

Environmental Exchange

A publication of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition

March 2004
Newsletter &
Calendar

The Houston-Galveston area's most comprehensive coverage of environmental news and events.

Green building the cornerstone of plan to cool down Houston

by Eric Epp, Contributing Writer

When severe weather strikes, people are in a heightened state of alert and tuned to their radios for the latest information. Blockbuster movies portray the awesome destructiveness of twisters and perfect storms. Set next to such powerful natural events, paving materials and rooftop surfaces are unlikely to arouse strong emotional reactions, yet they can be even more deadly.

"Over the past twenty years, there have been more deaths related to increased urban heating than all major storms during that time. . . Cool roofs save lives," Hashem Akbari, staff scientist from the Leader Heat Island group, said.

Urban heat islands--the higher temperatures in cities compared with surrounding rural areas--contribute to a growing number of medical and environmental problems, in addition to increasing the amount of energy spent on cooling.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are an average of 381 heat-related deaths per year in the United States. Urban heating has also contributed to an increase in asthmatic conditions and other respiratory illnesses. This is due in large part to an increase in ground-level ozone air pollution caused by heat islands.

The regrettable thing about heat islands is that, unlike major storms, they can be easily mitigated. Just a small reduction in temperature, says David Hitchcock of the Houston Area Research Center, is enough to have a dramatic affect on the environment. "Houston can reduce peak

summertime temperatures by two degrees or more. While this might not sound like much, it could reduce ozone (more) than many of our current air pollution measures. Many of the actions needed will pay for themselves."

HARC has developed the Cool Houston Plan, which focuses on three simple elements: rooftops, roads, and trees. A new

"Houston can reduce peak temperatures by two degrees or more...It could reduce ozone more than current air pollution measures."

--David Hitchcock,

Houston Advanced Research Center

approach to these elements can greatly reduce the discrepancy between urban and rural temperatures, which can be as high as ten degrees on summer days in Houston. Changing the color of the surface material on rooftops, and of paved areas such as roads and parking lots, greatly increases their reflectivity, directing the sun's rays away from the city and reducing the temperature. Typical pavement temperatures on a July day in Houston average around 133 degrees. Change the color of some of the paving materials and the temperature is reduced

Local coffee retailer offers greener choice

by Erika Anderson, Contributing Writer

Donate money, write letters, call constituents, boycott business, wear buttons, hold protests, paint signs and buy fair trade. Activism as a lifestyle can mean simply replacing the products you buy with socially conscious versions. As the cliché says, money talks. Fair trade allows consumers to speak their minds in the green language that corporations understand. Local businesses such as Lola Savannah let the public to do just that in the case of coffee, the second most traded commodity in the world.

Facing the lowest prices in a century, coffee growers in Central and South America have turned to cultivating illegal drugs or have abandoned their farms altogether, deserting a crop that is no longer profitable. Since 1988, world coffee prices have dropped sharply, from \$1.20 per pound to today's paltry 30 or 40 cents. With costs of approximately 80 cents per pound to grow coffee, farmers operating within this framework do so at a loss.

This is where fair trade comes in. Fair trade has played a critical role in the lives of coffee growers since the collapse of the market price for this crop. In return for practicing environmentally sustainable agriculture, fair trade coffee growers receive approximately \$1.29 per pound, allowing farmers to invest in their families and communities.

The idea of fair trade is more than fifty years old, but higher demand has now pushed it into the mainstream market –

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Environmental Exchange

The Environmental Exchange is published by the Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), an information clearinghouse and communications network for environmental issues in the Houston-Galveston area. The CEC mission is to improve the quality of life and health in the region through education, dialogue and collaboration. CEC serves the general public by bringing many diverse groups together to build awareness and stimulate discussion about environmental issues in the region. Programs include forums that give a balanced perspective on environmental issues, and information vehicles that enhance understanding.

tel (713) 524-4CEC (524-4232)

fax (713) 524-3311

email issues@cechouston.org

world wide web www.cechouston.org

mail 3015 Richmond Suite 270

Houston TX 77098

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Perspectives Big box stores offer bad advice for local gardening

by Brenda Beust Smith,
Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener

In more than thirty years of writing the *Chronicle's* "Lazy Gardener" column, I have watched numerous local gardening books slip into publishing graveyards, taking with them excellent advice that was both protective of our environment and good for our gardens.

