

ECOSF's August 2007 Newsletter

Hello Friends of the Earth,

Hopefully you are all enjoying the fruits (and veggies) of this wonderful summer harvest. We have heard from many farmers that it has been a great year for crops despite real drought concerns. Our backyards are blooming and ripening and the farmer's markets are exploding with peaches, nectarines, plums, pluots, and blueberries. Even though we're at the peak of our typical harvest time, San Francisco's climate graces us with a long growing season, and if you get your seeds sown and transplants planted now you can reap a winter harvest of broccoli, cauliflower, kale, Romanesco, lettuce, sugar snap peas, carrots, radishes and if you planted some winter squash about a month ago, you'd be ready to harvest around October. If you're not planning on growing a winter crop, maybe you'd like to grow a cover crop that can overwinter and then be mulched into the soil to add fertility and organic matter for some new veggie beds for spring. A good "green manure" mix of 50% Bell beans, 30% 'Magnus' peas, and 20% Common Vetch can compete against the weeds that come with our winter rains and add lots of organic matter and nitrogen for your spring crop. [Harmony Farm Supply](#) just outside of Santa Rosa offers this winter mix for \$0.79/lb and 2-3 lb. is good for 1000 sq. ft.

August is also an exciting month for the Cosmos, which [Rudolph Steiner and his biodynamic teachings](#) suggest are integral to a healthy, ecologically balanced garden or agricultural system. If it weren't so fogged in the evenings of August 6th and 7th you could have seen Mars and the Moon appearing together in the night sky. But don't fret, if you can find yourself on a cloudless (or fog-less) spot the night of Sunday, August 12th you'll catch the peak of the [Perseid meteor shower](#), which happens to coincide with the New Moon so it should be a dark sky. Towards the end of the month, on the early morning of Tuesday, August 28th there will be a [total lunar eclipse](#) that you won't want to miss. During this eclipse the moon's appearance can go from bright orange to blood red to dark brown.

Plant of the Month - Quercus agrifolia (Coast Live Oak)

Summer time in our Mediterranean climate of California means dry weather and rolling hills of golden grasses dotted with the occasional forest green canopy of a mighty oak tree. Much of the state's land below 3,000 feet used to be covered with oak woodlands and today even after extensive agricultural and urban development Oak trees still play an important role in California's ecology. We find many species of Oak here including Valley Oak, Blue Oak, Tanbark Oak, Black Oak, and our local native the Coast live oak.

Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) is in the Fagaceae family along with 900 other species of Oak around the world and can be found along the coast from Baja to the Northern Coast Ranges. The name *live* refers to the evergreen nature of the leaves and sets this tree apart from most other Oak species (there is also a Canyon Live Oak that grows more inland). These trees can grow more than 40 feet tall and can cover a

horizontal area at least that wide with a curly weeping branch pattern that represents the dendritic form that can be found throughout nature. The Ohlone, an indigenous people native to the Bay Area harvested ripe acorns from the Live Oak in the fall with gratitude and celebration for their usefulness and abundance. The flour derived from mashing fresh acorns and then leeching out the tannins can be turned into a hearty mush or even baked into a tasty bread. Although Live Oak acorns have more tannins and thus require more leeching than the valley oak they supposedly produce a more filling meal. Live Oak can be a powerful addition to your ecological garden of native shrubs like Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) and Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), or planted as a street tree provided that you have an area with full sun exposure, and its drought tolerance makes watering unnecessary after a few years. Refer to our [excerpt from Toby Hemmingway's "Gaias's Garden"](#) to learn more about the ecological functions of oak in the landscape.

