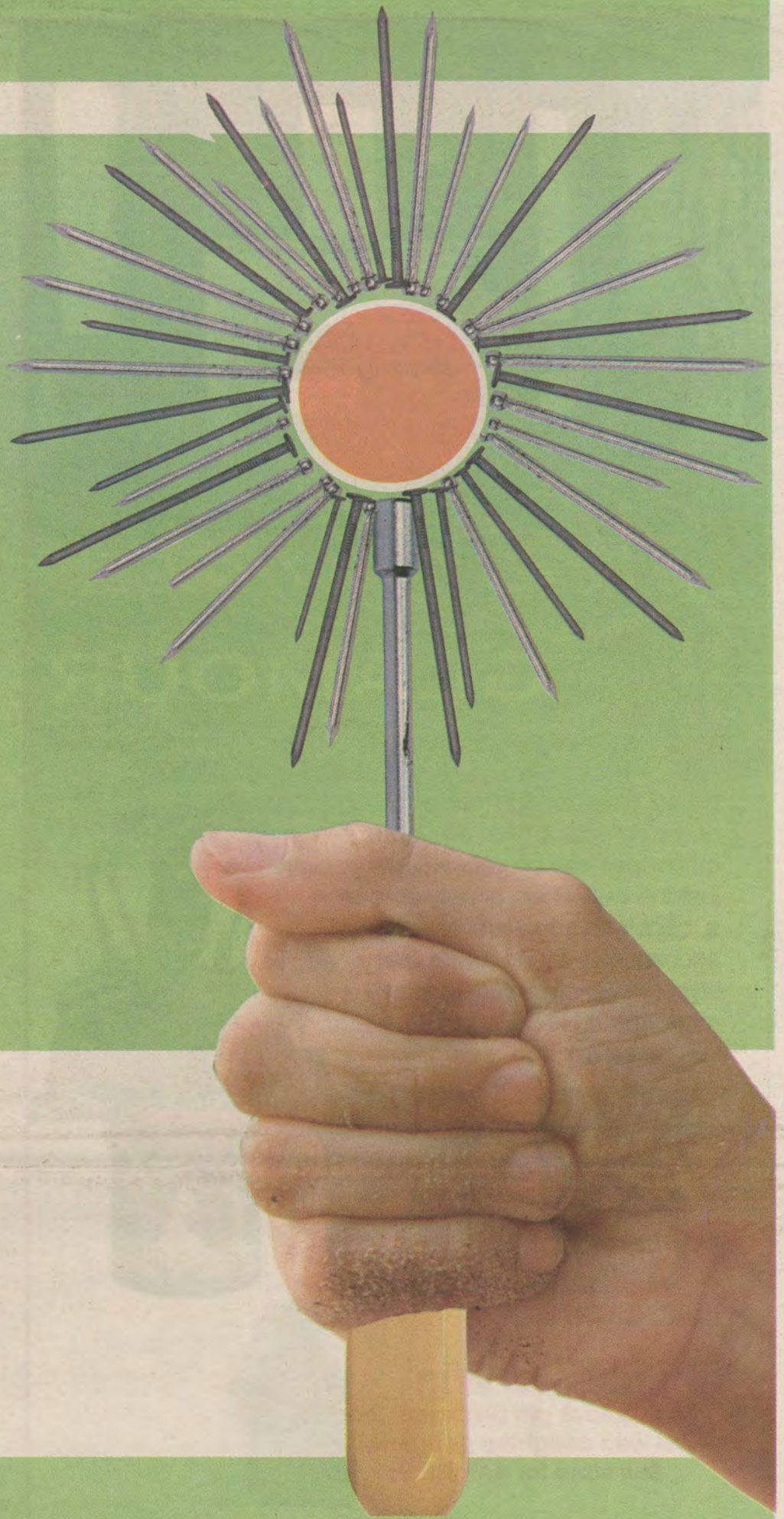


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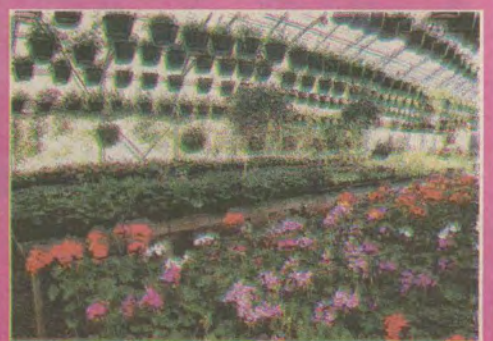
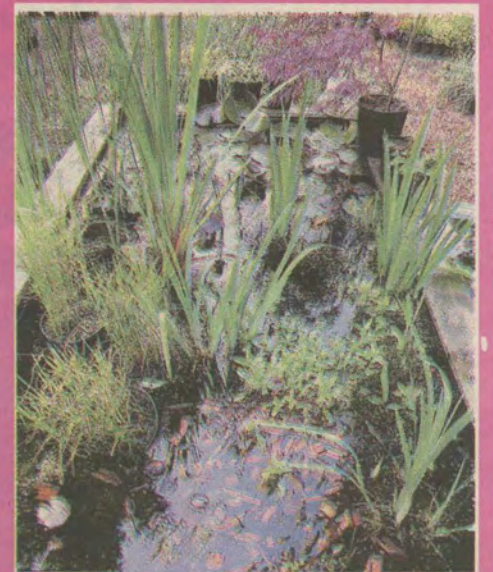
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**SPRING WATERING:** Kim Elsser waters a batch of seedlings at Indigo Farm on Rainbow Road.  
Photo By Derrick Lundy

## Garden activities sizzle

A variety of upcoming activities will get Salt Spring gardeners tuned up for another year.