Why? Most large bookstores carry few, if any, local books, preferring guides written for Texas or national audiences. The few local gardening books they carry are usually under "regional books" instead of "gardening." Most independent nurseries do carry local books, but nursery sales alone are not sufficient to keep local books in print.

National or statewide books are fine reference volumes. But for the protection of our bayous, it is to local books we must persuade gardeners to turn for advice on growing healthy plants that don't need fertilizing or treatments.

Our unique subtropical pocket, with our heavy spring and fall rains, is closer in ecology to parts of Louisiana than to the rest of Texas. Statewide or national books do not always give accurate advice for us. Most focus on plant cold hardiness.

Houston summers kill more plants than Houston winters. Heat hardiness zones exist, but only local authors seem to use them.

Xeriscaping is excellent for the Dallas/Austin/San Antonio oval, source of most marketed natives or xeriscape plants. These succeed here only in well drained areas or raised beds, a point seldom noted in statewide books.

Water-smart gardening is better for us. When plants are ill situated, they become weak, attracting insects or disease. Gardeners grab chemicals, often misusing them, ultimately further polluting our bayous. Too many gardeners won't follow label directions, assuming "If a teaspoon is good, a cupful is better." Getting gardeners to switch to plants that don't need chemi-

cals will be far easier than getting them to stop treating pests and disease.

This is not a minor problem. Some experts say gardeners, as a group, contribute more to water pollution than do industries. Every homeowner has to garden, if only in the front yard to keep POA from sending nasty notes. Think of the potential benefits if Houston's thousands of homeowners would landscape to stockpile rainwater for use during droughts, as many new local books urge them to do.

Most problems gardeners bring to me result from following advice learned in other areas or in statewide or national gardening books and websites. We are unique. We plant traditional spring bloomers (larkspur, snapdragons, hollyhocks) in December, not March. Weed/feed products used elsewhere don't work here. We refrigerate tulips before planting.

The Lazy Gardener motto is: "If you have a plant with an unacceptable level of insect or disease damage, get rid of it! Replace it with one that doesn't get unacceptable levels of insect or disease damage."

The key phrase is "unacceptable levels." Thanks to native plant/habitat advocates, gardeners now accept temporarily decimated butterfly weed. "The monarchs are here!" Someday they may accept temporary damage on other plants as well. Often it's due to an insect passing through. Sometimes a good plant has been weakened by being in the wrong spot or over- or under-watered. Sometimes it's just not a good plant for us.

Area growers now market many appropriate hardy plants. But gardeners won't find most of these in national or statewide gardening books or websites: plants such as firespike, a shade shrub with fire engine red blooms, or sun-loving bulbine, which has year-round yellow-orange spikes.

One place to find good local gardening tips is at Mercer Arboretum's annual March Mart. The event will include an authors' booth, 8 am-4 pm on Saturday and Sunday. This will be a great opportunity to meet and quiz local gardening authors and to find local gardening books that may, in the future, become totally unavailable.

So long, Spur

State moves ahead with 3-year closure

Despite the best efforts of quality-of-life activists and civic organizations, the Texas Department of Transportation was allowed to move forward with plans to close Spur 527, the major artery into downtown, for three years during construction. The agency was sued by attorney Jim Blackburn who, on behalf of the West



Alabama Quality of Life Coalition, sought an injunction to delay construction. Area residents continue to be concerned about safety and health impacts from motorists looking to avoid 59 traffic by cutting through neighborhood streets. Another group, 59 Gridlock, says they will be monitoring the traffic situation on their web site at www.59gridlock.org. Leading up to the closure, the group met with city officials, including Mayor Bill White, and held rallies on the Mandell bridge over 59 to alert commuters.



Make room for cyclists

Unidentified activists decided to take matters into their own hands in response to the removal of bike lanes from West Alabama by repainting new lanes. The city removed bike lanes late last summer to accommodate traffic that will likely result from the Spur closure.

Photos courtesy the Houston Independent Media Center

Cooler

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to 88 degrees. In Houston, HARC hopes the city will implement this suggestion by using new, porous material in pavements and, where possible, painting surfaces white. Even something as simple as laying down grass parking lots, as at Reliant stadium, contributes to heat reduction.

