

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY OF EARTH DAY WITH THE HERB SOCIETY
by Karen Cottingham

Earth Day is an annual springtime invitation to reflect upon the genius and beauty of nature and to consider how our own choices and habits impact our planet. This year, Earth Day coincides with The Herb Society of America - South Texas Unit's 34th annual Herb Day Symposium on April 22. ***Celebrating the Beauty of Earth Day with Herbs*** will offer earth-friendly gardening and food preparation ideas that are easy to introduce into daily life and that contribute to the overall well-being of our environment.

Attendees will learn how to raise earthworms on their patios or under their kitchen sinks, how to incorporate edible plants into beautiful landscapes that their neighbors will love, and how to tread lightly on the earth by consuming more plant-based foods and less meat. Guests will also be introduced to the fascinating concept of *biomimicry*, a discipline which looks to the genius of nature to solve the technological and social problems we face today.

The sixteenth century French philosopher, Michel de Montaigne, was remarkably modern when he said, "Let us give Nature a chance; she knows her business better than we do." Nature has indeed perfected its engineering, chemical, and design strategies over millions of years. The graceful curve of the calla lily and the expanding interlocking spiral design of the sunflower seed head are not only aesthetically beautiful, but are mathematical models of optimal efficiency. Until recently, however, scientists, engineers, and designers have primarily relied on technology rather than nature to solve the challenges of modern society. A new philosophy of problem-solving, *biomimicry*, is an approach to innovation which emulates nature's time-tested patterns and strategies.

Linda Paisley, an expert in **biomimicry**, will introduce us to this fascinating discipline in her presentation, *Biomimicry - Nature's Garden of Inspiration and Innovation*. The secrets of nature, as applied to technological challenges by biomimicry specialists, may well provide the solutions that safeguard the earth as we move through the 21st century. A collection of natural objects that have been models for inspiration and innovation can be examined throughout the day.

Another symposium topic is **vermiculture**, which is the practice of raising earthworms to produce vermicompost. Are you still sending your vegetable trimmings down the garbage disposal? Does all of your recyclable paper go into those green cans for the City to collect? Think about letting earthworms convert these valuable resources into nutrient-rich compost. Instead of buying expensive bags of worm castings at your garden center, why not make your own for free? It's easy! Mary Sacilowski, a microbiologist and Herb Society member, has successfully tended a small "worm farm" on her patio for years. Her program, *The Low-Down on the Down-Under: The Underground World of Earthworms*, will show you how to create your own thriving earthworm bin. Let worms complete nature's cycle by decomposing your kitchen

waste into rich compost that will improve the structure, water retention, and fertility of your soil. Raising earthworms is not only beneficial for your garden, it's an excellent introduction to science, ecology, and gardening for children. Worm bins will be available for your inspection, and you can even go home with your own "starter worms".

Now that you have rich, fertile soil, wouldn't it be great to grow your own herbs, fruits and vegetables? Or is your urge for self-sufficiency thwarted by an expectation of St Augustine grass and azaleas in the front yard? Angela Chandler, who lives on a half-acre urban homestead filled with attractive, edible plants, will demonstrate **how landscaping can be both beautiful and edible** in her program, *Ornamedibles: Pretty Plants That Are Good To Eat*.

Angela has even coined a new term for attractive edible plants - "ornamedibles". Growing ornamedibles not only gives you produce that is delicious and pesticide-free, but it reduces trips to the grocery store and requires much less water than traditional landscaping. Worried about "curb appeal"? Your neighbors probably won't even realize that your beautiful front yard is actually a miniature farm in disguise!

Some of you are probably thinking about cutting back on your meat consumption or joining the "meatless Mondays" club. You may even be moving toward a vegetarian or vegan diet. Perhaps you have health concerns, or maybe you know that giving up animal products provides approximately the same environmental benefit as giving up your car.

If you are ready to make some changes in your food choices or would simply like to learn more about plant-based diets, Pat Greer's program, *Ethical Edibles - The Earth-Friendly Kitchen*, was designed just for you. Pat will show you how to make **delicious, nourishing plant-based meals** that you and your family will love.

Pat is well-known in the Houston urban farmer and healthy-eating community. Her business, *Pat Greer's Kitchen*, evolved as she created innovative, delicious and healthy food products to make use of the bounty of local produce in food co-ops and farmer's markets.

Make your reservations now for Herb Day and invite your friends to join you. ***Celebrating the Beauty of Earth Day with Herbs*** will take place April 22 from 8:45 am to 2:45 pm at the Education Building of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in the Museum District. Guests must be pre-registered and pre-paid, and space is limited to the first 150 registrants. The registration deadline is April 18. A delicious luncheon catered by *The French Fig Catering* is included in the \$45 registration fee; and plants, herbal crafts, and herbal personal care products will be offered for sale. Proceeds will be used to provide scholarships to students of horticulture, botany, agriculture, or agronomy. Lucia Bettler will also be selling books relevant to the Herb Day programs and other items from her shop, *Lucia's Garden*.