

ecology park news



WINTER 2011



Do not follow where the path
may lead.

Go instead where there is no
path and leave a trail.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

tidbits

A New Look for the Newsletter

This issue is a step into the modern world. With a fresh new design and the ability to print in colour with photographs, we hope you will enjoy these new tools while still recognizing our traditional roots. Hearty thanks to Valerie Strain of Janus Design for the lovely newsletter design that launches our third decade. Would you prefer to receive the newsletter digitally? Just tick the email box on your membership renewal form, and we'll shift your name to the digital newsletter list. Soon our newsletters will also be posted on the Ecology Park website, so look for them there.

Membership Renewals

Ecology Park memberships are based on the calendar year, so they are now due for renewal. Check the enclosed insert for more information.

Still Thriving... Twenty Years Later!

It's hard to believe, but the first "Ecology Garden" newsletter was distributed in January of 1991. That's exactly twenty years ago.

At that point, we were gearing up for the very first season of an educational garden in Peterborough. Who would have thought we'd still be thriving so many years later, with an expanded focus and larger location than the original site on Rogers Street!

This milestone is cause for great celebration, thoughtful reflection on the past, and intense curiosity about where we'll be twenty years from now. Since few of you know the background of the Ecology Park and many people ask about it, this 20th anniversary of our newsletter seems a perfect time to look at our journey so far, and ponder future goals and directions.

A Walk Down Memory Lane

In the winter of 1991, a small group of people met at the Kawartha World Issues Centre (then on Murray St.) to discuss the potential of an organic food garden to teach local folks how to grow their own food, and to explore gardening without toxic chemicals. A request to the City's Parks and Forestry Division for a piece of land resulted in an offer to share space at the Rogers Street community garden.

With startup grants from the City of Peterborough's Sustainable Development Committee, Environment Canada's Environment Week Fund, and two student staffers through the provincial Environmental Youth Corps, the project was off and running.

On a plot just 25' X 100', the first Ecology Garden was born, growing a variety of vegetables, demonstrating raised beds, square foot gardening, trellises, mulching, and using compost as a soil amendment. The Ecology garden became the home of the City's first compost demonstration site, sponsored by the Waste Management Division.

Educational workshops were on Saturday mornings on topics ranging from building birdhouses to starting a backyard composter. A weekly summer children's program brought many local youngsters to the garden, eager to help weed, water, and of course, taste the harvest. Feedback from visitors was encouraging and positive, and strong friendships were built with many residents of the senior's apartments across the street.

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Costumes are perennial favourites with kids of all ages. Dramatic entertainment was a highlight of the 1999 Canoeathon - one of our many fundraisers.

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That first year on Rogers' Street we also met George and Stella Barber, a couple of the best gardeners you could ever meet. They have become long-term friends of the Ecology Park, helping in many ways over the years and sharing their vast knowledge with an unparalleled generosity.

At that time, the term "organic" was considered very counter-culture. Since we wanted to present this approach as mainstream, we often used the term "sustainable" or "ecological" to describe this new/old philosophy of gardening, stressing the positive impacts of building long-term soil health and natural pest control.

In the next few years, the "Ecology Garden" nested under the collective wing of Peterborough Green-Up, and became a cornerstone of its greenspace programs. In the early nineties, Green-Up coordinated a host of gardening demonstration sites around town. As the growing number of these sites began to create an unmanageable workload to coordinate, thinking shifted towards a centralized showcase of ideas for land stewardship. Happily, the City offered the use of 5 acres of Beavermead Park as a location for creating an "Ecology Park." We've never looked back.

The tree nursery was started at the Beavermead site in 1993, and in 1994, the food garden moved from Rogers St. to Beavermead as well. More theme gardens were started, including a wildlife garden, herb garden, children's garden and compost education area. Bud Wildman (Ontario Minister of the Environment at the time) toured the park that summer, reinforcing the importance of local action in sustainability and environmental education.

Gradually, new gardens emerged, including a Low Water Garden sponsored by Peterborough Utilities, and a butterfly garden, sponsored by the Harris family. The woodland, shoreline and prairie naturalization projects were all planted with native plants grown in our own plant nursery. Children's programs, adult workshops, newsletters, volunteers and community support underpinned the Ecology Park as it grew and adapted through the years.

When financial times became extremely tough in the late 1990s with the shift to the Harris government and the withdrawal of provincial funding to community environmental programs, Peterborough stepped forward and helped the Park survive. The City and Peterborough Utilities provided seed funding, while local donors, volunteers and Garden Market patrons helped us move beyond survival towards full, flourishing bloom.



Much has changed over twenty years. Today, "organic" is a well-known and respected term, and organic food is justly getting a great deal of popular attention. We have moved from municipal bans on cosmetic pesticides to province-wide regulations. Tests of waterways in Ontario municipalities during 2010 showed an 80% reduction in residues of common yard pesticides over the levels found before the bans. Native plants are gaining recognition as a must-have element of garden planning.

