, in right relationship, nurtured by your love, taking only what we need, giving back to the earth in gratitude, sharing what we have, honoring all with reverence, reconciling and healing, mindful of those who will come after, and recognizing our proper place as part of, not apart from, your creation.

She looks forward to making new connections and sharing common ground again this summer in the Living Earth Garden.

A LOOK BACK – 2018 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



In September we played host to a conversation about ways we can create a farm-friendly community in the Greater Mankato area.



With DNR Naturalist Scott Kuldulka we held a monarch butterfly tagging workshop in the Community Gardens.

Wow! What a year it has been. With the hard work, help and generosity of so many we are growing into our new phase of being a non-profit!

Here are some highlights:

- Became a registered 501c3
- Changed our name to Living Earth Center
- Got a new look and logo
- Created a website!
- Received our first online donations!
- Received our first online registrations for events!
- Developed a strategic plan
- Participated in our first #Give to the Max Day and Giving Tuesday fundraising events
- Held our first annual Community Picnic
- Logged over 300 volunteer hours
- **Raised \$10,644- the most we've ever raised!**
- Welcomed some great new gardeners to the Living Earth Community Garden
- Welcomed some great new Board Members
- Held the 13th Annual Earth Conference



We taught a kombucha brewing class in August. *Be kind to your mother!*

- Welcomed in the light with our Winter Solstice Celebration
- Educated nearly 20 students in our Children's Garden Classes
- Collaborated with other organizations such as Roots Shoots and Boots, Transition Mankato, the U of M Extension program and many others on events and programming

We look forward to sharing common ground with you again in 2019! Please let us know if you have any ideas, suggestions, comments or feedback. You are the Living Earth Center.

TIME, TALENT, AND TREASURE: THANK YOU!

Living Earth Center could not operate without the donations of time, talent, and treasure from such a vibrant and generous community of supporters.

We extend our sincerest thanks to each and every one of you.

Financial Contributions

Jim and Kay Ackil
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BOOK REVIEW: NOURISHMENT

BY MELISSA MARTENSEN

While the old adage “you can’t judge a book by its cover” holds, I can attest that one can definitely be *drawn* to a book by its cover. One look at that gorgeous sheep on the front of Fred Provenza’s new book *Nourishment: What Animals Can Teach Us About Discovering Our Nutritional Wisdom* and my interest was piqued.



Provenza, a retired animal behaviorist, draws on his over 30 years of research to show how sheep, goats, and other foraging herbivores rely on feedback on a cellular level to make nutritious food choices.

He cites a study early in his career involving Angora goats and blackbrush plants. Provenza hypothesized that the goats would prefer eating the younger blackbrush bushes because they are high in protein. Observation showed that in fact the animals completely avoided the young plants, opting for the older bushes which are lower in protein. He argues that in the past this behavior would have given stock to the argument that livestock are stupid and need the wisdom of humans to

make proper nutritional choices.

In fact, upon further study Provenza learned young blackbrush, while high in protein, are also high the secondary compound tannin which is extremely hard for animals to digest. So by choosing the older bushes in larger quantities they were avoiding the negative effects of tannin, while still gaining protein.

Provenza delves deeply (yet still accessibly) into the world of these secondary compounds in plants. He explains how they generate feedback in animals (including humans) at a cellular level, giving the body all the information needed to make custom nutritious choices.

He argues that since the foods making up the bulk of modern-day human diets are highly processed and modified, they have lost the richness of secondary compounds disconnecting this important feedback loop. “Human food systems, based on *food quantity* rather than on *biochemical richness*, have a maladaptive feedback loop built into them,” he writes.

He concludes the first half of the book by saying that: “In coming to rely on advice from authorities, we fail to consider a crucial point, one the body of every wild insect, bird, fish, and mammal who ever roamed the planet comprehends from personal experience: The body was the

first molecular biologist, geneticist, physiologist, nutritionist, pharmacist, and physician. A healthy body knows what to do with wholesome foods.”

The second half of the book shifts focus from nourishment and food to look at wider issues concerning modern society. Provenza discusses topics beginning with supplements, moving to placebo effects and cancer treatment, to challenges of conducting non-biased research when science is funded by corporations, to questioning the idea of what it means to scientifically *know* something. These are all interesting topics in their own right, but I felt they strayed far from the books purported topic of *rediscovering nutritional wisdom*.

This book is at its most powerful when it is fulfilling its main mission – making a case for humans to rediscover the nourishment found in whole, natural, unprocessed foods. As Provenza says, “To counter foods and food environments designed by industry to entice us to eat the harmful products they sell, we must learn to forage selectively... Over time, one child and one family at a time, from the bottom up, we can wean ourselves of processed foods. In the process we can create a culture that knows how to combine wholesome foods into meals that nourish and satiate”

LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



My name is Jessi Klitzke. I'm a Mankato native. I started drawing and crafting at a very young age. I went on to study commercial art and graduated in 2009. I have been a selling artist for the past several years. I teach art classes at Maker Space and am also an artist for Salvage Sister's shop here in Mankato. I love to paint and be able to work with so many awesome creative minds. I'm best known for my floral paintings but I do enjoy painting other things too. I continue to study new techniques and mediums any chance I get.



REAL FOOD FOR REAL PEOPLE

Roasted Corn with Wild Greens Pesto from *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*

- 4 to 6 large ears fresh, sweet corn
- Sunflower or hazelnut oil
- 2 to 3 T Wild Greens Pesto

Prepare hot charcoal grill or preheat the broiler to high. Shuck the corn and rub lightly with oil. Set the corn directly on the grill or under the broiler and roast, rolling the cobs occasionally, until all sides are nicely browned, about 5 to 7 minutes. Serve with dollops of Wild Greens Pesto.

Wild Greens Pesto

- 2c wild green, some combination of sorrel, dandelion greens, purslane, lamb's quarters, wild mint, and mustard
- 1 wild onion or 1/4c chopped shallot
- 1/4c toasted sunflower seeds
- 2/3 to 3/4c sunflower or hazelnut oil
- Pinch salt and maple sugar

Pound together the greens, onion or shallot, and sunflower seeds with a mortar and pestle or by whizzing in a food processor. Slowly work in the oil and season to taste with salt and a little maple sugar.