This weekend marks the Salt Spring Garden Club's Gardeners' Weekend Extravaganza, which includes the group's annual fundraising Spring Plant Sale at the Farmers Institute.

Always a popular event, it's the place to find bargains and specialty plants from club members' collections.

Doors open at 1 p.m.

Then on Sunday, May 1, A Seeds for Malawi project fundraiser unfolds at 813 Beaver Point Road from 1 to 4 p.m.

Seeds for Malawi is a garden club project that sends support to families in Malawi trying to grow their own food and become self-sufficient.

Also on April 30, the garden club's president Linda Gilkeson presents a talk called Bugs: The Good, The Bad and The Beautiful.

Set for Meaden Hall beginning at 7 p.m., the event is sponsored by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy.

Gilkeson will describe beneficial insects, pests and butterflies of our region, and will answer questions people may have about how to encourage or organically control certain insects in the home and garden.



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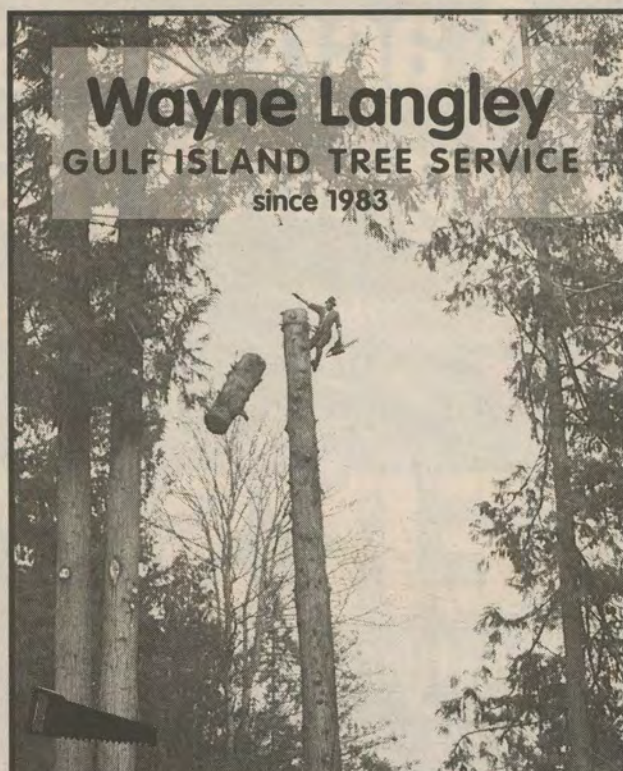
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# Island Natural Growers surveying local producers

By GAIL SJUBERG  
Staff Writer

The Gulf Islands are known for their bounty of gardeners, but some members of the crop take their growing more seriously.

Island Natural Growers (ING) is the Gulf Islands chapter of the Canadian Organic Growers, with most of the current 65 members residing on Salt Spring Island.

Right now the group is cultivating more than spring earth, with a comprehensive "produce study" underway.

As explained by ING member Erin Harper, who is working on the project, one part of the initiative is a survey. From that the group will develop a baseline of what is being grown on the island before determining what may be done to improve local production and marketing of products.

Gulf Islands farmers can expect to receive calls from volunteers, if they have not already contributed information to the survey. People growing vegetables, fruits, nuts, herbs, grains or any other plant edibles that could be sold — and not necessarily organic — qualify to participate.

Anyone in that category who does not receive a call

in the next couple of weeks should contact Pat Reichert at 537-4282.

"We have a fairly comprehensive list of people but I'm sure we've missed some people," said Harper.

One of the study's longer-term goals is to strengthen the relations between producer, stores and consumers, building marketing channels and knowledge networks for producers.

The survey and study is receiving federal-provincial funding through the Islands Agri-Food Initiative, and has also received support from the Capital Regional District, Island Farmers Institute, Islands Trust, ING and some community members.

The produce study should be complete by November.

ING also holds monthly meetings, with tours of various farms and gardens undertaken during warmer months.

A tour of Neptune Farm at 201 Byron Road is on the agenda for the next meeting, which is set for Wednesday, May 4.

"In the summer we do a tour and a potluck and it's for anybody interested in natural organic growing."

While people are encouraged to join ING, they don't have to be a member in order to attend.

A tour of the farm is at 6

p.m., followed by a potluck supper at 7 p.m. (People should bring their own dishes and cutlery.)

The business meeting is set for 8:30 p.m.

## ING Goals

According to the ING website, the groups goals are:

- To operate as a mutual self-help society that takes in the interests of farmers, gardeners, and the entire rural community.

- To work in harmony with the natural processes of plant and animal growth, as the best way to maximize the production of pollution-free food for local consumption.

- To exchange knowledge and expertise with each other, and undertake to inform the public about organic methods of growing.

- To support the development of bioregionally-based food systems, to strengthen and stabilize local economies and to minimize transport of farm inputs and produce.