Reflective roofing material or lighter colored roofing also makes a big difference in temperature, which Hitchcock states will pay for itself in reduced energy costs. Currently, HARC is working with the city of Houston to explore the use of

reflective roofing on city buildings.

Planting more trees helps mitigate the urban heat island by providing shade and by reducing some forms of air pollution.

Hitchcock said that the city has been generally receptive to their Cooler Communities proposals. "There has been support of heat island concepts and involvement by the city of Houston over the past few years. . . Mayor White is knowledgeable about the benefits and issues. We hope the city will serve as a champion for heat island actions. (However) heat island mitigation is really a regional challenge, so we also need strategies that involve Harris County and the outlying counties."

Because changing governmental policies and practices as they relate to surface materials and tree plantings involve many debates and decisions, HARC is also focusing on other factors that contribute to the urban heat island. They are encouraging city residents to do their part to cool the city. "One cool roof on a residential street can affect that block's temperature," says Akbari. Homeowners can help by planting trees where they will shade their homes, particularly on the western side and around their air-conditioning units. They also can reduce the area they have to mow by using other types of shade planting, including trees. If they need to replace a roof, they can use reflective roofing, and driveways can be surfaced using lighter colored chip seals or coating products.

Hitchcock states that the next step for the Cool Communities Plan will be to continue informing the public, city officials, and developers that taking simple steps can have a huge environmental impact.

In addition, HARC is trying to determine "what changes (they) can make in the thermal characteristics of cities that will provide the greatest benefit." In Houston, for example, planting more trees might be especially desirable because trees reduce flooding and increase property values, as well as reducing urban heating. ☉

CEC Notes

Houston Earth Day event one month away

CEC is happy to announce that Earth Day plans are final. This year's event is scheduled for Saturday, April 24, in Hermann Park. CEC is working in collaboration with Friends of Hermann Park, the Houston Zoo, and Houston Museum of Natural Science to bring a community environmental event to the park. All non-profit groups, small businesses and individuals interested in participating are encouraged to contact CEC right away. Booth space is still available; the more groups represented the better! We also need volunteers to make sure this year's event runs as smoothly as last year. Please email earthday@cechouston.org or call (713) 524-4232 if you or your group would like to be a part of the festivities.

Coalition Notes

Buffalo Bayou Partnership creates new conservation division

When the Buffalo Bayou Partnership released its "Buffalo Bayou and Beyond" master plan last year, the plan recommended restructuring the nonprofit organization into three divisions: conservation, design, and land development. Now the Partnership has announced that the conservation division has been formally organized, funded, and staffed. The Partnership reports that several conservation programs are underway, including a vegetation management program for the bayou's western sector from Shepherd to I-45 and the restoration of the Charles Tapley site.

MfCA hosts next film in anti-sprawl video series

The CEC, Mothers for Clean Air, and the Houston Sierra Club anti-sprawl campaign will co-host a screening of the environmental film *The Air We Breathe*. The film is the third in a series of videos focusing on urban sprawl, quality of life, and their effects on our health. *The Air We Breathe* will be shown Friday, March 26, 7 pm, at the Upper Kirby District Building, 3015 Richmond, which houses the Houston Environmental Center. The film will be preceded by refreshments and networking at 6:15 pm.

Annual event boasts wide variety of plants

Once again, it's time for March Mart, the Gulf Coast's largest horticultural event and plant sale. March Mart offers a wide selection of plants rarely found at local retail nurseries. Choices range from familiar plants and hardy Texas natives to tropicals and specialty species. March Mart also features difficult-to-find plants, reasonable prices, and knowledgeable sales people. There will be gardening booths, exhibits, and a new author's booth, where garden books can be purchased and signed. The event, a fundraiser for Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, will be held Friday and

Saturday, March 26-27, 8 am-4 pm, at Mercer. Previews of the event featuring slide shows of native plants are scheduled for Wednesday, March 10, 12-1 pm, and Saturday, March 20, 9-11am. For more information, call (281) 443-8731, or visit www.cp4.hctx.net/mercer/index.htm <<http://www.cp4.hctx.net/mercer/index.htm>>

Mothers mad about mercury to march on EPA's Dallas office

A protest is scheduled in response to the US Environmental Protection Agency's plans to roll back regulations on mercury emissions. To allow for the trading of mercury credits by coal-burning power plants, the agency will reclassify the heavy metal as a less toxic substance.

