

# SNOHOMISH CONSERVATION DISTRICT

## The NEXUS



## Confessions and Catnip

By Lois Ruskell, Information and Education Coordinator

Most people who know me (I believe) would not consider me a lazy or sedentary person. My cat probably wishes I would sit still long enough so she had a lap to sit in, and my kids swear I can't sit through an entire movie. So why do I find myself cruising the Web looking for books with titles like 'lazy gardener' and 'easy garden fixes'?

### A Crazy Year

Maybe it's because in the past twelve months my life has included ten airline trips, eleven hospitalizations of family members, two funerals to plan, a trip to China, and becoming the sole caregiver for a blind, deaf parent 1,200 miles away.

My yard has suffered and my cat shredded my carpet in protest of my frequent disappearances. (For cat lovers out there, she did have daily care and human contact, just not this human.) To add insult to injury, this winter was particularly hard on my plants. I now have more dead shrubs and fallen branches than I know what to do with. We won't even talk about what's fallen into my neighbor's yards from MY trees!

### Truth Comes Out

So, here's the confession part. I finally broke down and ordered a yard waste bin. I had always been able to compost my yard waste and reuse it as any good recycler/

conservationist would. But wait, it gets worse. I not only filled up my waste bin with branches and twigs last week, I filled up my neighbor's too while they were on vacation (with their permission of course). I still have many more dead shrubs and fallen branches, so I finally went to the Internet in search of some 'new technique' or 'quick fix' to deal with this abundance of high-carbon yard waste. (Surfing the web gives my sore pruning arms time to rest!)



The bed on top is a normal garden bed, planted with the same seeds as the hugelkultur below, but two weeks earlier. The hugelkultur had burlap on top of sod, pine cones, pine bark, fresh-cut branches, manure and leaves.

every spring. Pumpkins, gourds and squash use a lot of nutrients and water to produce those large leaves and fruit. My brother swore it reduced his compost pile by as much as 50 percent over the summer, plus he got a great crop of pumpkins!

### The Hugelkultur Technique

According to Toby Hemenway, author of *Gaia's Garden: A Guide to Home-scale Permaculture*-- Hugelkultur is a central European technique of piling up rotting wood and brush, stomping it down, adding some

compostable material (such as sod, straw or grass clippings) on top, and then topping it off with compost and an inch of soil. As the woody brush on the bottom decomposes, it releases nutrients slowly.

The rotting wood and brush also acts like a sponge, holding and releasing water slowly as well. This means you don't need to water or fertilize a hugelkultur very often. As an added bonus, this protects the watershed by storing and releasing both water and nutrients slowly, preventing nutrient flushes downstream that can harm aquatic life.

### Benefits

Paul Wheaton, curator of websites for permaculturalists and hugelkultur states "This makes for raised beds loaded with organic material, nutrients, and air pockets for the roots of whatever you plant. As the years pass, the deep soil of your bed becomes incredibly rich and loaded with soil life. As the wood shrinks, it makes more tiny air pockets - so your hugelkultur becomes sort of self-tilling."

Wheaton says that during the first few years, "the composting process will slightly warm your soil, giving you a slightly longer growing season. The woody matter helps to keep nutrient excess from passing into the ground water, and re-feeds it to your garden plants later." Some folks report being able to plant potatoes in these mounds a month earlier than in a regular bed.

### Wood Choices Matter

According to Wheaton, selecting the right rotting trees for your hugelkultur is important. Cedar would not be a

Every unit of carbon  
incorporated into  
soil can hold  
four units of water!

What I found was a way to recycle branches, produce an edible crop, and capture and slowly release water and nutrients to those plants. It's called Hugelkultur', a German word meaning mound culture. And it's actually a very old technique; similar in nature to the way my late brother used to plant pumpkin and gourd seeds on top of his compost pile

## Summer 2009

Serving Snohomish County  
and Camano Island

### New at the District

#### Assessment Hearing July 1

A public hearing to determine interest and gather input on the District's proposed assessment will be held by the Snohomish County Council on:

**Wednesday, July 1, 10:30 AM**  
**Henry M. Jackson Rm, 8th floor**  
**(Administration Building East)**  
**3000 Rockefeller, Everett**

The Council is the final determining body on whether or not the Conservation District will receive assessment funding for the next five years. They would like to know the level of support for our programs. **Please come July 1 and share your views.**

#### Be Counted!

We need more input on our proposed assessment. Do our programs and staff help you? Do you support the District plan to request a \$5 assessment? We need you to voice your opinion in a quick survey at Survey Monkey on the Internet. The link can be found on the home page of our website: [www.snohomishcd.org](http://www.snohomishcd.org).