- To oppose corporate control for the world food supply through issues such as global trade agreements, genetic engineering and seed patents.

The ING contact person is Anne Macey, who can be reached at 537-5511.

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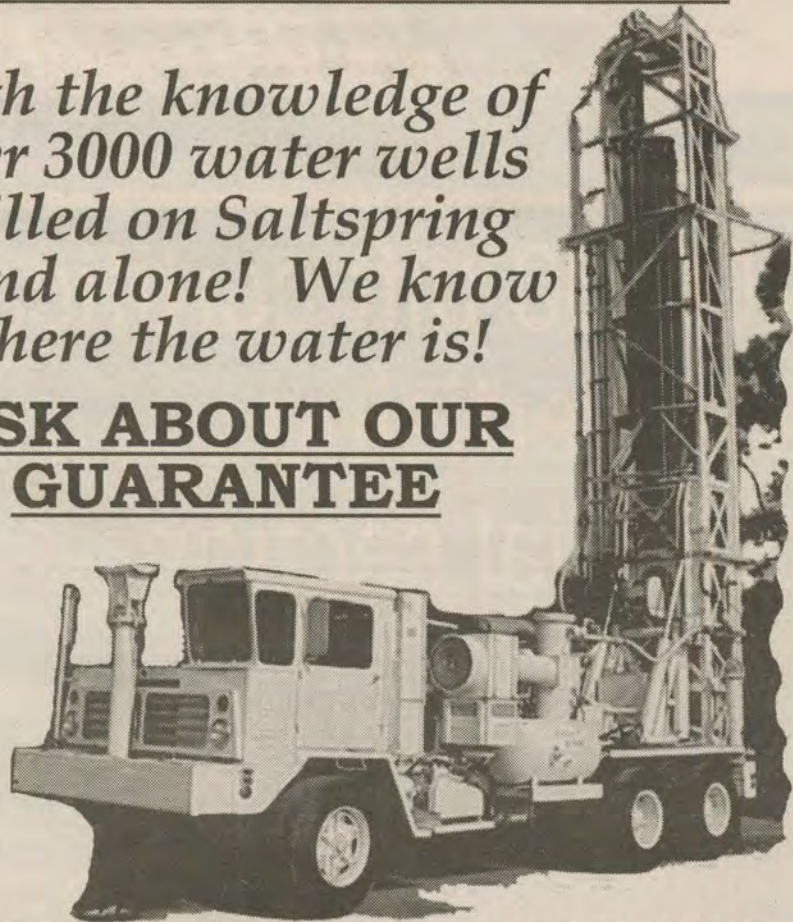
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# Bylaw check recommended before buying or building

By SEAN MCINTYRE  
Staff Writer

Having finally gathered the tools, plans, money and free time to get started on that special home renovation or addition project, it's tempting to begin the job

without paying attention to a detail that may come back to haunt you regardless of how fine your craftsmanship may be.

"There are a lot of people who don't realize their projects need to be cleared in

advance," said Islands Trust planner Cathy MacNamara, who works out of the Salt Spring Trust office. "Anytime you're proposing to add a structure, it's a good idea to check with the Islands Trust."

Bylaws governing land use on Salt Spring Island are determined by the needs and desires of the community. They are continually evolving and based on a combination of historical, environmental and social factors.

At first glance, the bylaws may appear intimidating, but it is important to recognize that if you own a home or a piece of land on the island, these rules apply to you.

MacNamara admitted the prospect of going through the bylaws may seem daunting, but ensured would-be do-it-yourselfers there is a lot of help available.

"Every situation is different," MacNamara said. "To be sure, before embarking on a project I recommend paying a visit to the Islands Trust to consult with planning staff. We are always available during office hours and that is why we're here."

She added that a complete and updated list of the regulations is available on the Islands Trust website: [www.islandstrust.bc.ca](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca).

John Gauld, one of the

Trust's regional planning managers, who also works in the Ganges office, said regulations generally concern uses of a property and the physical requirements regarding buildings on the land.

Once it is determined what the actual property can be used for, builders need to be aware of how the bylaws will affect the final design and location of these structures.

The rules dictate elements such as the total floor area, height requirements and setback information.

Setbacks outline how far away from roadways, bodies of water and property lines the structure must be.

A point often overlooked is that setback regulations also determine the distance between buildings on the property.

For example, according to Section 4.1.1 of the Salt Spring Land Use By-Law 355, "No accessory building with the exception of a carport may be located within three metres of another

building of the lot."

Often, reading the bylaws comes down to a matter of semantics, so a look through the list of definitions included with the bylaws is recommended.

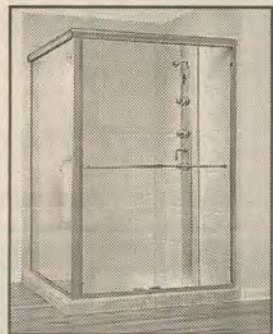
Gauld said the best way to avoid contravening the bylaws is to consult with the Capital Regional District (CRD) or the Islands Trust before buying a property and before proceeding with any project.

Acquiring a building permit from the CRD is contingent on a project's compliance with the bylaws.

Because builders stand the chance of being disappointed when their efforts to build a studio space in the back yard are dashed at the permit granting stage, it is a good idea to peruse the guidelines with the planners at Islands Trust before setting your heart on anything.