Opponents of the plan will march on the Region 6 EPA office in Dallas on Thursday, March 13, at 11 am. The focus of the march will be pregnant women and children. Women of child-bearing age are encouraged to be "pregnant" for a day to make a statement about the impacts of toxic mercury on babies and young children. However, men and women of all ages are encouraged to attend.

For more information about car pooling from Houston, or to help organize the event, contact Karen Hadden, executive director, Sustainable Energy and Economic Development Coalition, at <karen@seed-coalition.org> or (512) 479-7744.

Symposium to focus on children's health

Environmental health hazards and their effects on children will be the focus of the upcoming Gulf Coast Pediatric Environmental Health Symposium.

Co-hosted by Baylor College of Medicine, Texas Children's Hospital, and the Southwest Center for Pediatric Environmental Health in Tyler, the symposium will feature nationally and internationally renowned experts on pediatric environmental health. Continuing education credits are available for physicians, nurses, and social workers, but all interested individuals are invited to attend. The event will be held Friday, March 19, 8 am-5:15 pm,

Crowne Plaza Houston Medical Center Hotel. For more information, visit <<http://www.envirohealthhouston.org/symposium04>>

Eco Notes

Public comment closes this month on EPA's new mercury rules

January 30 marked the beginning of a 60-day public comment period on the Environmental Protection Agency's new rules designed to reduce mercury emissions. The primary source of mercury emissions is coal-fired power plants.

The EPA drew the ire of environmental groups in Texas and across the country in December when it announced new rules for coal-burning plants. For years, the agency has been drafting guidelines that would have reduced emissions by 90 percent nationally. Now, instead, the agency has proposed a cap-and-trade plan that sets a national emissions limit and allows cleaner plants to sell pollution credits to dirtier plants. While the plan is expected to reduce the nation-wide emissions total by 70 percent (ten years later than the original plan), environmental groups have argued the EPA left hotspots such as Texas virtually unprotected.

Texas leads the nation in mercury emis-

Resource Corner

Helpful hints for CEC member organizations

CLEAN launches new site

The Citizens' League for Environmental Action Now launched a new web site last month. The site features local and national news, features, and editorials on health and environmental issues. The site also provides links to other important organizations and a guide to local air quality.

Visit the new site at www.cleanairwatersoil.org.

sions, with 8,992 lbs released from coal-fired plants across the state in 2001. Twelve state water bodies, including the Gulf of Mexico, are under health-department advisories because of mercury contamination. The Texas Department of Health also warns against the heavy consumption of species high on the food chain, such as swordfish, orange roughy, and tuna.

The EPA is accepting public comments via mail email or facsimile until March 30. Submission information can be found at

<<http://www.epa.gov/mercury/comment.htm>>.

Groups criticize plan to revive Gulf snapper

Federal plans designed to help replenish the Gulf of Mexico with red snapper are being criticized on grounds they fail to ensure survival of the species.

Red snapper stocks have declined in recent years and some environmental groups and others say overfishing and the shrimping industry are to blame.

The Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council wants to restore the fish to 20 percent of its spawning potential within three decades.

While the council has established five alternatives to address the red snapper shortage, the Gulf Restoration Network, a collection of fifty environmental and social advocacy organizations, said there's only one way to solve the problem.

The network believes something needs to be done to stop shrimping boats from unintentionally collecting juvenile red snapper in their trawl nets.

The network endorses an alternative for restoration of the species that includes maintaining the current total allowable catch at 9.12 million pounds while relying on an anticipated reduction of shrimping industry activities in the Gulf.

In 1996, the allowable catch was raised from 6 million pounds per year. This is a ceiling members of the Gulf Restoration Network would like to see reinstated. Red snapper was classified as "depleted" by the Fisheries Service in 1997.

The network said the council failed to address the problem in some of its alternatives and at least three of the proposed plans do not meet current fishery laws because red snapper in the Gulf would not

be replenished by set deadlines. Biologists with the US Department of Health said if the snapper population is not increased by 20 percent, the species may not remain viable in the wild.

