

Warm winter greetings friends and neighbors,

Our urban, bay-side peninsula and all the surrounding hills and valleys are full of life at this time of year ~ Pacific herring spawn amid the 483 acres of salt marsh and tidal flats of [Tomales Bay](#), [Steelhead trout](#), the anadromous analog to rainbow trout, spawn from February through March by 'smelling' their way back from the ocean to the native streams where they hatched, while [Chantrelle](#) mushrooms burst from beneath the duff of magnificent aged oak trees. The [Western Spadefoot](#) frog, which lives most of its life under the earth by burrowing with the 'spades' on its hind feet, comes out during the rains to breed, while the male [Northern Pacific Treefrog](#), which despite its name spends most of its days in shrubs and low lying vegetation, calls for a mate, and the [California Red-Legged](#) frog, which also has its short breeding period at this time, is also known as "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," of Mark Twain significance. If you don't happen upon one of these slippery croaksters that often but would like to, check out Tree Frog Treks, a SF based non-profit that 'strives to create critical thinkers who will work to save, preserve and maintain our planet's biodiversity', and who have some rescued amphibians and reptiles on hand to offer 'fun, hands-on science, literacy and art programming; and nature exploration'. If you're really lucky, you might see a [Pacific Gray Whale](#) ending its southern migration, or [Southern Sea Otters](#) giving birth to 3-5 pound [pups](#) - which can be seen riding on the bellies of their mothers rafting on the surf. Closer to home, one early sign of spring is the plum trees blossoming throughout the city, just in time for the Chinese New Year, Gung Hay Fat Choy, and [Happy 4708!](#)

We always like to point out that nature is all around us, even in one of the most densely populated cities in the world, but there's also plenty of easy to reach day adventures if you have some more time~ Enjoy the beauty of the ocean and fields blanketed in mustard flower, among the native perennial bunch grasses that shoot up with our winter rains along the coast north and south of the city. The Marin Headlands and Point Reyes are on the gorgeous and dramatic northern path and the peninsula down towards Half Moon Bay is especially beautiful with many parks and public access points to the ocean, just watch out for the 30 foot swells if you're near [Mavericks](#) Go see [Cataract Falls](#), a series of small falls along Cataract Creek, at Mt. Tamalpais or take the short trip to [Mt. Diablo](#) and experience breathtaking views amidst Oak woodlands and wildflower studded grassland. Our state parks are a bloom in wild flowers in February and March and the weather is just starting to warm enough to appreciate and enjoy the crisp cool air out there. Get out, attune your senses and participate in the emergence of new life and the refreshing essence of change that is within everything.

### **ECOSF News**

Since our last update, in which we shared the excitement about our new Glen Canyon farm site, we have had our hands and hearts in the earth throughout the city; building a cob bench with the [SF Urban Permaculture](#) students at the [Double Rock Community Garden](#), collaborating with the site nutritionist and the after school garden program at [Malcolm X Elementary](#), sowing native wildflower seeds in the landscape at the St Francis

Square Cooperative Housing, rebuilding the herb spiral at Bryant Elementary, sharing our homesteading experiences with the community at [Kitchen Table Talks](#) and meeting and planning for new projects on the horizon. Winter time is, after all, a time for reflection and gathering of energy for the burst of life in spring, and our energy this winter has been very much focused on the Glen Canyon learning farm project.

After meeting with school staff, faculty and students, district representatives and parents we have narrowed down the exact site for the project (an open field, roughly ¼ acre, behind the bleachers next to the athletic field), and more importantly we're growing our relationship with the school community to better understand how we can all cooperate to create a vibrant experiential learning space and meaningful education opportunities. We're starting with basic elements like farm rows, irrigation, powerhouse, and nursery operations (the school already has a greenhouse we just have to move down to the site and the powerhouse is for solar panels that a couple teachers already have.) Further plans are yet to be fully formed through a community design process but another fantastic element we're angling for is a large rainwater harvesting tank to store roof runoff and feed the farm directly through a gravity fed irrigation system. We've already applied for a \$5,000 grant to make this happen and we're always exploring other creative options for funding some of these more ambitious design elements. The school has also generously offered us storage space and a desk to work from inside the building, which really helps us out. Soon we will be holding regular weekly work sessions for the students, staff and faculty to get involved and help with the all the hard labor or as we call it, FUN!

The first task will be a massive sheet mulching over an area 50' x 50' that will provide a weed barrier and subterranean worm apartments under the farm rows. We want to experiment with different techniques for building soil fertility including cover cropping, lasagna compost beds, and double digging but to kick things off we are going to bring in tons of soil, literally, and lay out 25' rows of 1' deep planting mix over our cardboard to jumpstart the growing operation. We fully recognize that the outside input of soil is not exactly the best ecological practice, which is why we are also experimenting with the above mentioned techniques of more long term soil building, and we are planning, of course, on eventually closing the resource loop as much as possible with extensive on-site composting and application of agro-ecological principles. The work will be tough but rewarding, massive in scope yet individually achievable, easy for all and open to many, and we will be eagerly working with volunteer groups, and interested people in the community to make it happen.

