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CRC's GREEN SCENE

A monthly newsletter of the Sustainability Committee at Cosumnes River College

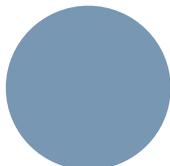
A Los Rios Green Stimulus Package

The first edition of the Green Scene (October 2008) introduced you to the Winn Center for Construction and Architecture. Ryan Connally, professor of construction, tells us that the building is but part of an ambitious district plan that started with the recognition in early 2006 of the department of Environmental Design (including Architecture, Construction, Building Inspection, Architectural Design Technology, and Construction Management) as a Program of Distinction for CRC.

In 2006, the district also announced its Green and Clean Tech Force Initiative, designed to increase the number of programs that would help Sacramento meet the needs of the growing green and clean energy sectors. CRC responded by creating the Green Building Certificate: Environmental Design, Energy Management and Performance-

Based Construction. Rooted in green building design in architecture and construction management, the certificate cross-pollinates with such diverse disciplines as horticulture and geography, widening the perspective of what it means to be green.

In Spring 2008, CRC's construction and architecture departments received state funding to increase career awareness of the emerging green technologies in the building sector. One outcome of this grant has CRC and SCC students creating lesson plans and teaching middle school students interested in architecture, construction, and engineering in a pilot after-school program. Another outcome provides five-day, paid 'externships' in green and clean industry sectors for local K-12 and post-secondary educators
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Hawks Nest Bookstore Aids Plastic Recycling

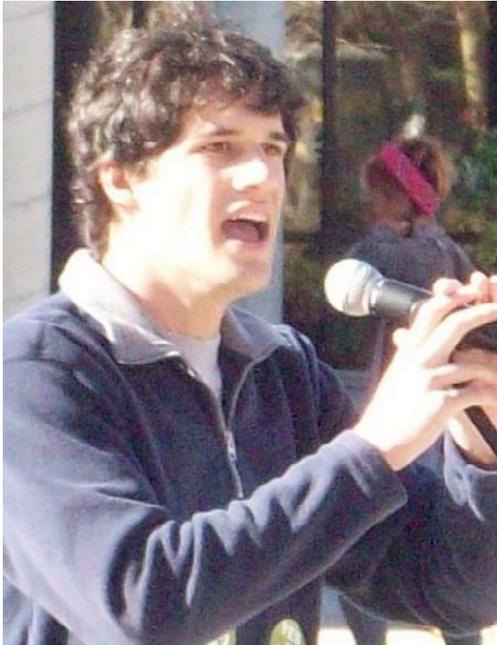
Check out the new box for recycling #2 and #4 plastic bags in the Hawks Nest Bookstore.

Shopping bags for customers at the bookstore are made from 100% recycled materials, use only water-based ink, and now can be recycled right in the store.

Better yet, reuse a bag from your last bookstore purchase, or bring a canvas bag from home.

Kudos to the Hawks Nest!





Meet our Student Members

Daniel Fagan: Campuses Must Take the Lead on Energy Conservation

Editor's Note: In this continuing series, we feature one of our CRC Sustainability Committee student members each month.

Social sciences major Daniel Fagan, 22, first got involved on campus through a club that he started called the Society of Ethics and Justice (SEJ). It was through the SEJ that Daniel began working with other students and professors on various issues, including the environment.

Currently, Daniel also serves as editor of *The Voice*, a student journal on campus that aims to elevate the level of discourse

among students on issues related to social justice.

According to Daniel, "I joined the Campus Sustainability Committee because I believe that colleges and universities have a responsibility to take a lead on energy conservation."

Like many student members of the Sustainability Committee, it was the Global Climate Change course (Biol 351/Geog 305) at CRC that inspired Daniel to get involved with groups like the Sustainability Committee that aim to mitigate the community's carbon footprint.

Daniel Fagan, student member of the CRC Sustainability Committee, speaks at CRC at a rally supporting Proposition 92 in December 2007.

Corn Cups – Are They as Green as They Sound?

Cath Hooper reports...

Honestly, I was as excited as the rest of you when I read about the compostable corn-cups now in use at the CRC cafeteria (see Green Scene, February Issue). But the skeptic in me couldn't help wondering whether this latest eco 'solution' was as green as it sounded.