Sierra Club seeks to halt local 'healthy forest' logging project

The Houston Sierra Club filed an appeal in late January for a stay of the decision by the US Forest Service and Sam Houston National Forest to log on more than 8,000 acres of the preserve.

Among the group's more serious charges is that the plan, one of several pilot projects around the nation to test the Bush administration's controversial Healthy Forest Initiative, violates the National Environmental Protection Act.

The Houston Sierra Club's forestry chair, Brandt Mannchen, said the Forest Service erred when it issued an environmental assessment that found no significant impacts from logging in the Four Notch/Boswell Creek Watershed of the national forest.

He accused the Forest Service of withholding information, such as the number of trees to be removed, in order to avoid having to issue a more complete environmental impact statement.

The Sierra Club also claims the agency violated NEPA by failing to assess the cumulative impacts of logging on the preserve or to consider alternative actions.

Though confident in the group's standing to challenge the project, Mannchen said it is unlikely a stay will be granted. In ten years of filing appeals in an effort to protect the national forest, the Sierra Club has never won an appeal.

Making things harder, he said, are new rules surrounding public input on forest management.

One of the central arguments against the Healthy Forest Initiative is that it restricts citizens' ability to challenge federal forest policy. This is the first time the Sierra Club has appealed a logging

project under the new rules. Mannchen said he still has not received information he sought through a Freedom of Information Act filed more than one year ago.

"Claims that (the Forest Service) are

conducting an open process are shallow," Mannchen said. "They don't want us involved in the process at all."

Historic water decisions currently in the works

A state senate committee held its first meeting in Austin last month to discuss water issues looming ever larger in Texas.


The senate select committee on water met to adopt rules and set the agenda that will ultimately inform the 2005 legislature's approach to state water management. Victoria Republican Ken Arbrister serves as committee chair.

The committee was charged by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst with examining a broad range of issues relating to the management of both surface and ground water, including the rule of capture, inter-basin transfers, monitoring desalination plants, the regional water planning process, and water rights.

The most contentious issue facing the committee is likely to be water rights. A subcommittee on the lease of state water rights, was formed largely in reaction to deals already in the works by the General Land Office.

One potential deal would allow a Midland-based company to lease groundwater rights on state-owned land in West Texas. The other would involve the GLO's entering into an agreement with WaterTexas to supply water to Central Texas. A third proposal involves the pumping and piping of groundwater from the Texas Panhandle to other parts of the state. Some senators balked at the precedent-setting deals being negotiated without legislative oversight. In a letter to state land commissioner Jerry Patterson, Fraser urged the agency to hold off on negotiations with private entities until the subcommittee could examine the proposals. He argued that the agency's actions would violate the spirit of Senate Bill 1, which in 1997 created sixteen regional water planning districts throughout the state to ensure local control of water planning decisions.

Representatives of the Department of Agriculture, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Water Development Board, and the Parks and Wildlife Department also attended the meeting.

The committee's report, which could be the basis of new senate laws on water management, is due out next December. 

March Calendar

For the most complete and current listing of environmental happenings in the Houston-Galveston region, visit CEC's web site at www.cechouston.org and click on Calendar.

Mon, Mar 1

Ornithology Group March Meeting

Where: Bayland Community Center,

6400 Bissonnet

When: 7 pm

Contact: Kathy Farr at (713) 939-9375 or www.ornithologygroup.org

Fee: Free

Sat, Mar 6

Katy Prairie Conservancy Tour

Where: Call for details

When: 8 am-12 noon

Contact: (713) 523-6135 or www.katyprairie.org

Fee: Free; Reservations required

Horseshoe Marsh Bird Sanctuary Dedication

Where: Bolivar Lighthouse

When: Call for details

Contact: Houston Audubon Society at (713) 932-1639

Fee: Please call for fees; Reservations required

Houston Museum of Natural Science 2004 Gala

Where: Houston Museum of Natural Science

When: Call for details

Contact: Lynn Wisda at (713) 639-4609

Fee: Yes; Please call for ticket prices

Houston Zoo Wild Art Class - Family Reunion (ages 6-12)