Our first big workday is also a Bakers Alley event (see below) Sat. Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> 11-4, and will include an Earth oven building workshop as well as a huge sheet mulching and soil bed building demonstration. We appreciate the volunteer help for this event from the [Urban Permaculture Design class](#), the school community and hopefully all of you wonderful eco-enthusiasts, and keep your ear to the street for upcoming workdays and events at the space. For more info, questions, comments Contact us at [info@eco-sf.org](mailto:info@eco-sf.org) .

### **Bakers Alley**

In keeping with our mission create cooperative communities, in 2008, we began an event called Bakers Alley and the gathering has become one of the most engaging ways we have seen to bring people together to share food, fun and practical skills for sustainable living. With the help of the community, we built an earth oven of clay, sand, straw, with an urbanite (sidewalk concrete) base to regularly fire up as a community oven and bring people together for workshops, gatherings, skill sharing, and potluck. It's always been an engaging experience for everyone and a place for us to outreach to the community, open our lending library to the public, and offer our seedlings and other homemade goods and crafts. We've had exciting workshops like baking with professional baker [Tracy Wolfe](#), and other favorites like fruit tree pruning, soap making, fermenting and brewing, acorn preparation and of course the kickoff work party to build the oven itself. To see photos for some of our past Bakers Alley events, [click here](#).

Well, [Bakers Alley is back!](#) Join us for a rain or shine late winter, or really early spring depending on the weather, oven building kickoff work party at our new school garden and ecology education space at the High Schools at Glen Canyon (Aka School of the Arts and the Academy of Arts and Sciences). Come out and learn how to design and build your own earth oven and join in the ancient tradition of building with earth by mixing up some sand, clay and straw; be prepared to get a little dirty! We'll also be continuing the farm row prep by sheet mulching, double digging and building up planting beds on the ¼ acre farm space. Everyone is welcome, especially kids, and it's potluck so bring a little something to share.

### **Sat. Feb. 27th 11-5pm Bakers Alley – How to Build an Earth Oven**

**Location:** Sports Field at the Glen Canyon Schools – 555 Portola St, San Francisco. Parking is available via O'shaughnessy Blvd @ Portola. Close to 36, 44, 48, and 52 Muni lines. From the parking area on O'shaughnessy, proceed down the hill towards the football field. We'll be behind the bleachers with plants and building materials. See ya there!

If you have any ideas for future events at Baker's Alley or have any comments or feedback, please let us know.

### **Let the Greywater flow**

¿El Nino? Rain is falling in San Francisco and the rest of the temperate desert or, as it is euphemistically called, Mediterranean climate that makes up most of California, and in mid February it is easy to forget about conserving water, and to curse the cold rains, after all *it's supposed to be an El Niño year*. El Niño o La Nina no esta importante. We live in a drought prone area that gets at best 6 months of rain and 6 months of hot baking sun in most inland places, and even on the coast with all those overcast summer days unless you're harvesting fog drip, highly doubtful, the moisture in the air probably isn't watering your garden, cleaning your clothes or providing much fresh, clean water to

drink. California's water systems and cycles are fascinating, complex, controversial, and like the tiny [Delta Smelt and the mighty Chinook Salmon](#), seriously threatened.

That's why it is so exciting to see the recent progressive developments in California's Plumbing Code that ease the restrictions on home greywater use. As of August 4<sup>th</sup> 2009 the state dept. of housing and community development adopted an emergency measure changing [California greywater regulations](#) and making it significantly easier for everyday people to divert water from washing machines sinks and showers to irrigate gardens and recharge aquifers instead of going down the drain. The emergency changes took effect during a 180 day public comment period that will run out soon, so for now; it's the law. One of the major changes is that now greywater can be discharged beneath just 2 inches of mulch, rock, or soil while under the old regulations the release point had to be buried 9 inches underground. Another helpful change is that no permit will be required for simple home greywater systems. These changes make it easy for anyone to capture the many gallons of good, grey water that would have cost taxpayer money to treat and dump in nearby waterways, and instead use it to water fruit trees, and other perennials as long as they don't have tasty parts you want to eat at, or below, ground level (e.g. root crops and most vegetables). For more detail Check out this clip of "[Laundry to Landscapes](#)", a video by Oasis designs which is a family owned consulting and design company run by long time ecological designer and greywater pioneer Art Ludwig who has authored several books including [Create an Oasis with Greywater](#).

Using Greywater is an obvious and effective way to conserve water and live with less impact on our land base, and with the hydro-ecological disruption and water wars that have been going on in California since "American development's" assault on indigenous cultures and continue to this day, it's vitally important that we all understand and get involved with the many ins and outs of our water cycles. To get the low down, nitty gritty, and learn much, much more from our local experts, check out the [Greywater Guerillas](#).