"We have to serve the community," said Gauld. "Part of that is making our bylaws accessible for everyone."

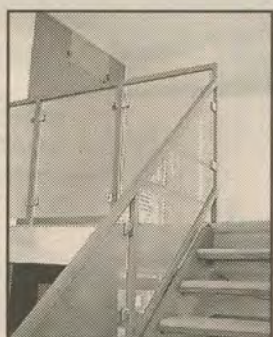
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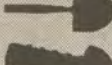
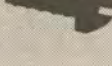
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# Your chance to win a \$100.00 gift certificate to any business advertising in this Springtime special section

Throughout the Springtime special edition of this week's Driftwood, we have hidden a number of home improvement tools shown at left. We invite readers to find the tools carefully hidden within many of the ads in the section. Look for all the symbols then fill in the entry form below. Include your name, address and phone number plus the number of tools that you have found.

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### How to enter:

- Send entries by fax to: 537-2613
- Drop off to: The Driftwood, 328 Lower Ganges Road between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm Monday to Friday.
- Mail to: 328 Lower Ganges Road, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2V3
- Deadline to enter: Friday, May 6 at 4 pm. Winner will be announced in the May 11 edition. Random draw from correct entries will decide the winner. One entry per household please.





**TOP OF THE WORLD:** Cambria Simons is part of a crew of workers replacing the roof on a building at Kingfisher Cove. Photo by Derrick Lundy

## Place to recycle computers

For many islanders, a spring clean-up session involves getting rid of excess or non-functioning computer equipment and other electronic goods.

Brinkworthy resident Rosemary Partridge recommends Break Down Recycle at 850 Devonshire Road in Victoria as a place that accepts these items for nominal charges.

"If you have things you'd like to dispose of and don't wish to put them in the landfill and can't get in to Break Down Recycle yourself, I will take them in when I go," she says.

Phone her at 537-4455.

Break Down can also be reached directly at (250) 381-2373.

Several companies offer similar services in Victoria and on Vancouver Island.

The Capital Regional District's regional recycling guide is a comprehensive resource detailing how to dispose of large or toxic items.

It is available at [www.crd.bc.ca/es/recycling\\_guide](http://www.crd.bc.ca/es/recycling_guide).

For information on what items the Salt Spring Recycling Depot can accept, contact them at 537-1200.

Deb Fedoruk from Electronic Ark on Salt Spring also recently took islanders' surplus computer equipment to a drop-off day in Nanaimo, which was coordinated by Cumberland-based Compucycle.

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## Health authority dumps wastewater inspections

Among fragrant bouquets blooming around the region this spring, islanders with sewage issues received some good news and some bad news from the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA).

As of May 31, homeowners will no longer need VIHA inspections to install or repair sewage-disposal systems. And permits (that currently cost \$250) will not be required except to install a holding tank (for a \$200 fee).

On the downside, only registered practitioners in the wastewater industry will be allowed to plan, install or maintain disposal systems after the May 31 deadline.

"Now, industry will be responsible," said VIHA's supervisor of environmental health Gary Gibson.

"We'll basically be looking after public health issues."

And all existing permits to construct, install, alter or repair sewage-disposal systems will expire on May 30.

But, "Nobody will get caught in the lurch," Gibson said, explaining that people simply wouldn't put themselves in that difficult position.

He advises homeowners who still need work to be

approved to call VIHA to set up an appointment before the deadline.

As of May 31, sewage work can only be conducted by practitioners certified with the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of B.C. (ASTTBC). Professional hydrologists and biologists will also receive planning-level certification, he said.

Certification courses for practitioners have been available through Westcoast Onsite Wastewater Training Centre at Royal Roads College for the last year.

But islanders might have trouble finding registered practitioners because the program change is so new that regulatory bodies haven't made a list of certified people in the community yet.

Gibson indicated that the ASTTBC will eventually provide a list of practitioners on their website ([www.asttbc.org](http://www.asttbc.org)). VIHA will also keep a list at the health protection and environmental services office.

The existing provincial Sewage Disposal Regulation will be repealed and replaced by the Ministry of Health Services with the new Sewerage Disposal Regulation on May 31.

A copy of the new regulation is also available online ([www.qp.gov.bc.ca](http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca)).

Health Minister Colin Hansen said amendments to regulations governing installation and maintenance of wastewater systems will improve the province's ability to protect public health while reducing the regulatory burden on industry.

"The amendments reduce the regulatory burden from 211 under the current Sewerage Disposal Regulation to 18, furthering government's commitment to cut red tape and create an effective and efficient regulatory environment," he said on July 12, 2004 when the regulation was introduced.

The new regulation applies to all types of onsite wastewater systems, from septic systems for single-family homes to complex systems for multi-residential, industrial and commercial applications.

Installation and maintenance plans will still be filed with VIHA but environmental health officers won't make house calls unless they need to follow up on a complaint, Gibson said.

"We're hoping it will free up a certain amount of time."



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# Islanders asked to search for barn owls this spring

The B.C. Field Ornithologists group has launched an ambitious project to determine the population size and distribution of barn owls on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

Armed with silent flight, acute hearing and night vision, the mysterious barn owl (*Tyto alba*) hunts for mice and voles in farm fields, estuaries and Garry Oak meadows.