It takes only a minute and we would appreciate hearing from you! We hope to have all the responses in by June 30, so the results can be submitted at the hearing mentioned above.

### Inside

- ❖ Hugelkultur Photos
- ❖ Farm Shopping List
- ❖ Stanwood HS Wins
- ❖ Comings & Goings
- ❖ Firewise Community
- ❖ Farm Market Guide
- ❖ Upcoming Events



A perfect summer day is when  
the sun is shining, the breeze is  
blowing, the birds are singing,  
and the lawn mower is broken.  
James Dent

# Confessions and Catnip - continued -

by Lois Ruskell, SCD Public Outreach Coordinator

good choice because it is loaded with natural pesticides and herbicides, that is why it lasts so long. This is probably not a good mix for tomatoes or melons. Black locust won't rot – likely because it is so dense; black walnut is very toxic to most plants; and cherry is toxic to animals, but it might be okay when it rots. Pine and fir will have some levels of tannins in them, but Wheaton believes most of that will be gone once the wood has been dead for a few years.

## Carbon and Nitrogen

Another thing to keep in mind is that wood is high in carbon and will consume nitrogen during the compost process. This could prevent nitrogen use by your garden crop. That's why well-rotted wood is a better choice. Also, adding green material such as grass clippings or other green compost to the mound before capping with soil gives your crop a quick-releasing nitrogen source. Both potatoes and melon-type crops (in the cucurbitaceae family, which includes gourds, watermelon and pumpkins) would be suitable for a hugelkultur.

The beds can be outlined with rock or blocks to look a little more 'civilized', or you can consider them your 'wild composter'.

Another option for composting brush is to dig a trench and fill it with brush, rotten firewood and woody trunks. Permaculturalist Tom Ward digs trenches about 18 inches deep, adds brush and soil, then plants blueberries on top. I had an old buried woodpile on my property and the plants that did the best there were evergreen huckleberries. This acts similar to a bog or pond, with the rotting wood giving the plants moisture during drought times.

If I can find the time, a hugelkultur may very well be in my future. Although I would love to have lots of pumpkins this fall, maybe I could make it up to Abby, my cat, by planting catnip in my hugelkultur – what a crop we'd have!



4. Here is the long bed. At this point, you can add quick composting items such as sod, leaves, rotten straw and vegetable scraps before the soil is dumped on the top.



1. An old woodpile is discovered. All but the most rotten wood at the bottom is moved to the site of the future hugelkultur.



2. The old wood is picked up and moved to the new location.



5. The first of many loads of soil and compost are added.



6. Here is the finished hugelkultur bed. It can be bordered with rocks, bricks or tree trunks for a more civilized look. Then plant from the list below, and watch it grow!

## Credits –

Page 2 photos by Paul Wheaton. Information and photos used with permission from the website: [www.permies.com](http://www.permies.com) and <http://www.richsoil.com/hugelkultur>. Pg 1 photos used with permission by Saponaria from the 'Worts and All' blog: <http://saponaria-wortsandall.blogspot.com/search/label/hugelkultur>.



3. The wood is laid out in a long, rectangular pile, outlined with the largest logs. Branches standing straight up (at right) are generally trimmed.

## What works well for crops in a hugelkultur?

Melons, cucumbers, potatoes, legumes, pumpkins, gourds, strawberries, summer & winter squash



## Want to learn more about what to layer in your magic mound?

Check out this website from Oregon: [http://www.oregonlive.com/hg/index.ssf/2008/09/1d\\_slot\\_with\\_gr51vern02.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/hg/index.ssf/2008/09/1d_slot_with_gr51vern02.html) or Search for [Oregon Live](#) and [hugelkultur](#).

Then, click on the link in the paragraph with the heading 'pile'.

# Have A Hankering for Horse Property?

By Alayne Blickle, Program Director, Horses for Clean Water



Are you (and your family) truly ready to have a horse or two at home? It's a 24/7 type of job where YOU are totally responsible for the well being of your horse, its structures, and the land it will be living on! Doing your horse-related homework up

front will save you lots of money, time and frustration later on. Use this checklist to determine whether your dream property will actually be a dream-come-true – or a nightmare!