Is the job finished yet? While much progress has been made, there is still a role for the Ecology Park in providing quality environmental education for children, being a trusted resource centre for the community and providing leadership for continued progress towards wise and sustainable use of the land in our care. Urban forestry, land use and development, biodiversity and food security are just a few of the pressing issues that require attention. With the continued support of so many individuals and local groups, the next twenty years will be just as fruitful.

Early Birding

by Sue Prentice

In January, the chickadees started their annual territorial sing off. You may have heard them; not the chickadee-dee-dee that is their common song for daily flock interactions, but a two-toned "spring's here!" This is the song that the males use to establish territories and lure in females for the mating season. As chickadees are

non-migratory birds overwintering here in larger family flocks, their mating rituals begin a little early. As the day lengthens and the temperatures climb ever so steadily, you will notice that chickadee song activity begins to dominate the airwaves.

Soon the chickadees will soon be joined by the Northern Cardinal, whose song, sung from the highest perches of still-naked trees is a steady, repetitive "purdy purdy purdy purdy." Not long after the cardinals, the House Finches will join with their rolling melody. These are signs that we are indeed coming out the other side of winter and soon the snow will melt and the migrants will start to arrive home for the mating season.

It also means that we are busy planning the first feature-length bird watching for beginners course. In honour of the Ecology Park's 20th anniversary, Andrew Jobes and I are responding to many requests for a more extensive program. The details are still in the works, but the program will include a classroom component to cover the basics, such as what to consider when selecting binoculars and bird guides, and how to use these two important pieces of equipment. We will teach the skills needed to go out into the wild, or your backyard, on a great birdwatching adventure. The program will also include several field trips so that you can practice your new skills with guidance. Stay tuned for more information. And, in honor of the park's 20th anniversary, all funds raised will go to the Urban Ecology Centre fund.



Living on the Edge

by Andrew Jobes

What do you think a Blue Whale, a Snow Leopard, a Peregrine Falcon, a Monarch (butterfly), and a Snapping Turtle have in common? Let's see... two mammals, a bird, an insect, and a reptile... one that lives in the ocean, one in Asia, three in Ontario. Give up? They're all species at risk. Most of you probably knew that the whale and the leopard are species at risk, but some of you might be surprised to learn that there are species at risk in Ontario at all, and even more surprised to learn that there are actually over 200 of them. Other Ontario species at risk include the Wolverine, the American Badger, the Barn Owl, the Woodland Caribou, and the Polar Bear (yup... there are Polar Bears in Ontario!).

So what's a species at risk? It's a species with populations small enough that they are at risk of becoming extinct, which means that they would no longer live anywhere on the planet. Ontario has an Endangered Species Act, which identifies four levels of risk:

- Extirpated: a species that used to live in the wild in Ontario but doesn't any more. These species still exist somewhere in the world, but not in Ontario.
- Endangered: a species that lives in Ontario that will soon become extirpated if immediate action is not taken to prevent that from happening.
- Threatened: a species that is likely to become endangered if appropriate actions are not taken.
- Special Concern: a species that is at risk of becoming threatened.

There are many reasons why species can be at risk. Many of them have lost much of their habitat from human activities. Some have been outcompeted for food, space, and other habitat needs by invasive species that have come to Ontario from other places. Yet others are facing diseases. A few are simply at risk because they are rare and will never be abundant no matter what we do. Almost all will likely be affected by climate change, as well.

There are several species at risk in the Peterborough area, including the Northern Map Turtle and the Snapping Turtle, the Butternut (a tree that is suffering from a disease called Butternut canker), the Chimney Swift (a cigar-shaped bird that flies over downtown Peterborough all day during the summer), and the Monarch. We will explore these and other species at risk in more depth in future Ecology Park newsletters as we continue a series on "Species at Risk".



Green Infrastructure in Ontario

Peterborough is proud to be one of six Ontario communities to host a day-long workshop on "Green Infrastructure" a progressive approach to urban planning that is relatively new in Ontario. The economic value of greenspaces to communities is finally beginning to be measured, with some startling results. Urban forests, greenways, parks, green roofs, community gardens and other greenspaces provide enormous services such as cleaning the air, absorbing rainwater, reducing energy needs, absorbing greenhouse gases and providing food. However, the term "infrastructure" has traditionally referred only to roads, sewers, lights, sidewalks and other built structures. With growing awareness of the value of greenspaces to communities, there is a corresponding understanding of the need to adequately invest in preserving and enhancing this leafy green infrastructure.

On Tuesday, March 8, Peterborough will host a day-long training workshop for local professionals on understanding the principles of green infrastructure and how to include it in urban planning, legislation and budgeting. The cost for the day is \$95 plus tax, which includes lunch and a comprehensive training manual. For further information, visit the website of the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition at www.greeninfrastructureontario.org.

tidbits

Urban Forest News

Peterborough's Urban Forest Program has been a satellite of Ecology Park programs since its creation through Ontario Trillium Foundation support over three years ago. This winter, we're networking with community groups from all over the province to work towards province-wide programs and targets. We're contributing to a new website which showcases community initiatives (www.ufsn.ca), hosting the Green Infrastructure Workshop in Peterborough on March 8, and attending a province-wide planning session in Toronto on February 26. Here at home, we're putting the finishing touches on a new Tree Selection factsheet, planning a community tree planting on the Parkway Trail this spring (tentatively May 7), and planning to work with a neighbourhood association this summer to do tree inventories and follow-up planting and tree care programs. It will be another busy year!