A strictly nocturnal species, the barn owl is seldom seen by the casual observer and most sightings are made during the nesting season when barn owls take up residence in island barns.

Although barn owls will nest in large tree cavities, the majority of nests in B.C. have occurred in man-made structures like silos, barns, water towers and industrial buildings.

Since barn owls on Vancouver Island are believed to nest or roost mostly on private lands, the B.C. Field Ornithologists need the cooperation of landowners to help in locating these owls, and are asking for assistance in reporting all known nest and roost sites.

Barn owl populations in many areas of North America have shown evidence of decline. The cause of these declines is often habitat loss resulting from urban development and changes in agricultural practices.

In British Columbia, the barn owl's range overlaps



**HIDING OUT:** Islanders are asked to be on the lookout for barn owls this spring, as part of a B.C. Field Ornithologists count to determine the regional population of the species.

with one of the fastest-growing and most densely populated regions in Canada. In the Lower Mainland, a number of research and nest box projects have been conducted and the population is relatively well studied.

However, there has never been a systematic local inventory of barn owls.

"We simply do not know how many barn owls live on Vancouver Island and this inventory will become an important benchmark for

future conservation efforts," says project biologist Paul Levesque.

"With the declines seen in other areas we need to start keeping a closer eye on this species."

To learn more about barn owls and to report a barn owl sighting, visit the B.C. Field Ornithologist's website: [www.bcfo.ca](http://www.bcfo.ca) or contact Paul Levesque at (250) 923-6005 or send an e-mail message to [hallux@telus.net](mailto:hallux@telus.net).



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## Two different home tours on Salt Spring's horizon

Islanders and visitors can look forward to two home tours this year.

The annual Home and Haven Salt Spring home tour, which is organized by and benefits the Island Arts Centre Society, runs in 2005 on Sunday, May 22.

ArtSpring executive director Paul Gravett said the event was switched to the long weekend Sunday to make the Saturday less hectic.

Home and Haven is a seven-home, self-guided tour, which runs smoothly with the help of some 80 volunteers.

Gravett said the organizing committee feels this tour may be the best yet.

"They are very excited about the line-up and are very much looking forward to it," he said.

Home and Haven is a consistent sell out,

so people should get their tickets as soon as possible. Contact the Ticket Centre at ArtSpring (537-2102) or tickets@artspring.ca.

Then on July 31 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the Salt Spring Island Conservancy is holding the first Salt Spring Eco-Home Tour, featuring unique examples of sustainable homes on the island.

The night before, at 7 p.m., the conservancy hosts a Sustainable and Environmental Home Forum.

Among the speakers is New Mexico architect and author Paula Baker LaPorte, author of Prescriptions for a Healthy House.

With Terra Firma Builders and others involved in a regional healthy home movement, the event will no doubt be popular.

See future issues of the Driftwood for more details on both events.

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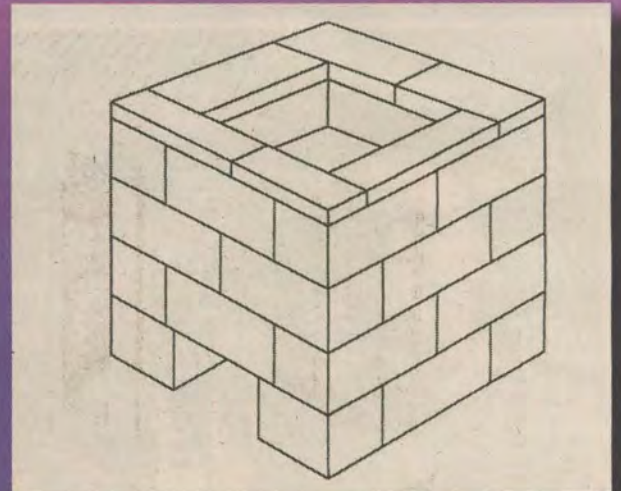
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**SPRING HARVEST:** A Salt Spring farmer is seen transporting bales of hay near Central on a wet spring morning. Photo by Derrick Lundy

# Lavender, spring colour, year-round harvests and Lotusland on calendar

The Salt Spring Garden Club continues its program this year with four speakers and a variety of topics.

On May 25, Jaqueline and Ben Sutton of Sacred Mountain Lavender Farm will talk about the 50 varieties of lavender they grow and from which they produce dried flowers, aromatherapy oils and culinary lavenders.

Then on June 22, Linda Gilkeson presents a highly informative and entertaining evening about how we can enjoy a "year-round harvest"

in the kitchen garden: what to do with the gaps left by the spring and summer crops to provide winter and spring harvesting.

After a summer recess, the club meets again on September 28 with well-known guest speaker Carolyn Heriot from Victoria.

Heriot has wonderful slides to give ideas about bulbs and plants that can provide colour in the spring garden.

On October 26, Claude Le Doux will take the club on a "tour" of Lotusland, a

unique garden just outside Santa Barbara.

It will give some ideas about how we can "push the button" horticulturally on Salt Spring.

More details about the monthly speakers are in the Driftwood the week prior to the garden club meetings, which always fall on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. at Meaden Hall.

New members are always welcome, and non-members can also attend the talks for a nominal cost.

