



Natural Connections at Mercy Center

February 2007

You might ask why the banner shows swimmers on the beach. These are not swimmers, but rather are *plungers*. We had a group which makes an annual visit to Mercy Center, which includes a plunge into Long Island Sound.

I thought seeing people in bathing suits leaving the Sound during this chilling cold spell, was similar to a lesson drilled into my head at a recent training program.

At the end of January I began attending a 5-day intensive program coordinated by CT NOFA, the Connecticut chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association. The program, Organic Land Care, was intensive, detailed, comprehensive and just plain a lot of information. While I already had a good understanding of soils, composting, invasive plants and basic plant biology, I learned about turf management, alternative pest management, and organically acceptable methods and/or chemicals.

I was also feeling a bit optimistic, for there were about 60 of us, landscaping professionals, landscape architects, and land management folks who made up the class of 2007. To see that many people attending this program - to be able to offer organic methods to their customers or to overhaul their company vision and offer only organic methods felt awesome!

The mantra repeated by all the speakers was, the *Right Plant for the Right Place*. Meaning, you will have bad results and potentially need pesticides and/or fertilizers if you are putting the wrong plant in the wrong place. It starts with understanding your plant needs, knowing your soil conditions and recognizing the temperature zone we live in. The Right Plant in the Right Place will lead to a healthier plant and usually require less maintenance, less water and little to no fertilizer needs.

So with that in mind, keep your feet out of the cold water and think spring thoughts.

Always learning,

Upcoming Events & Activities at Mercy Center

- Travelling to New Dawn Earth Center
- Journey through the Heavens
- What are Invasive Species?
- Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants: Putting the Right Species in the Right Place
- Kirkpatrick Sale coming to Mercy Center!
- Spring Equinox Celebration
- Thinking about Gardening?
- Spring Herbal Awakenings

Sherill

Sherill Baldwin, Ecology Director at Mercy Center

Travelling to New Dawn Earth Center

Home Composting Made Easy

New Dawn Earth Center
75 Wrentham Road
Cumberland, RI
Wednesday, March 28
7 - 8:30pm
\$10

As a member of the Mercy Northeast Ecology Project, I work in collaboration with the New Dawn Earth Center in Cumberland, RI. Like Mercy Center, they provide an array of environmental and nature programs and are creating a model Center that lives the ideas and values it promotes.

On Wednesday, March 28th, I will be venturing east and providing a workshop called Home Composting Made Easy at New Dawn. The workshop is designed to help beginners learn how to compost and a refresher course for experienced composters. The science and art of decomposition, what may or may not be added to your pile, how to use the finished compost and troubleshooting tips will all be covered. The workshop will also include a hands-on demonstration and participants will receive a composting workbook.

The workshop I'm providing is only one among many New Dawn is offering this spring. For a brochure of their other programs (which includes Kitchen Cupboard Medicine, Vernal Equinox Hike, Wonders of Wildflowers and Birds, Berries and Breakfast) please email New Dawn Earth Center at newdawn@mercynortheast.org or call them at 401.333.1341.

In addition, Denise Turcotte from New Dawn and her colleague Marlene Bosch will be coming to Mercy Center in April (April 28-29). Look for the upcoming announcement or find it in our Soundings catalog. They will present The

Journey through the Heavens

Stargazing events for the whole family!

Mercy Center at Madison
Saturday, March 10 at 8pm
Saturday, April 14, at 8:30pm
No Charge



With Donald Lukaszek

Join us and take a journey among the planets, stars, constellations and many, many other celestial delights. Learn about the stories and myths of the constellations and venture outside to view them in the sky. This program will start indoors with a short presentation and then go outside to use a telescope for viewing. Please wear appropriate clothing for the outdoors. Flashlights are permitted, but please cover them with red plastic so the light doesn't prevent good viewing in the field. Pre-registration suggested.