## Size and Zoning Compatibility

- 1. Consider the acreage and the number of horses you want on it** in terms of stalls, paddocks and pastures. Horses can be kept on very small parcels, but if it's pasture you're after, you'll want at least an acre per horse.
- 2. Research local zoning, ordinances and community covenants yourself.** Don't rely solely on a real-estate agent or word-of-mouth. These folks may not be fully aware of laws affecting horses and livestock. Be sure to check with zoning and building codes if your plans include building structures.
- 3. Check out the new neighborhood** to see if it is compatible with horses. Non-horsey neighbors may not be as tolerant of odors and flies, or early-morning tractors mowing pastures. A new development being built nearby might eliminate riding trails or have other adverse effects.
- 4. Determine how easily will you be able to ride at your new location.** Is there an arena or round pen, or easy access to equestrian-use approved trails? Never assume that horses are allowed in greenbelt areas or on existing trails.

## Manmade Features

- 5. Look carefully at manmade features** --barns, outbuildings, arenas and other structures such as fences. How useful, sound and appropriate are they for horses? Can you make additional changes if needed?
- 6. Determine well and septic system locations.** Wellheads need a suggested buffer of 100 feet. Septic systems should be functioning properly. Drain fields should not be under roads, driveways, confinement areas, or pastures.
- 7. Evaluate vehicle accessibility**, both for everyday deliveries as well as emergencies. Are driveways wide enough for horse trailers and emergency vehicles? Can hay deliveries get to the barn? Can trucks get through gates to dump gravel for footings? Are overhead phone wires going to be a problem?

## Natural Features

- 8. Inventory** creeks, wetlands, and ponds and **review ordinances and regulations** affecting these features. Ask about required buffers, fencing and other laws pertaining to these sensitive areas.
- 9. Check the soil.** Look for dry, well-drained soils for buildings, confinement areas, arenas and other structures. For pastures, organic, well-drained soils are best.
- 10.** Visit the prospective property during the rainy season or a rainstorm to **observe the topography and drainage.** See how and WHERE water runs. If it all runs right where you want to build your barn or into an existing arena – bad idea!
- 11. Existing vegetation will give you more information about appropriate uses for the property.** Contact the District for information on native plants and the types of soils and conditions they prefer.

## Doing Your Research

**Soils** - For help with soils, check out the USDA Web Soil Survey at: <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm> or contact the Conservation District at 425-335-5634, ext 4.

**Plants** - For help with native plants, contact the Washington Native Plant Society website: [www.wnps.org](http://www.wnps.org) or the WSU Extension Snohomish County website <http://snohomish.wsu.edu/>.

**Property** - For property information, go to Snohomish County Planning and Development Services, at [http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Property\\_Info\\_FAQ.htm](http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Property_Info_FAQ.htm) or call 425-388-3411.

**Noxious Weeds** - For weeds, contact Sonny Gohrman at 360-435-7830.

## What to Look for When Shopping for Farm Property



Join Alayne Blickle, Horses for Clean Water, and Snohomish Conservation District for a fun and educational farm tour. We will highlight what to look for when buying a new farm, especially if you want to bring horses home. This quaint, picturesque farm sits on a hillside, commanding a view towards the Sound. The Bryant family has put a lot of time, money and thought into revamping the historic barn and facilities, making them chore-efficient and clean for their animals.

## Bryant Farm Tours, Grandview

**Saturday, September 26**

**Tours are free, noon lunch is \$5**

**Choice of 2 identical tours: 10 AM or 1 PM**

Please let us know when you register if you will be joining us for lunch. Lunch includes a presentation by Alayne on Tips for Preparing Your Farm for Fall/Winter. To register, email [workshops@snohomishcd.org](mailto:workshops@snohomishcd.org) or call Pam at 425-335-5634, ext 123.

## Stanwood Team Wins State

Congratulations to Stanwood High School's Envirothon team! Lead by advisor Ryan Ovenell, this team won first place in the State Envirothon Competition held at Camp Lutherwood in Whatcom County on May 19 and 20. The team of five will fly to the University of North Carolina in Asheville in early August to compete against teams from all over the U.S. and Canada. This is the first time a Snohomish County team has won the right to compete nationally at the North American Canon Envirothon.



Stanwood High School's Envirothon team members (left to right): advisor Ryan Ovenell, Jack Medlicott, Scott Weisse, Alexa Flem, Thor Pearson, and Andrew Salmon.