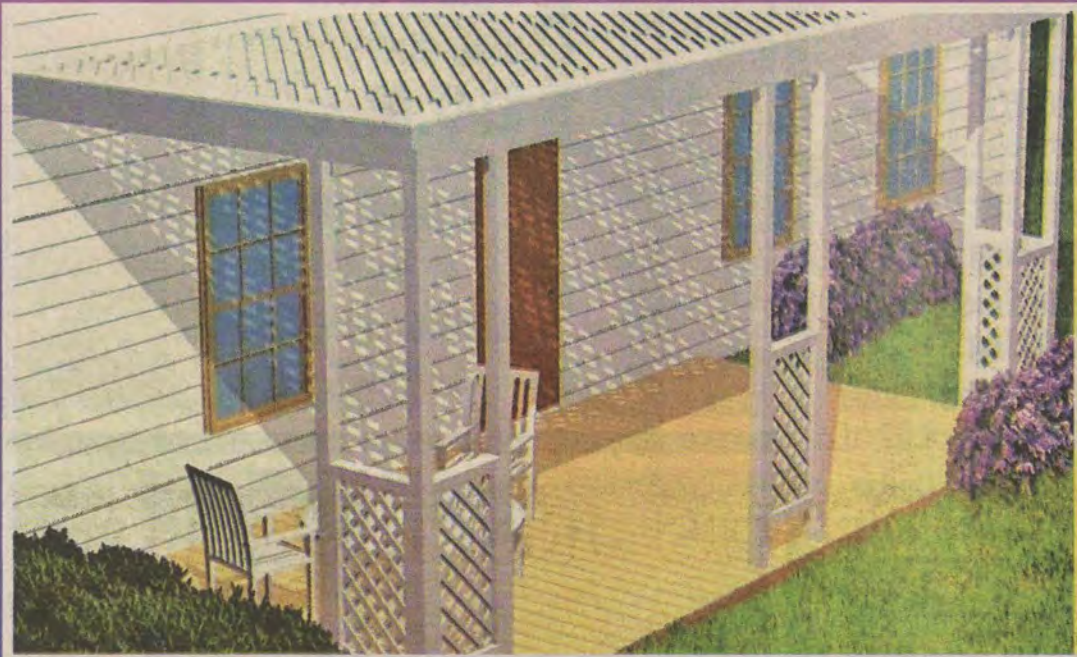
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- Shut off all water-using appliances and fixtures.
- Remove the lid from your meter box. It is usually concrete or metal — about 10 x 15 inches (25 x 37.5 cm).

Take care not to damage the wires.

- For new meters, watch the triangle in the middle

of the meter for a few minutes.

In older meters, watch the 10-gallon hand. If neither moves, you do not have a leak.

If you do have a leak, you will need to find its source.

The most likely culprits are:

- toilets — add food colouring to the tank water, wait 15 minutes.

If the water is coloured, you have a leak.

A worn flapper valve is the most common cause.

A leaking toilet can

waste 20-40 litres per hour.

• faucets & showerheads — worn washers or seals are the most likely cause. A dripping faucet can waste more than 35,000 litres of water per year.

• service lines or sprinkler systems — A small hole in a pipe can waste up to 280,000 litres of water in a three-month period.

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#1 BUILDING SUPPLY ON SALT SPRING

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# Simple shifts add up in water saving game -- make investments or change habits --

Salt Spring's Water Preservation Society urges island residents and visitors to conserve our limited water resources.

Society president Maxine Leichter points out that the Capital Regional District has compiled a useful tip sheet on how to save water.

Now is the perfect time to prepare for dryer summer months by getting your home and property in best water-conserving shape.

At the same time, you can work towards changing water-wasting habits.

## Investments

- Replace your showerhead. Older models use 18 to 30 litres of water per minute, while water-efficient models use only 9.5 litres or less per minute.

- Replace your old toilet with a 6-litre flush model.

- If you are unable to replace your water toilet, retrofit your toilet with toilet displacement devices. You can fill plastic bottles with water or pebbles and place one to three of such bottles in a toilet tank. (Make sure they do not interrupt the flushing mechanisms or flow of the water.)

Caution: Do not use a brick, as it will disintegrate over time, causing serious

and expensive problems in the plumbing.

- For more information on other basic repair techniques call the Demand Management Information Line at (250) 474-9684 and request for a copy of the Household Guide to Water Efficiency.

- Retrofit household faucets with water-saving aerators that can be found at most hardware stores.

- Install a point-of-use, instantaneous hot water demand unit or heater.

- Insulate water pipes to reduce hot water delivery delay (and wasted water) experienced while waiting for water to run hot from the faucets.

- If you are considering the purchase of a new dishwasher, look for one that is water and energy efficient.

- Consider purchasing a water-efficient washing machine. They use up to 40 per cent less water and 60 per cent less energy than top-loading machines.

## Changes of habit

- Reduce your shower time, or reduce the amount

of water used in the bath.

- While waiting for hot water to flow when preparing for a shower, catch the cool water in a bucket and use it for plants, pets or cleaning.

- Reduce the number of times you flush your toilet with multiple uses before flushing.

- Do not use the toilet as a garbage can.

- Do not let the water run while brushing your teeth. Instead, wet your toothbrush and turn off the faucet while brushing.

- Do not run the faucet while washing your face or shaving. Instead, fill the basin with water.