The good news is that these plastics (known as PLAs for the polylactic acid from which most bio-plastics are made) are not petroleum-based, and it appears that they really do biodegrade.

Environmentalists, however, raise a number of objections. First, industrial corn production is fertilizer-,

pesticide-, and insecticide-heavy, contributing to soil erosion and water pollution (and there is no denying this). Also, the use of corn to make plastics, in addition to ethanol, diverts yet more corn away from food production. The PLA industry responds that the corn is usually low-grade animal feed not slated for human consumption.

More problematically, most PLA is made from genetically-engineered corn that may be contaminating conventional crops or disrupting local ecosystems (for more on this, watch the compelling movie *The Future of Food*). Natureworks, the company that manufactures most of the PLA used for packaging and water bottles, does use non-GE corn if requested

to do so. (Let's start requesting!)

But the main cause for concern, it turns out, is the current US system, which is simply not prepared for PLAs. Thus, these bio-plastics are currently far more likely to end up in one of two places rather than in a compost pile: a landfill, where they will last

(SEE BIO-PLASTICS, PAGE 3)



Recipe Corner: Chris Wagner's Home-Blended Garden Mulch



I live in an area with a large amount of hard-pan about 16-24 inches below the surface; therefore, creating good, productive soil has been a

commitment for a number of years.

In the past, I have used my own leaf mulch. Nothing beats the smell of fresh leaf mulch! And there's just no substitute for the benefits those big worms and other micro-organisms bring.

But I have lost my huge leaf pile this year as I proceed with

work on a Japanese garden. Instead, I have begun to use the blender to speed decomposition and lessen the attraction to rodents. I bury the mulch (this morning it was wilted-lettuce based) so that it doesn't attract pests.

I have a designated blender for the project of mulching peels and rinds and skins from vegetable matter, a counter-culture practice that makes use of what often otherwise goes into the garbage disposal.

At Thanksgiving, I was able to take five blenders full of goodies to soften the clay at the

back of the yard. I dug up a shovel of clay dirt, added a blender full of pureed peels, and buried them with a single turn of the wrist. The kitchen smelled like Jamba Juice, and the blended scraps were absorbed in a day.

Try it, and you will have the most beautiful azaleas from the acid in citrus peels. And by April, you will have worms the size of your fingers doing most of the work.



Bio-Plastics Require Hotter Compost

(FROM PAGE 2)

just as long as conventional plastic containers, that is, 100-1000 years—nobody seems to know for sure how long; or conventional recycling, where they “disrupt the existing recycling systems by commingling with petroleum plastic batches, potentially rendering everything unrecyclable” (“Ecology Center”). Even when PLAs make it to the compost, they are unlikely to biodegrade without the high temperatures reached in an industrial-sized pile.

What does this mean for CRC's corn cups then? Right now, the corn cups are certainly not composting—most likely, in fact, they are

ending up in the trash can, causing a problem rather than offering the solution we were after. But there is hope on the horizon! Word is that composting may be coming to CRC by way of a cooperative relationship between the grounds crew and the cafeteria kitchen.

According to Cory Wathen, Director of Administrative Services, grass cuttings are currently mulched on site, but leaves from large trees require vegetable matter more powerful than grass to biodegrade, so they get dumped into a green waste bin and hauled off campus at CRC's expense. Enter here the scraps from the cafeteria kitchen to create a hotter compost pile—hot enough to compost those leaves (at no cost!) and perhaps our corn cups too.

Getting those cups composting may still be some way off, but on the whole, I'm feeling more positive about CRC's corn cups. With a CRC compost pile and some serious training of our cafeteria customers to use three bins (one for bio-degradables, one for recyclables, and one for whatever's left), we could actually turn those cups into fine CRC mulch.

“Ecology Center Calls for Moratorium on Bio-Plastic Bottles.” *Ecology Center Newsletter*. Winter 2006. <http://www.ecologycenter.org/newsletter/20061117.html>

Royte, Elizabeth. “Corn Plastic to the Rescue.” *Smithsonian*. August 2006. March 8 2009. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/plastic.html>



Green Sleuth:

Tips for Cutting Your Water Use in the Garden

Susan Scott reports...

The average water use in Sacramento is almost twice that of the rest of California. In fact, Sacramentans use 280 gallons per day per person; the average in the rest of the state is 192 gallons per day per person (*Sacramento Bee*, March 5, 2009).