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 8-10 am

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$45 for member, \$55 for non-member

Sat, Mar 6-Sun, Mar 7

Houston Zoo Family Overnight Program - The Truth About Cats and Dogs

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 6 pm

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$45 for member, \$55 for non-member

Sun, Mar 7

Kickoff for 2004 Summer Directory of Day Camps & Summer Classes for Children in Houston & Turtle Demonstration

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 12-4 pm Summer Book, 2-4 pm Turtles

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: Free; bring \$11 to buy book

Tue, Mar 9

Tree Basics

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: \$15 for member, \$20 for non-member

Wed, Mar 10

Houston Audubon Society March Meeting

Where: Cullen Hall, University of St. Thomas

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: (713) 932-1639

Fee: Free

Lunch Bunch: March Mart Preview of Plants

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 12-1 pm

Contact: (281) 443-8731

Fee: Free

Wed, Mar 10-Fri, Mar 12

Texas GLO Coastal Issues Conference

Where: Solomon P. Ortiz International Center, Corpus Christi, TX

When: Call for details

Contact: 1 (800) 998-4GLO or www.glo.state.tx.us

Fee: Yes; Please call for fee

Thu, Mar 11

Outdoor Nature Club March Meeting

Where: Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: Calvin Blakley at (281) 358-5407

Fee: Free

Fri, Mar 12

Audubon Docent Guild Winter Owl Prowl

Where: Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: Audubon Docent Guild at (713) 464-4900

Fee: \$5; Reservations requested

Houston Audubon Society High Island Work Day

Where: High Island; call for details

Contact: Winnie Burkett at (713) 932-1639

Fee: Free; reservations requested

Sat, Mar 13

All in the Family (ages 4-5)

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 9-10 am or 10:30-11:30 am

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$15 for member, \$20 for non-member

Tue, Mar 16

Houston Audubon Society Sanctuary Seminar

Where: Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

When: 6:45-9 pm

Contact: (713) 932-1639

Fee: \$5; reservations requested

Piney Woods Wildlife Society March Meeting

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: Kathy Coward at (281) 893-1816

Fee: Free

Thu, Mar 18

Native Plant Society of Texas Meeting

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7:30 pm

Contact: Glenn Olsen at (281) 345-4151

Fee: Free

Sat, Mar 20

It's All Relative (ages 6-9)

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 9:30-11:30 am or 1-3 pm

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$25 for member, \$30 for non-member

Naturalist Explorers Class - Calling All Frogs (ages 5-12 + a parent)

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: \$9 for member, \$15 for non-member

March Mart Slide Preview of Plants

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 9-11 am

Contact: (281) 443-8731

Fee: Free

Tue, Mar 23

Mammals of Texas

Where: Houston Arboretum

When: 7-9 pm

Contact: (713) 681-8433

Fee: \$15 for member, \$20 for non-member

Fri, Mar 26

Houston Zoo Dinner Program - We Are Family

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 6-8 pm

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$25 for member, \$30 for non-member

Fri, Mar 26 & Sat, Mar 27

March Mart Plant Sale

Where: Mercer Arboretum

When: 8 am-4 pm

Contact: (281) 443-8731

Fee: Free; bring money to buy plants

Sat, Mar 27 & Sun, Mar 28

Rice Design Alliance 2004 Architecture Tour

Where: Call for details

When: Call for details

Contact: (713) 348-4876

Fee: Please call for details

Sat, Mar 27

Rivers, Lakes, Bays & Bayous Trash Bash

Where: Call for details

When: 8:30 am-1:30 pm

Contact: (281) 486-9500

Fee: Free; call for reservations

Piney Woods Wildlife Society Field Trip-

Where: Texas City Prairie Preserve/Galveston Bay/Attwater's Prairie Chickens

When: 5:30 am

Contact: Kathy Coward at (281) 893-1816

Fee: Free

Houston Zoo Adult Class - How Does Our Garden Grow?

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 8-10 am

Contact: (713) 533-6550

Fee: \$25 for member, \$30 for non-member

Regular Meetings

Meetings are monthly unless otherwise indicated.

Call to verify before attending a meeting. To list meetings, call 713-524-4CEC or fax 713-524-3311.