- Use a small amount of water and a lid on a pot when cooking. This method uses less water. Save the water for cooking vegetables for soups gravies, sauces or outdoor plants.

- Compost kitchen wastes (organic matter) instead of using a sink garbage disposal system.

- Scrape dishes instead of rinsing them under running water before loading your dishwasher. For heavy cleaning of grills or oven parts,

pre-soak them overnight.

- When washing dishes by hand, do not wash or rinse with running water. Use tubs or plug the sink.

- Capture excess water in a container while running the tap and use for your plants or pets.

- Operate automatic dishwashers at full capacity and/or set the water level for the size of your load.

- Operate washing

machines at full capacity and/or if your machine has a "suds-saver" feature, be sure to use it as this feature reuses the clean rinse water for washing the next load.

- Thaw frozen food ahead or in a bowl with cold water

- Partially fill the sink or a container when cleaning the kitchen or rinsing cloths.

- Rinse fruit and vegetables in a pan instead of running water continuously and use the water for indoor and

outdoor plant watering.

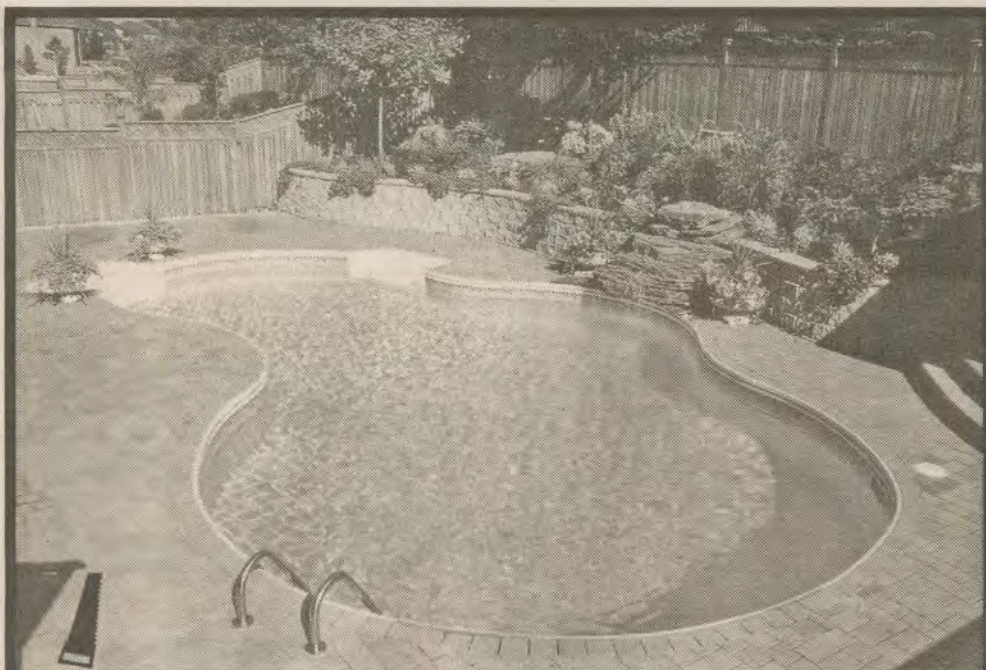
- Keep a bottle of drinking water in the refrigerator instead of running the tap for cold water.

- For regular household cleaning, use a pail or bucket rather than running water.

For more information on how to conserve both the quantity and quality of Salt Spring's water resources, contact the Salt Spring Water Preservation Society.