The Coast Live Oak can be found growing in the the mixed conifer forest with Douglass fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), California Bay Laurel (*Umbellularia californica*), Pacific Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*) and other Oak species. In San Francisco we are lucky enough to have some old Oak groves surviving right under our noses. The northeast section of Golden Gate Park behind McLaren Lodge on Stanyan is home to some of the oldest Coast Live Oaks in the City. In fact these are the only trees native to the shifting sand dune habitat of coastal San Francisco. Another large and probably older stand of trees carpets the hillside of Buena Vista Park on Haight and Baker. You can also see them in Glen Canyon, the Presidio, dotting the Brotherhood Way corridor and in McLaren park in the southern part of the city (you can usually tell the Coast Live Oak by the fuzz on the underside of the small, rounded ,light green leaf). Unfortunately the Coast Live Oak is one of the species that the epidemic Sudden Oak Death is decimating across the state. It is believed that up to 90% of the California's Coast Live Oaks and Tan Oaks are affected and dying. For more information on Sudden Oak Death see [click here](#).

One way you can learn more about our native species is to become familiar with what the San Francisco Park and Recreation Dept. calls our Significant Natural Resource Areas. These are fragments of original natural communities that still survive in San Francisco. As Rec and Park puts it "they are essentially "islands" in a "sea" of human-built environment. This *fragmentation* has many effects which threaten their continued existence. In order to counteract these threats, people need to help care for them. They are the last vestiges of the beautiful and unique ecosystems that are our natural heritage in San Francisco. Our actions can help to guarantee their survival. To get more involved [contact a land-steward or community group](#) for your neighborhood park or SNRA.

Volunteer Opportunities with ECOSF this Month

This month ECOSF will be helping to revitalize and regenerate a 2800 sq ft school garden for Monroe Elementary School in the Excelsior District. The school is located at 260 Madrid St. (btwn. Excelsior Ave. and Avalon Ave.) and there is usually ample street parking available. We'll be out there 3 days this month so you have plenty of opportunities to get involved:

Tuesday August 14th - We'll be doing some initial site work in preparation for planting a fall/winter salad bar garden for the students the following week. We will remove some of the existing vegetation and clearing overgrown pathways to make room for edible and medicinal native shrubs and the young aspiring naturalists who will be exploring the garden this fall. Some of the work will include pruning, and removing trees and shrubs, fixing the irrigation system, weeding some areas and applying sheet mulch methods to prepare some veggie beds. We will be out there from 12pm till 4pm and will provide all necessary tools and some organic juices and snacks.

Saturday August 18th - We'll be planting the winter salad bar garden of lettuce, sugar snap peas, broccoli, cauliflower and kale. We'll also be planting some edible and medicinal native shrubs such as Pink-Flowering Currants, Elderberries, Huckleberries, Serviceberries, Salmonberries, Osoberrries, and Salal. (That's a lot of berries!) We'll also be adding some support species because how can we emulate a balanced ecosystem with only food for humans? Certainly the children will have to compete with some crafty birds for some of these *Berrrrrific* shrubs, but we'll also include some nitrogen fixing, and beneficial insect and wildlife habitat plants like Ceanothus, Lupine, Yarrow, Coffeeberry, Toyon, Buckwheat, Goldenrod and Coyote Brush and more. We'll be on the site talking about the benefits and use of these species and planting them from 12pm till 5pm with tools, plants, and organic refreshments.

Monday August 20th - Cob-Mortar Rock Wall Completion at Sally and Roger Bland's Home. We'll be back at the Bland residence to finish the cob-mortared rock wall we started for their veggie bed. If you're unfamiliar with cob (a mixture of sand, clay, and straw) come on down for a stomping good time as we make up a fresh mix of natural mortar and slap it between some rocks to make an attractive rock wall for a raised bed. We'll be talking about using cob for lots of other projects for the backyard enthusiast like building a cob oven or a cob bench. We may also do a little tending in the garden and plant a few winter veggies for the family. Their home is located at 1370 12th Avenue (btwn. Irving and Judah St) in the Sunset. We'll be there from 12pm till 5pm with refreshments and dirty fun!

Saturday August 25th - We'll be back at Monroe Elementary school for a school picnic for incoming kindergartners and 1st graders so we'll finish planting some of the native shrubs with them and to sow some carrots, radishes, and beets with them as well. That will be from 11am till 2pm.