Donald Lukaszek earned his PhD in Physics from UCONN in 1994. Prior to that, he taught Astronomy Labs and conducted night-time observing sessions for members of the Astronomy class as a Graduate Assistant. For the past 15 years he has taught Physics, Earth Science & Astronomy at CCSU. Over the past several years, he has conducted Astronomy Observing Sessions/Workshops for the Connecticut Audubon Society and did so for the Mercy Center back in 2004.

[Register for this program now](#)

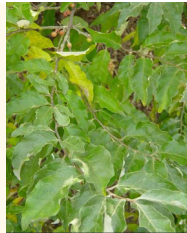
Universe: Its Story - Our Story, where participants will explore the mystery and experience the awe of the Universe's 13.7 billion year journey and our connection to it.

[For more info about composting, visit Cornell's Composting website](#)

What are Invasive Species?

What's all the Hullabaloo?

To right: Autumn Olive, [Elaeagnus umbellata](#) (invasive)



If you haven't heard about the concerns of invasive species, or invasive plants you may think this is an early April Fool's Joke. Unfortunately, invasive species is no joke. It's such a serious problem, the U.S. government manages the problem as a security issue. In 1998, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection adopted a policy to "control and prevent the spread and introduction of non-native invasive species" through "any action taken or authorized by the Department".

So what's the problem? With increasing global trade and easy movement around the globe, we have opened the floodgates for the introduction of non- native, invasive species into countries all over the world. They include plants, animals, insects, and microbes, and they can wreak havoc on native ecosystems. After habitat destruction, invasive species are considered to be the greatest threat to biodiversity. Biological invasions are "blurring" the distinctions of nature created by "evolution in isolation," the phenomenon of different organisms evolving in different environments around the world.

Most non-native species are not invasive and do not cause problems to their new environment. The problems arise when a new species inflicts ecological or environmental damage to the new environment. These organisms are able to establish in part because they are free of their co-evolved natural predators.

At Mercy Center, as far as we know, we do not have any invasive species, such as animals and microbes. However, we are growing, quite well in fact, a number of the most famous invasive plants found around the state. So we are creating an "Invasive Species Walk" to educate others about invasive plants.

Again, invasive plants are non-native plants that are disruptive in a way that causes environmental or economic harm, or harm to human health. In Connecticut, the

Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants: Putting the Right Species in the Right Place

With Charlotte Pyle

Saturday, March 17

9am - 12noon

Cost \$10

To right: Bayberry [Myrica pensylvanica](#) (native)



This workshop will cover uses of native plants for wildlife, erosion control, and landscape aesthetics. Site requirements of specific native shrubs and herbaceous plants as well as general guidelines for the use of native plants in natural habitats also will be covered.

Following the classroom work, we will adjourn to the outdoors to view the opposite: invasive plants in winter on the *NEW* Invasive Plant Walk at Mercy Center.

Charlotte Pyle is a Landscape Ecologist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service which is a federal agency that promotes conservation on private lands. Dr. Pyle works on invasive plants, use of native plants, wildlife habitat, and issues relating to the management of conservation land.

[Register for this program now](#)

Connecticut Invasive Plants Council has developed a list of non-native plants that cause (or have the potential to cause) environmental harm in minimally-managed areas.

In minimally-managed areas, such as Mercy Center's grounds, invasive plants crowd out native plants. The presence of invasive plants alters the way plants, animals, soil, and water interact within native ecosystems, often causing harm to other species in addition to the plants that have been crowded out. In our woodlots at Mercy Center we have trees that are being strangled by bittersweet. We also have a strong presence of Norway Maples, also an invasive plant, which I recently discovered is allelopathic.

When a plant, or tree, is allelopathic, it means it exudes biochemicals that benefit or harm nearby plants. For many invasive plants including Norway Maple, Spotted Knapweed and Garlic Mustard, they send harmful exudites, which prevent other plants to grow nearby giving the invasive species an edge in outcompeting native plants.

