Leaf Letter
The Newsletter of Spokane County’s Master Composters/Recyclers

Summer Edition August 2019

MC/R Activity Photo Album

Someone said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Here are a few that were taken this summer by MC/Rs. They demonstrate a wide variety of activities and observations in our community. The captions are brief but the pictures should “say it all.”

Thanks to those who shared! Enjoy!

The Little Garden Café tapes items to their recycle bin to educate patrons.

Spokane Indians baseball stadium begins collecting compostables.

Gary Cygiel and Catherine Tsai teach Girl Scouts about worms during recent summer camp.

MC/Rs Kathleen Browning and Jacquelynn Wright, along with Master Gardener Tom Bayless, clean up demo area. Beautiful!

Mason Neil in River Front Park answers questions about recycling.

MC/Rs tour Marle’ Worm Growers with Jeff Wood

MC/R’s booth at a recent Night Out Against Crime event held at Shadle Park. Robin Schmahl and Jacquelynn Wright shared information with more than 100 people that night.
We are the Villagers

It takes a village. Not the village that chases down the Frankenstein monster with pitchforks. (Why that came to mind, I do not know.) No, I am talking about the village where neighbors help neighbors to make a stronger more vibrant community for all. That is why we volunteer.

The Master Composter/Recycler program offers many types of volunteer opportunities. From turning compost piles at the demonstration area in the Green Zone to recovering recyclables at the Spokane River Clean Up, to staffing waste reduction information tables at school and community events, there are many chances for graduates to donate time that hopefully matches their interest and comfort level.

Even if you are the shy villager working quietly behind the scenes, I applaud and thank you. Please let me know every now and then how many hours and contacts you make for my grant reports. The MC/R program exists to make a difference and does that because of you!

Kris

Next Field Trip—Down River Golf Course

We learn about the importance of composting in class and many of the ways to make and use finished compost. What we don’t often get to see is how that knowledge is applied, on a large scale, in places other than our back yards.

Touring Barr-Tech was one of those learning opportunities and our next field trip to Spokane’s Down River Golf Course will be another.

Head Superintendent, Mike Greene, is a trained horticulturist who has taken sustainable turf management to heart. You may have read about some of Mike’s activities at Down River in the Spokesman Review. He is known for brewing and applying compost tea to the golf course to reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Applying compost to fairways has increased water retention. Mike started a pollinator garden and has a bee keeper not only collect honey produced on site, but teaches students from a local elementary school the important role bees play in the environment.

And, out of bounds areas have been planted with everything from wild flowers to pumpkins.

Come see for yourself:
The tour is

Sept. 5, at
9:30 a.m.
3225 N
Columbia Cr

The “R” that is Reuse

Spokane Public Library Takes Donations

Reuse is that “r” word found in between reduce and recycle in the waste reduction mantra. If you have gently-used books, all topics paperback or hard back, you can donate them to the Spokane Public Library. The Friends of the Library also accept commercially-produced (no home movies, please) CDs and DVDs.

What they do not take are damaged materials of any kind, magazines, condensed books or loose-leaf items.

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Bees and Plastic

Plastic is piling up in ecosystems all over the world, not just oceans and lakes. Its harmful effects on wildlife have been widely documented, but a few animals — like bowerbirds and hermit crabs — are doing what they can to recycle it. And according to a 2014 study, wild bees in Canada have joined the effort, using bits of plastic waste to build their nests.

These tiny insects can’t recycle nearly enough plastic to put a significant dent in the problem. Still, their resourceful use of polyurethane and polyethylene illustrates how widespread plastic pollution has become, and how some wildlife is adapting to it.

"Plastic waste pervades the global landscape," the study’s authors write in the journal *Ecosphere*. "Although adverse impacts on both species and ecosystems have been documented, there are few observations of behavioral flexibility and adaptation in species, especially insects, to increasingly plastic-rich environments."

The researchers found two species of leafcutter bees incorporating plastic into their nests, each bringing home varieties that mimic the natural materials they traditionally use. Leafcutter bees don’t build big colonies or store honey like honeybees, opting instead for small nests in underground holes, tree cavities or crevices in buildings.

One of the bees they studied, the alfalfa leafcutter, normally bites off pieces of leaves and flowers to make its nests. But the researchers found that three of eight brood cells contained fragments of polyethylene plastic bags, replacing 23 percent of the cut leaves in each cell on average. "All pieces were of the same white glossy color and ‘plastic bag’ consistency," the researchers report, "and thus presumably from the same source."

While they don’t make honey, alfalfa leafcutter bees still make money for U.S. and Canadian farmers by pollinating crops including alfalfa, carrots, canola and melons. The Eurasian insects were introduced to North America in the 1930s for that purpose, and they’ve since become feral, joining the continent’s many native species of leafcutter bees.

In a separate study conducted in Argentina between 2017 and 2018, researchers studying chicory pollinators found a nest made entirely of plastic. It’s the first known example of such construction worldwide. They believe the bees that made the nests are alfalfa leaf-cutting bees as in the example above.

Unfortunately, the nest was not healthy. *New Scientist* describes it: The plastic included thin, blue strips the consistency of disposable shopping bags, and white pieces that were a bit thicker. In this nest, one brood cell had dead larva in it, one was empty and may have contained an unidentified adult that emerged, and one cell was unfinished.

The study was conducted by Mariana Allasino of the National Agricultural Technology Institute in Argentina and a team of researchers, and *published in the journal* *Apidologie*. 

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Art Salvage

Art Salvage is a non-profit organization that is Spokane’s first creative reuse center. Its goal is to connect creativity and sustainability in our community. Located at 1925 N. Ash, Art Salvage accepts items that might normally go in the trash and gives them another life in someone’s artistic creation. Items accepted include art supplies, paints and brushes, yarns and fabric, sewing notions, office supplies, maps and art books, and doodads, widgets and whatnots. Check out their website, [www.artsalvagespokane.com](http://www.artsalvagespokane.com) for a list of items and days and times they are open.
Product Transformation Awareness Increases Recycling

A plastic bottle becomes a jacket, an aluminum can a bicycle. When consumers are reminded of the products that their recyclables can be turned into, they are more likely to recycle, according to researchers at Penn State and Boston College.

"Recycling rates in the United States are too low," said Karen Winterich, professor of marketing and a Frank and Mary Smeal Research Fellow, Smeal College of Business, Penn State. "For example, in 2015, only 25 percent of waste was recycled. Our research suggests that recycling rates can improve if consumers are exposed to signage and messaging that shows recyclables are transformed into new products. We hope to change the conversation from 'Where does this go?' as consumers question whether an item is recyclable to 'What can this make?' with consumers automatically thinking about products made from the material they recycle."

According to Winterich, the definition of a recyclable is an object with a future use, yet many of us still view recyclable material as trash.

"We may put it in the recycling bin, but in essence, we think of it as garbage," said Winterich. "We don’t think about it as something of value that has a future use."

Winterich and her colleagues conducted a series of studies in which they examined how product transformation salience—thinking about recyclables turning into new products—influences recycling. The results of these studies appear in print on July 1 in the *Journal of Marketing.*