Some of the work we do wouldn't be possible without the help of volunteers like you. We hope to see you out at one of our events this month and if you have any questions please email us at info@eco-sf.org

Other Events and Happenings this Month and Beyond

The SF Botanical Garden will be having their Shade Plant Sale this Saturday, August 11th. For more information [click here](#) to refer to their website. [The Urban Farmer Store](#),

San Francisco's premier irrigation specialists, will be offering a free Landscape Watering workshop Saturday August 25th at 10am to introduce you to innovative sprinkler and drip irrigation solutions. You can learn about system automation with valves, timers, and rain sensors. This class will teach you how to plan your own efficient irrigation system. The class is free but space is limited so reserve your seat by calling the store at (415) 661-2204 or by [email](#). If you don't mind a beautiful drive past Sebastopol to Occidental we encourage you to check out the [Occidental Arts and Ecology Center's Fall Plant Sale and Open House](#). Choose from hundreds of varieties of California Certified Organic heirloom brassicas (broccoli, cauliflower, kale, etc), lettuces, salad greens, chards, leeks, herbs, as well as old-fashioned annual flowers. Select from an array of ornamental and edible perennials propagated from their own collections. OAEC is located on 15290 Coleman Valley Road in Occidental which is about a 1.5 hour drive from San Francisco, but well worth it. The plant sale will go from 9am till 5pm on August 25th and 26th and they will offer garden tours at 10am and 11am each day. If you haven't been up to OAEC yet, you won't want to miss out on this incredible sale and ecological paradise.

Other Avenues, a worker-owned cooperative health food store located at 3930 Judah St. (btwn 44th and 45th Avenues) has been providing organic produce, bulk bins, and more in the Sunset district for over 25 years. In September they will be hosting ECOSF for a workshop on Creating and Planting Native Guilds. This workshop will introduce the concept of planting species that can harmonize with one another and create a cooperative community of plants that can produce food and medicine, fix nitrogen, attract beneficial insects, provide habitat for birds and other wildlife, make its own mulch, and thrive with little maintenance. We will spend some time talking about the roles each plant plays in a guild and which native species can fill those roles as well as taking it to the streets to plant a variety of these guilds out in front of Other Avenues in some recently removed sidewalk space. If you would like to attend this free workshop going on Saturday September 8th from 2pm till 4pm, stop by Other Avenues in the last two weeks of August to sign up. The workshop is free but space is limited and you have to sign up in person. While you're there, check out their local organic produce and other earth-friendly products.

Sizzling Succulent Recipe for your Summer Harvest

For delicious, seasonal, vegetarian meals in under an hour, Peter Berley's cookbook *Fresh Food Fast* may be just what you're looking for. We have it available to check out in our Lending Library so we wanted to offer you a tasty side dish to any summer harvest meal:

Pan-Seared Summer Squash with Garlic and Mint

- Pan searing the squash caramelizes it and produces a nice crust. The sugars become concentrated and the juices are locked in. You can use the same technique with eggplant slices and onion rings. Yield: 4 servings. (You may want to double the recipe its so good)

2 pounds summer squash, sliced 1/2-inch thick

2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
2 tablespoons fresh mint, torn into pieces
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 teaspoon coarse sea salt or kosher salt, plus additional to taste
1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Freshly milled black pepper

1. Warm a large heavy skillet, griddle, or grill pan over medium heat. Arrange the squash in a single layer and sear until speckled with brown and beginning to blacken, about 5 minutes. Flip the squash and cook for 4 to 5 minutes more. Repeat with remaining squash.
2. In a serving bowl, combine the lemon juice, mint, garlic, sea salt, and red pepper flakes and let marinate for 5 minutes. Whisk in the oil.
3. Transfer the seared squash to the bowl, toss to coat with the dressing, and let rest for about 5 minutes. Season with additional salt and pepper and serve.

As always, ECOSF is dedicated to provided information, education, and services of an ecological nature to San Francisco. If you haven't become a member, please [consider making a contribution](#) to these efforts and help create a cooperative community. If you have any projects, ideas, or suggestions, please let us know. We'd love to hear from you! Remember, blueberries are only in season for a couple more weeks so you might want to stock up while you can.

To a delicious August filled with fun, frolicking, and festivities,

Davin, Sam, and Tori
Ecology Center of San Francisco