### **In the Garden**

Now is the time to enhance your garden with any perennial fruit bearing trees and shrubs. Most nurseries in and around San Francisco have bare root fruit trees eager to be planted in your urban homestead, or community space. Recent specialized grafting techniques provide 6 on 1 apple trees already trained for [espalier](#), or multi graft plums, pears, and even fruit cocktails (peach, plum, nectarine, and apricot). These are all great options for diversity in a small urban lot. If you have even less space, you might want to consider a [genetic dwarf](#), which don't grow higher than 6 feet, and are great for containers. Now's also the time for your blueberries, raspberries, blackberries (and all their hybridizations), currants, grapes, kiwis, figs, persimmons, and more - all which can do well in the right microclimate. And of course it's not too late for native plants to get some nourishing natural water from the March and April rains. If you have trees already in the ground, now is the time to prune them for structure or fruit set if you haven't done so already. If you're not sure what to do and you're looking for a place to start consult a good book, call the local [Cooperative Extension](#), or keep your eyes and ears out for [local](#)

[workshops](#) and classes on fruit tree pruning and care. Our friends at the Garden for the Environment have near monthly organic gardening and composting (the first step in most organic gardens) workshops, [click here](#) for their calendar of events.

For annuals, Brassica's like kale, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and mustards do great being planted right now, as well as lettuce, Asian greens, spinach, peas and direct seeded root crops like carrots, beets, turnips, and radishes. You can "headstart" some seeds indoors in a window, or even under a low power fluorescent bulb, for planting in March when it's just a bit warmer. Timing is important for successful growing, and we're just in time now to work into action our winter plans for bountiful spring and summer gardens. Edible Flowers like sweet and spicy Nasturtium, Primrose and Borage are full of life and color, or should be soon, and in the case of Borage which will reseed itself each year the Bees will especially appreciate the treat.

### **Upcoming events**

#### **Sun. Feb. 21st 12-2pm Raising Urban Chickens- at Other Avenues Food Co-op**

Baaak, Bok, bok, baaaaaak! Tori and Davin will be clucking it up at a workshop on raising urban chickens at Other Avenues Food Co-op. Come learn about the practical and beneficial aspects of urban animal husbandry for chickens including local ordinances, coop and run design considerations, and how to raise healthy hens for 'city' fresh eggs and super fertilizer for your organic garden. Whether you're just curious, or you're ready for your first cluckers this season, we'll cover everything you need to know to get started as well as the joys and challenges of raising urban chickens. Everyone who attends will receive a coupon for free chicks at Half Moon Bay Feed and Fuel!

**Location:** Other Avenues Health Food Co-op. 3930 Judah St. btwn. 44th and 45th Avenues. Conveniently located near the N-Judah, 18, and 29 Muni lines.

Please RSVP by contacting Other Avenues at (415) 661-7475 or [info@otheravenues.org](mailto:info@otheravenues.org)

#### **Sat. Feb. 27th 11-5pm Bakers Alley – How to Build an Earth Oven**

See above, or [click here](#) for flyer and details.

**Location:** Sports Field at the Glen Canyon Schools – 555 Portola St, San Francisco. Parking is available via O'shaughnessy Blvd @ Portola. Close to 36, 44, 48, and 52 Muni lines. From the parking area on O'shaughnessy, proceed down the hill towards the football field. We'll be behind the bleachers with plants and building materials. See ya there!

#### **Other Events Happening this month:**

Habitat Restoration Volunteer Days with Nature in the City, [click here](#) for various dates.

Black History Month Celebration with the Radical Women of San Francisco, [click here](#) for calendar of events.

Container Gardening Workshop at the SF Botanical Gardens, [click here](#) for calendar of events.

Sunday, Feb 28th - [Open House at Commonweal Garden](#) - The Regenerative Design Institute

[A special workshop update we would like to share:](#)

Looking to start growing fruit trees, or wondering how to take care of the trees you already have? This introductory, day-long workshop will cover the basics of fruit tree selection, biology, ecology, placement, planting, pruning and care, propagation and grafting, watering, and orchard management. Instruction sites, located in the Half Moon Bay area, include three different sized orchards of various varieties and ages, including Apples, Plums, Asian and European Pears, Persimmons, Avocados, Loquats, Figs, and Walnuts. Payment for the workshop is \$25-\$75 sliding scale. No one will be turned away, however, so please contact us if you cannot afford the tuition. Class size is limited, so sign up now!

Participants are asked to bring their own pruning clippers.

This class will be facilitated by Aaron Dinwoodie (farm manager at Tunitas Creek Ranch) and Antonio Roman-Alcalá ([Alemayn Farm](#)), and meets Sunday, February 21st, at 9:30am. It ends at 4pm, with one hour for BYO/Potluck lunch. To register, please write Antonio at [antidogmatist@gmail.com](mailto:antidogmatist@gmail.com), with "TREE COURSE" in the subject line.

### **Bringing It All Home**

We would like to leave you with some thoughts by [Aldo Leopold](#), the holistic forester and supporter of land based ecological ethics of nature and wildlife preservation:

*I need a short name for what is lacking. I call it the ecological conscience. Ecology is the science of communities, and the ecological conscience is therefore the ethics of community life. - Aldo Leopold 'The Ecological Conscience' 1947*

Thank you for your support, suggestions, passions and providence,

Sam, Tori, and Davin