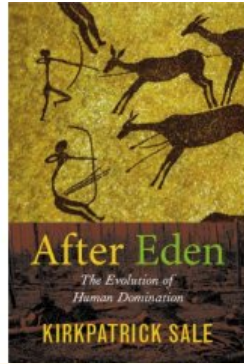
Characteristics that make plants invasive include:

- the ability to establish new plants and grow rapidly under a wide variety of site conditions
- a high reproductive rate
- the ability to disperse wide distances - often by the spreading of vegetative fragments as well as seeds
- the lack of the natural controls on growth and reproduction that would be found where the invader is native

For more information about invasive species in CT

Kirkpatrick Sale coming to Mercy Center!

After Eden:
Learning to Live
on Earth



At one time, humans lived in general harmony with nature, knowing themselves on the species level, not set apart from their fellow creatures, and availed themselves of the fruit of the lands without violence. When they learned to hunt large animals, only about 70,000 years ago, all that changed. Humans created a culture of distance from, and domination over, the other species of the planet. This domination has now brought us to the point of great environmental peril and the threat of ecocide. It is now time to rethink our relationship to nature, to bring forth the memory of the ancient beings we still have within us, and to learn to live as they did: on a small scale; in concert with all species around us; careful not to despoil the Earth and its treasures; with an intimate connection to the natural systems around us; and deeply conscious ways of nature's majesty as experienced, for example, at the Equinox.

Following his presentation, Mr. Sale will be selling and signing his most recent book, *After Eden: The Evolution of Human Domination*.

Kirkpatrick Sale is the author of a dozen books, including *Human Scale*, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992*, and *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*. His most recent book is *After Eden: The Evolution of Human Domination*. He is a contributing editor to *The Nation* and the director of the Middlebury Institute.

*Join us for dinner for an additional \$12; please make a reservation with Guest Services.

[Register for this program now](#)

Thinking about Gardening?

Lots of workshops and Volunteer Opportunities!

Spring Equinox Celebration

Check out this
incredible line up!

Saturday
March 25
11am - 3pm
No Charge



>11am - 3pm Join us for our used book sale, plant sale, refreshments, chair massages, and tai chi demonstrations.

11am - Four LIVE Birds of Prey (including a Bald Eagle) with WIND OVER WINGS

12:30 - NEW HAVEN MORRIS & SWORD DANCERS

2:00 - From Trash To Tunes with DENNIS WARING

3:30 - 5:30pm

FEATURED POET - KIM GARCIA

Reading and Book Signing

Plus Community Open - Mike

Ms Garcia is the author of *Madonna Magdalene*, a recently published poetry collection and teacher of creative writing at Boston College. She will read from her new book and be available for signing. To follow is an open mike - so bring some of your work to read!

The Spring Equinox Celebration programs are funded in part by the Erwin C. Bauer Charitable Trust Fund, Earth Mercy CT committee, and Mercy Northeast Community.

[For more information about this program](#)

Spring Herbal Awakenings

I've scheduled more 'garden parties' for the spring. These are actually work parties. Time to slow down the pace, focus on one garden and one weed at a time. No need to RSVP. Park at the Ecology Center and from the Ecology Center we'll walk over to the garden chosen for that day. If you're late - I'll leave a note at the Ecology Center indicating where I'm working that day.

As you may know, Mercy Center has a lot of gardens. Many have been a little neglected over the years, and are looking for kind hands to bring it back to life. Consider coming out and joining me for a Garden Party.

Upcoming Garden Cleanups at Mercy Center: Wednesdays 2-4:30pm April 11 April 25 May 9 Thursday 2-4:30pm April 19 May 3 May 17

There are a number of workshops in the area. Two focus on organic gardening.