American Institute of Architects Environmental Committee 2nd Tues at noon. AIA office 3000 Richmond, Ste 500. 713-520-0155.

American Institute of Chemical Engineers 1st Thurs, Sheraton Astrodome, 610 Loop S. & Kirby Matthew Kolodney, 713-767-3752.

American Planning Assoc. 1st Tues, 11:45 am, The Court at St. James Place. Bret Keast 713-785-0080.

Bayou Preservation Assoc. 2nd Monday of Jan, March, May, Sept & Nov, at the Houston Arboretum, 713-529-6443. Please RSVP.

BikeHouston last Tues, 6:30 pm, 3015 Richmond 713-652-2555.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition Board meeting 1st Tues, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond. 713-524-4CEC.

Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition 3rd Weds, 7:30 pm, Lakewood Forest Utility District Office, 14223 Lakewood Forest Drive Map is on web site at www.ccfcc.org (281) 469-5161

Electric Auto Association, Houston Chapter. 3rd Thurs, 6:30 pm, HEC 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. Ben Chamberlin, 713-975-7744.

Environmental Educator's Exchange 1st Wed of Feb, May, Aug, Nov, 5 pm. Sites vary. Kelly Drinnen, 409-683-4233.

Friends of Texas Wildlife. 2nd Sat, 10 am, Samuel Matthew Park, 1728 E. Hufsmith Road, Tomball, 281-255-8885 or Lynda Guertin, cell 713-825-4095.

Galveston Bay Estuary Program Quarterly. Call for specific dates: 281-332-9937.

Galveston-Houston Assoc. For Smog Prevention (GHASP) 3rd Thurs, 7:30 pm, 3126 Fairhope. Ron Parry, 713-669-1195.

Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, Monthly walking tours, 4th Sun, 2 pm. Historic Neighborhoods Council Meeting, last Sat. Call 713-216-5000 or visit www.ghpa.org for times and locations.

Green Party 3rd Mon, Montrose Public Library 4100 Montrose. 713-866-6285 or 713-880-3219.

Gulf Coast Institute: Houston/Gulf Coast Smart Growth Initiative 4th Wed, monthly at 11:30 am, H-GAC, 3555 Timmons, 2nd floor. 713-523-5757.

Harris County Soil & Water Conservation District 1st Wed, 9 am. Bennie Billington, 713-855-8716.

HART - Houston Animal Rights Team 1st and 3rd Thurs, 7pm, University of St. Thomas 2nd floor, Crooker Center (the student cafeteria) 713-527-9144 .

Historic Neighborhoods Council 1st Sun, 10:30 am, Heights Branch Library. Ramona Davis. 713-216-5000.

Houston Arboretum & Nature Center 3rd Wed, 5:45 pm, Houston Arboretum. 713-681-8433.

Houston Archeological Society 2nd Fri, 7:30 pm, M.D. Anderson Hall, Univ. of St. Thomas. Tommy Nuckols, 713-664-8369.

Houston Audubon Society 2nd Wed, Sept-May. 7 pm, University of St. Thomas, Cullen Hall.

713-932-1639.

Houston Bicycle Club, Inc. 2nd Tues, except May. 7 pm, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Drive. 713-935-2810.

Houston Canoe Club Gen Mtg 2nd Wed, 7 pm, Red Cross Building, 2700 Southwest Frwy. Social Mtg 4th Wed, 7 pm Jax Grill, 1613 Shepherd. 713-467-8857.

Houston Homeowners Assoc 4th Mon (except November, Aug, and Dec), 5:30 pm, First Presbyterian, 5300 S. Main. Michael O'Brian, 281-496-0752.

Houston Renewable Energy Group Last Sunday of Jan, April, July, Oct., 2-4 pm, TSU School of Technology, Room 225. 713-524-2492.

Katy Prairie Conservancy 2nd Tues, 5:30 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-523-6135.

Keep Houston Beautiful Quarterly meetings at 2700 Post Oak Blvd., Ste. 1728. 713-621-7020.

Legacy Land Trust 3rd Wed, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-524-2100.

League of Women Voters of Houston 2nd Thurs or Fri. 713-784-2923.

Mothers for Clean Air Quarterly. Call Jane Laping 713-526-0110.