Envirothon is North America's largest high school environmental education competition. High school youth study and compete on their knowledge of five areas: soils/landuse, forestry, aquatic ecology, wildlife and a current environmental issue. The five-day event is sponsored by Canon. Each member of the top ten teams wins a Canon scholarship for college. Find out more about Envirothon at: [www.envirothon.org](http://www.envirothon.org).

## Project Protects Bay

Snohomish Conservation District recently assisted with this fencing project (photo below) at the W Bar B Ranch in Warm Beach. The new fence will keep livestock out of the ditch, which runs into Port Susan Bay north of Warm Beach. Native trees and shrubs will be added next. The ranch actively manages its pastures and animal waste with input from District staff.

Conservation District farm planners can help landowners with fencing off streams and wetlands to exclude livestock, and planting native trees and shrubs to provide shade. Many of the material costs can be subsidized. Call our office (425-335-5634, ext 4.) to schedule a free visit with a farm planner. For restoration help, call Ryan Williams at the same number, extension 116.



# Comings & Goings

With summer comes two big changes at the District, and another one in the works! After our election, we have a new member joining our Board of volunteer Supervisors. He is farmer Karl Hereth from the Snohomish area. Our newest staff member, Megan, arrived from Hawaii and is now working in the Bear Creek Watershed in South Snohomish and North King counties. In April, planner Amanda Ruzicka left to work for the Forest Service in New Mexico. She worked solely in the Stillaguamish Watershed so we are currently recruiting for her position. Read on to learn more about Karl and Megan.

## New Supervisor - Karl Hereth

Karl Hereth grew up on a 100-year-old family farm south of Snohomish where he is the fifth generation to farm the land. His family includes his wife Mandy and three little boys; his three-year-old son (his little helper) and one-year old twins. Karl grew up with a strong work ethic and strong family values. He started helping his dad, Mark, at the age of five, "driving the hay truck". Karl, his parents, sister, and brother ran a dairy operation for 24 years. They raised Holsteins, hay crops and corn. All the Hereth kids were involved in 4-H and FFA, balancing school, sports and farming. Then Karl began raising replacement heifers for his sister and brother-in-law. He also leases land to grow hay and corn and takes pride in producing quality feed. Spring and summer for Karl consist of growing hay and corn for their farm, as well as doing custom baling for others.

## New Farm Planner - Megan O'Brian



Megan O'Brian is the new Small Farm Planner for the Bear Creek and Evans Creek watersheds. She offers landowners technical assistance and produces a variety of small farm plans for both sub-basins. She was previously employed as a Conservation Specialist with the Windward Oahu and West Oahu Soil and Water Conservation District in Hawaii.

Megan received her BS in Global Environmental Science from the University of Hawaii at Manoa – School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology. To contact Megan for a farm visit: Email: [megan@snohomishcd.org](mailto:megan@snohomishcd.org) Phone: 425-335-5634, ext 106

# Fresh From the Farmer's Markets

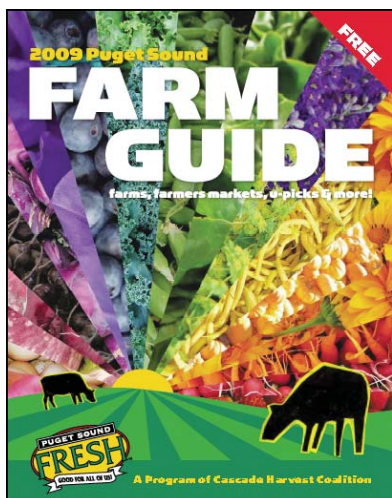
Fresh picked sweet corn, green beans, bright red beets, blueberries, tasty strawberries and so much more! These are just some of the great produce items available over the summer in the Puget Sound area.

Buying local food means supporting local producers, paying less for transportation, and supporting your local community. Check out local farmstands, farmers markets and harvest festivals in your area or, get to know a local farmer by signing up for a share at a consumer-supported agricultural enterprise.



Need help finding producers and markets in your area? Pick up a copy of the '2009 Puget Sound Farm Guide' (lower left) or visit the website at [www.pugetsoundfresh.org/pdf/2009-PSF-Farm-Guide.pdf](http://www.pugetsoundfresh.org/pdf/2009-PSF-Farm-Guide.pdf). The guide has a large map, a quick search guide, recipes, fair dates and lots of local producer contacts for produce, cheese, meat, honey, flowers and more.