Organic Garden Planning Workshop

Saturday, March 17, 10 AM--2 PM
Common Ground School, 358 Springside Ave, New Haven, 203-389-4333

This will be a beginner to intermediate level workshop for adults. Morning: compost, soil, and bed preparation. Lunch Break: Delicious lunch made with Common Ground grown ingredients. Afternoon: seeds, seed starting, and planting. Free childcare available with pre-registration. \$15 per person (includes lunch).

For more detailed information go to New Haven Ecology Project website: www.nhep.com.

Cultivating an Organic Connecticut Conference Saturday, March 10

8:30-5:45pm Windsor High School, Windsor, CT
CT Northeast Organic Farming Association (CT NOFA)

This is a very exciting annual conference with great workshops, world known keynote speakers, and the biggest and best potluck lunch you have ever eaten. Definitely a worthwhile, informative, inspiring experience to take in for anyone interested in gardening.

[For more information about CT NOFA](#)

With Cynthia Kazmirsky

Saturday, March 31
9am - 12noon
\$25



Come and walk the Mercy Center landscape in search of new growth and spring greens. Awaken to spring and new beginnings by cleansing the body from winter stagnation and explore the fields and forests of Mercy Center looking for medicinal and edible plants. We will gather, discuss, and then prepare the wild plants to make teas, tonics and snacks to awaken and rejuvenate our bodies for the new season. Class will close with a Guided Meditation.

Cynthia Kazmirsky has played in the woods and swamps and honored the plants and nature since childhood. A child of Slovak farmers, she became aware of the healing spirit of plants and herbal medicines. She has studied with Tom Brown, Jr., attended the Tracker School and herbal studies with Gail Ulrich and Rosemary Gladstar. She now lives in the woods of south central Connecticut and caretakes the land that owns her.

[Register for this program now](#)

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

In addition to offering programs that are low cost and/or free, we also provide scholarships for programs that might be cost prohibitive. When the Mercy Northeast Ecology Program first came into being, the committee felt that everyone should be able to learn about and/or connect to the environment regardless of income. So there is a small pocket of money to help people attend ecology programs - specifically Mercy Center sponsored programs which are listed either as The Spirit & the Earth in our Soundings catalog, or has been promoted in Natural Connections.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are still needed to help with the Spring Equinox, including greeters, book sale help, help with refreshments and help with plant sale.

Volunteers needed for the Stargazing activities. The presenter could use an assistant, we could use help greeting participants and guiding people from the main building to the field.

If you're interested in volunteering, please call me at 203.245.0401 or email me at sherill@mercybythesea.org.

If you would like to attend a program and need financial assistance, please contact us to learn more about our scholarship program.

For more information contact Jim Emswiler at jim@mercybythesea.org or 203.245.0401.

****NEW* Climate Change Discussion Course***

Global Warming: Changing CO2course
A 4-week discussion course*

Wednesday evenings:

April 11, April 18, April 25, May 2 (and May 9*)

With Jeanie Graustein

This discussion course will encourage personal exploration of our values and habits as they relate to climate change.

Together and with the assistance of the program curriculum, participants will seek to understand the history and science of global warming. As a result you should feel more empowered to take action and curb global warming.

*An optional 5th week of discussion has been added specifically for organizations and/or groups of faith who are seeking to change their institution.

Fee will be \$15 to cover the cost of the guidebook

Discussion Book Just Arrived!

The discussion guide, *Global Warming: Changing CO2course* for the upcoming discussion course has just arrived.

The guidebook is not only beautiful, but is chock full of incredible essays from a number of authors including Donella Meadows, Van Jones, Alan AtKisson, Elizabeth Kolbert, Lester Brown, Rev. Sally Bingham, and Bill McKibben.

The guidebooks will be provided to participants of the discussion course at cost (\$15). If you want to preview the discussion guides, let me know when you're visiting next and I'll share it with you.

[Learn more about Northwest Earth Institute guidebooks](#)

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Mercy Center is a conference and retreat center for human development. The Ecology Program is supported with funds from the Mercy Northeast Community, Mercy Action and ministry funds from Mercy RI and Mercy VT.