Nature Discovery Center of Friends of Bellaire Parks 3rd Mon, 7 pm, Nature Discovery Center, 7112 Newcastle. 713-667-6550.

Native Plant Society of Texas 3rd Thurs (except Dec, Jan), 7pm, Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway, 713-431-6346.

Outdoor Nature Club 2nd Thurs, Sept-May. 7:30 pm (social begins at 7), Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet. 281-358-5407.

Piney Woods Wildlife Society 3rd Tues, 7:30 pm, Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. 281-443-8731.

Sierra Club 1st Thur, 7:30 pm, Central Presbyterian, 3788 Richmond @ Timmons. 713-895-9309.

Texas Association of Environmental Professionals 3rd Thurs, 11:30 am, Brady's Landing, 8505 Cypress; Reservations: www.taep.org, reservation@taep.org, or 713-629-9119.

Urban Harvest Community Gardens Quarterly Meeting 4th Tuesday in January, April, July, 6-8 pm; Organic Gardening Classes weekly; workshops for outdoor classroom teachers annually summers. 1900 Kane. 713-880-5540.

Vegetarian Society of Houston 4th Wed, dinner mtg. at various local restaurants. 713-880-1055; Outreach volunteers call 713-880-1055.

White Oak Bayou Assoc 2nd Wed, 7:30 pm, Heights Fire House, 12th & Yale. For agenda, Fred Lazare, President, 713-864-9416 or Teresa Matlock, Treasurer, 713-864-3008.

Wildlife Rehab & Education Central/West: Carol at 713-661-5038 date and times. South/East: 2nd Wed 7 pm Sharon, 281-332-8319.

The Woodlands GREEN Quarterly at WCSC, 8203 Millennium Forest Drive. Christina West, 281-291-5876.

Fair Trade Coffee

Continued from page 1

witness the new espresso products at Dunkin' Donuts or Starbucks' Fair Trade blend. Even so, fair trade items seldom make it onto the shelves and must be sought out by conscientious consumers. In Houston, fine coffee and tea distributor Lola Savannah offers ten different types of fair trade coffee.

Michael Spencer of Lola Savannah explained how his company obtains fair trade coffee: "The program in which we participate is with TransFair USA (a nonprofit certifying body), where they do third-party verification of fair trade. It used to be, the grower would go to a co-op and they would get whatever price (the market gave them). Now with fair trade, if (the coffee is) organic and it fits the qualifications, then they give that lot of coffee a number, and the co-op gives them a guaranteed price. Then the coffee is marked and shipped by an importer, and the importer reports the purchase to TransFair. When we purchase our coffee from the importer, we report the number to TransFair."

Lola Savannah's main clients are regional, for example Central Market and local restaurants such as Star Pizza. According to Spencer, fair trade coffee, all of which is organic, actually tastes better when grown in the shade, an agricultural method termed "bird friendly" because it gives migratory birds a place to rest.

Although bird-friendly approval is relatively new, the preservation of forest habitats even in the case of coffee growers is not. Until the 1970s, cultivators farmed coffee under a forest overstory; but then, in an effort to increase production and combat the spread of an African fungus, growers switched to higher yielding varieties that do better in direct sunlight. This required clear-cutting, a devastating practice for the environment as well as for the people.

Shade-grown coffee provides non-coffee products financially critical to small growers. Trees can be used as firewood, for example, or as an additional source of income. Also, forest farming does not expose workers to the wide range of chemicals required on technified farms, where coffee bushes are grown in direct sunlight.

Instead of poisoning and depleting the soil, the cultivation of coffee according to the agroforestry model improves soil by using nitrogen-fixing legumes. Preserving the forest in its natural state also provides habitat to animals that depend on it for survival. This is vital in the case of migratory birds, whose habitats have been disappearing from the earth at a rapid rate due to deforestation.

"We try to have a social conscience," says Spencer. "This is not a mainstream product . . . when someone goes and gets a fair price for their product; it's tangible, you can see it in the estates. This is more sustainable."

Lola Savannah can be reached at www.lolasavannah.com or by calling (713) 222-9800. ☕

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Green building to help cool down Houston

Local coffee retailer offers greener choice

Photos of Spur 527 demolition and protes

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