**Enjoy the summer and support your local food producer!**



## Kid-Approved Fresh Strawberry Smoothies

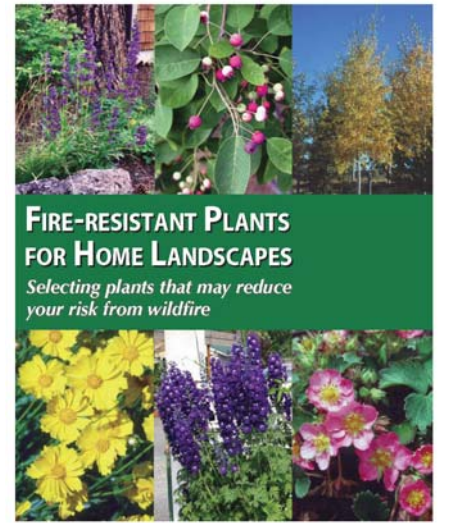
*A recipe from the 2009 guide (left)*

1 cup fresh local strawberries; 1/2 cup milk; 2-3 ice cubes; 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract; 2 teaspoons honey.

Blend all ingredients until smooth. Add more milk if it's too thick. Pour smoothie into glass and enjoy. This smoothie is also great with added bananas, yogurt or mixed berries. Invent your own special flavor!

# Designing a Firewise Landscape/Community

Summer is the time to be thinking about the fire resistance of your home and community. The national Firewise Communities program is a multi-agency effort designed to reach beyond local fire service. It involves homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, and others to help protect people, property, and natural resources from the risk of wildland fire - before a fire starts.



The Firewise Communities approach emphasizes community responsibility for planning and designing a safe community as well as effective emergency response. It also highlights what an individual can do to design and maintain a safer home and a more fire-resistant landscape around it.

## A Firewise Community in Washington

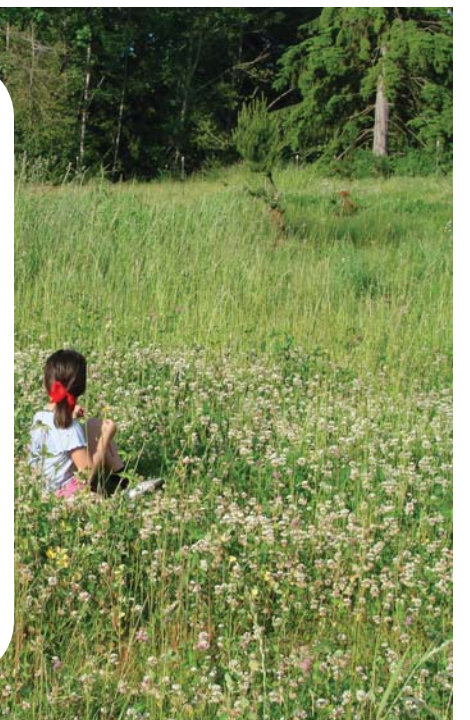
The community of Shelter Bay, Washington, for example, continues to embrace Firewise, actively completing project work that maintains its current Firewise Communities/USA recognition status. Shelter Bay is a home-owners association located in LaConner; it earned Firewise Communities/USA recognition in April of 2006.

One of the most rigorous projects that Shelter Bay residents completed was its response to a December 2006 windstorm. Eighteen volunteers hauled twenty-five truck loads of fallen limbs from Shelter Bay after that storm. This produced two benefits, removing unsightly debris and reducing the community's fuel load—a big step in keeping the neighborhood Firewise. They also groomed a greenbelt and addressed access concerns by installing a gated emergency exit for homeowners and emergency vehicles. The gravel road still needs work, but the homeowners and local fire department now have an alternate access point in the event of an emergency. Work continues on developing greenbelt maintenance plans and the creation of a phone tree for emergency evacuation.

Homes ignite because of the condition of the home itself and everything around the home within 100 to 200 feet. Landscape design and materials become critical elements in creating a Firewise home. The booklet shown above can help you choose plants that are fire-resistant. Find it on-line at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/pnw/pnw590/pnw590.pdf>. The District also has a limited supply of firewise materials on-hand.

## Upcoming Events

- The Silvana Fair** - July 25
- Stanwood/Camano Fair** - July 31, August 1 & 2
- Festival of the River** - August 8 & 9, Arlington
- Evergreen State Fair** - August 27 - September 7, Monroe
- Bryant Farm Tour** - Sept 26
- Fall Septic Care** - Oct. 17, Stanwood PUD
- Building a Raingarden** - July 15, Camano Island (as part of the Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program)



## Snohomish Conservation District

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