Seedy Sunday

Peterborough's 2011 Seed Exchange

March 13th – 1-4pm

St. James United Church

(221 Romaine St.)

FREE Admission & Workshops

*Come out to trade or buy seeds & get excited for Spring.

Greenhouse Startup

In March, we'll be starting seedlings again in the greenhouse at Trent University's Environmental Science building. Our crew of volunteers usually meets on Wednesday mornings. While working space is limited in the greenhouse, if you're interested in joining us, contact Cathy Dueck at 705-745-3238 ext. 212 or email cathy@cogeco.net.



Green Roof at Mountain Equipment Co-op in Toronto

Dreaming of the Future...

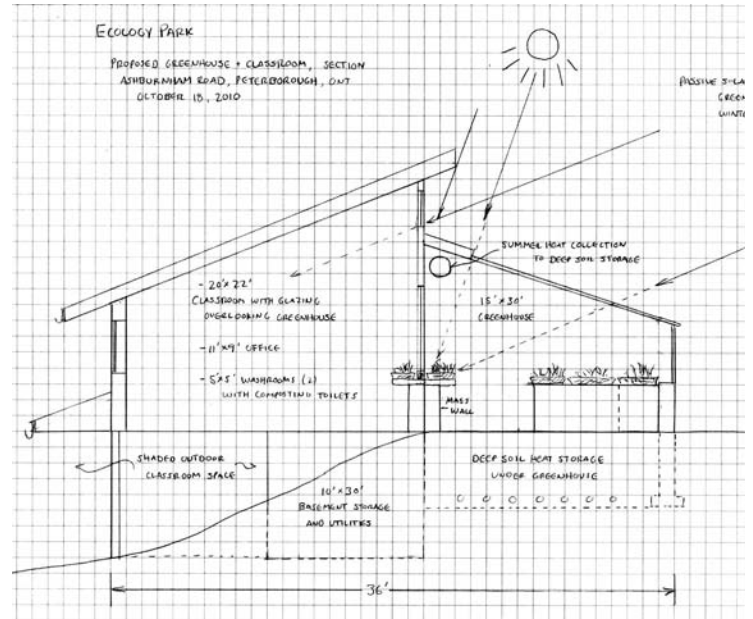
an Urban Ecology Centre for Peterborough

Thinking about the next twenty years has started an exciting process in motion. We've always been challenged by the lack of greenhouse and indoor meeting/teaching space at the park. School programs are often cancelled on rainy days, and tiny tots can get very cold and uncomfortable in spring and fall with no indoor warm-up space.

A few years ago we looked into the potential for constructing a small building/greenhouse inside the Ecology Park, but since we're in the floodplain, no permanent structure could be built. Last spring, the new Willowcreek Trail was built to extend the Rotary Trail from the Ecology Park eastwards to the Willowcreek Plaza. This drew our attention to the space on the east side of Ashburnham Drive, part of which is outside the floodplain, and owned by the City of Peterborough.

After speaking with Chris Magwood of Sir Sandford Fleming College's Sustainable Building Program, we're once again dreaming of a classroom and meeting space with an attached greenhouse. If we're selected as the class project for 2012, labour and building design would be donated by the program, and we would need to fundraise for the building materials. We're now seeking permission in principle from the City to proceed with plans. This involves a whole series of applications for approvals and permits. Although still very early in the dreaming stage, we wanted to share this exciting development with you, our loyal supporters.

An Urban Ecology Centre could be a headquarters for many stewardship programs such as urban forestry, ecological gardening, trail groups, a heritage tree seed bank, community gardening and Ecology Park workshops and children's programs. Can you help make our dreams come true? We'd love to chat.



**Peterborough's Ecology Park
is on Ashburnham Drive
beside Peterborough Utilities**

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705-745-3238 fax: 705-745-4413

www.greenup.on.ca
ecologypark.greenup.on.ca



SPRING EVENTS

For the Love of Gardening

Peterborough's annual gardening extravaganza will be held this year on April 8 to 10 at the Evinrude Centre. Look for our booth and say hello.

Green Expo

Peterborough Green-Up is now the official host of the annual Green Expo, held this year on Saturday, April 30 at the Evinrude Centre. Visit the website for more information at greenexpo.ca.

Opening Day at the Park

This year, Easter Sunday is late in April, so our official opening day for the Ecology Park Market is Tuesday, April 26, from 1-5 pm.

Spring Plant Sale

Circle your calendars for our annual plant extravaganza. Sunday, May 22 from 1-4 pm, the Ecology Park is a plant-lover's paradise. See you there!