Not only does this overuse divert water from the natural habitats of California rivers and wetlands, it also generates carbon dioxide emissions because of the energy required to transport water through the state to our homes and businesses.

Here are just a few of the many things you can do to use less water in your garden (tips taken from WaterUseItWisely.com)

Watch for tips on indoor water conservation in future issues of the Green Scene.

- Don't water your lawn or garden until the soil is almost dry on top. There will still be lots of water deeper down and your plants will develop deeper and more extensive roots. Most of the water in the top inch of the soil evaporates into the air and does not help your plants. Thus, less frequent but deeper irrigation uses less water.
- Don't water your lawn on windy days when most of the water blows away or evaporates.
- Aerate your lawn at least once a year so water can reach the roots rather than run off the surface.
- Use a layer of organic material on the surface of your planting beds to minimize weed growth that competes for water.
- Water only when necessary. More plants die from over-watering than from under-watering.
- Replace some of your grass with drought-tolerant plants.
- Next time you add or replace a flower or shrub, choose a low water-use plant for year-round landscape color and save up to 550 gallons each year.
- Choose California native plants for your garden (see inset, below). They need much less water than most familiar garden plants.

Choosing Plants for a Drought-Tolerant Garden

John Rusmore reports...

The following plants grow in our garden with **minimal water** in summer months.

- Ceanothus (California lilac)
- Eriogonum (Buckwheat)
- Lotus scoparius (Deerweed)
- Lupinus succulentus (Arroyo lupine)
- Zauschneria cana (California fuchsia)
- Baccharis pilularis (Coyote bush)
- Sisyrinchium montanum (Blue-eyed grass)

These plants require **no** water!

- Red-hot pokers (but these aren't native)
- many succulents and cacti



California fuchsia (a hummingbird favorite, above) and Ceanothus (right) are both good choices for a drought-tolerant garden.
<http://www.calfloranursery.com>





Cosumnes River College Sustainability Committee

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 Dave Hodapp
 Cath Hooper
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 Michelle Smith
 Christine Wagner

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Heather Downing
 Daniel Fagan
 Elizabeth Gaylord
 Kristiana Hauge
 Onyi Ibeabuchi

Newsletter:

Cindy Erickson
 Cath Hooper

News In Brief...

Earth Week 2009

Mark your calendars now for great speakers during Earth Week, April 20 – 25.

Documentary film maker Larry Lansburgh will give Earth Week's keynote address, "Is Earth Day Really Necessary? A Hard Look at Global Realities," on Wednesday, April 22 at 1:30 pm.

Other speakers include Amanda M. Wolcott Paskey (CRC Anthropology), "Fall of Great Civilizations," on Tuesday, April 21 at 9:00 am, and Trey Hudgins (CRC Biology), "Alternative Energy," on Thursday, April 23 at 12:00 pm.

Display tables will line the quad on Wednesday, April 22 from 10:30 am to 1:00 pm, with many student participants as well as green and non-profit agencies.

The week ends Saturday morning with a Creek Week Cleanup led by Dave Hodapp (CRC Chemistry).

For more information, contact Julie Oliver at 691-7581 or oliverj@crc.losrios.edu.



CRC Bookstore Sells Green Products

Being green just got easier with new products available at the Hawks Nest bookstore.

Stop by soon and check out their display.

New Green Programs on Campus

(FROM PAGE 1)

of math, science, technology, physics, and vocational education. Participants will take back to their classrooms real-world, work-place applications of new technologies.

Just this spring, Los Rios received a 2.1 million dollar grant from the Department of Labor for community-based job training. The grant will fund the FTE for courses developed for the Green Building Certificate as well as create three additional certificates:

- *Building Information Modeling* – training draftspersons for the new 3-D drafting and design software
- *Home Energy Auditing* – training home inspectors to diagnose home energy performance deficiencies and advise needed repairs or changes
- *Sustainable Landscape and Water Systems Design* – highlighting new technologies in landscaping and exterior water conservation

It's exciting to hear that some stimulus is taking place on our own campus!



We're on the Web!
 Look for archived issues
 of the
GREEN SCENE
 on the CRC homepage
 under the
 Events and Culture Link.