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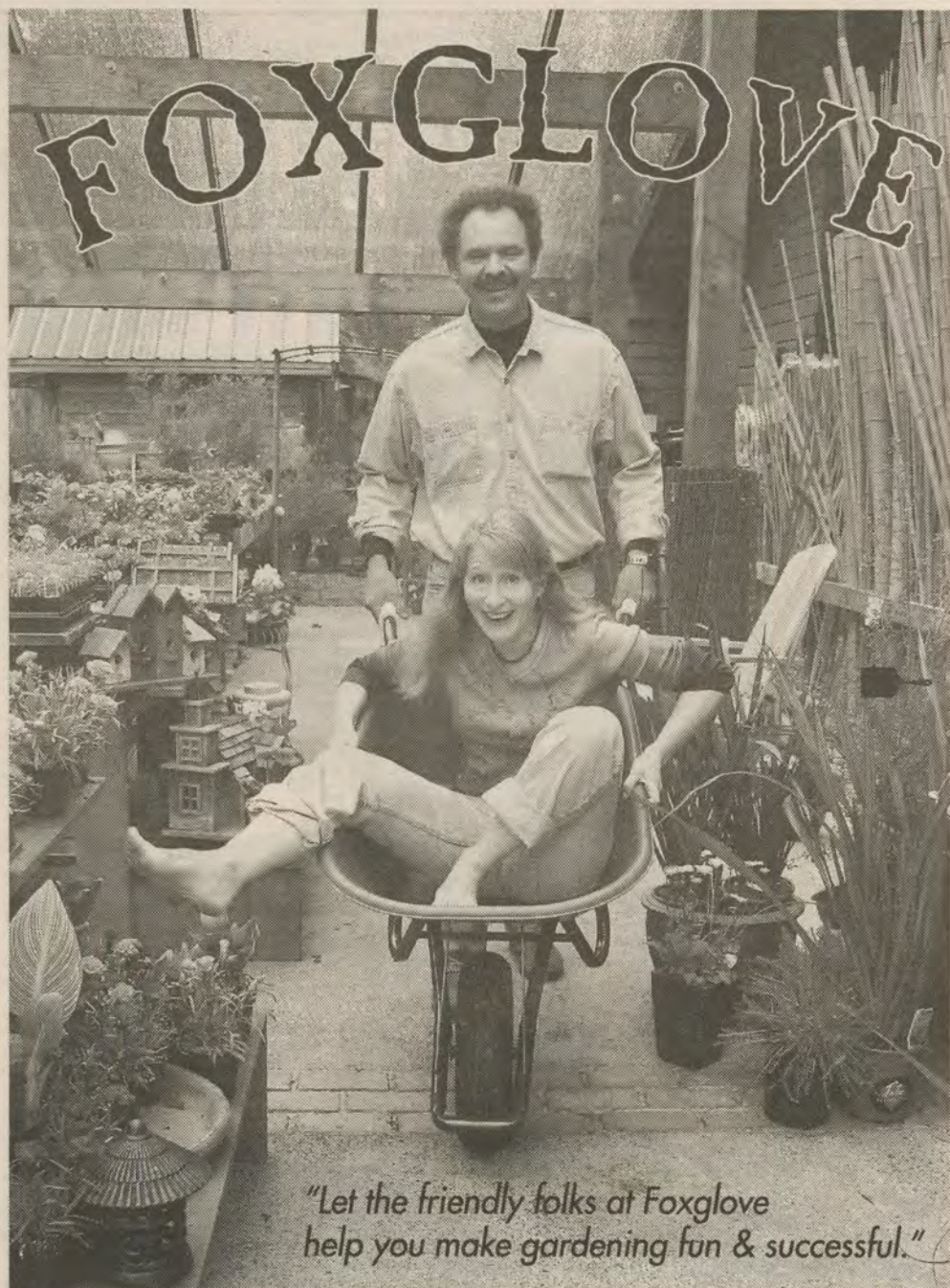


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# Spring the perfect time for routine maintenance chores

If you're like most Canadians, your home is probably your most important investment. It's also the place where your family spends a great deal of time.

A regular schedule of seasonal maintenance can help you protect that investment for years to come, and keep your home and family healthy, safe and sound all year round.

This spring, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has

a short checklist of simple inspection and repairs you can carry out to help put a stop to the most common — and costly — problems before they can occur, often in as little as a few minutes a week, including:

- Check your furnace, air exchanger and air conditioner filters, and clean or replace them if they are dirty.
- Test all smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and replace the batteries.
- Test your fire extinguish-

er pressure gauge and get it recharged if necessary.

- Inspect your basement for signs of water leakage or moisture.
- Inspect all windows and doors for proper operation.
- Remove storm windows and install screens, and repair any holes or replace the screens if necessary.
- Check cladding and the outside of your home for winter damage, and inspect all outdoor caulking at windows, doors and other pen-

etrations.

- Inspect foundation walls for cracks and leaks.
- Inspect the condition of the roof for loose or missing shingles.
- Clean any debris from eavestroughs and downspouts, re-attach any secants that are loose, and ensure the water flow discharges away from your foundation.
- Clean chimneys serving any wood-burning appliances at the end of the heating season.
- Have the septic tank checked and clean if needed (usually once every three years).
- Check all driveways and walkways for cracks or frost damage.
- Inspect the grade and landscaping of the ground around your home for proper drainage away from your basement.
- Check the yard for exterior maintenance such as fence and shed repairs or tree and bush trimming.

For more information or a free copy of the About Your House fact sheet Home Maintenance Schedule and other fact sheets on virtually every facet of owning, maintaining or renovating your home, ask CMHC at 1-800-668-2642 or visit our website at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca).



**STUDENT BUILDER:** Gulf Islands Secondary School carpentry program student Seth Rebko uses a saw on a construction project. Photo by Derrick Lundy

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# Heating upgrades could bring some cozy savings

By MITCHELL SHERRIN  
Staff Writer

An upgrade to heating systems can help homeowners conserve energy, save money and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

But it's recommended to develop an energy plan for the entire home before changing a heating system, notes local energy consultant Elizabeth White.

"Heating can't really be considered except in the context of the entire building envelope," White said.

The "building envelope" includes windows, foundation, crawl space, attic and insulation, she noted.

"There's no point replacing a heating system with a new one and then doing major upgrades to your envelope because you will find that you've got a way oversized heating system."

White helps evaluate heating loss and energy waste on Salt Spring through the Victoria-based non-profit organization City Green.

She recommends that homeowners considering a heating upgrade complete the federal government's EnerGuide for Houses program.

"The advice the homeowner receives, along with a rating of the home, explains where the major heat losses are occurring and what aspects of the home can be most cost-effectively upgraded."

Assuming that an EnerGuide plan has been completed, White noted that

islanders have limited options for heating, each of which has pros and cons.

"Electricity is likely to remain the most stable for pricing but, like every other fuel source, it is likely to increase in price."

White likes electric baseboard heaters over central-heating systems because they are relatively inexpensive and allow occupants to control individual room temperatures.

"Wood heat is an option most of us take advantage of on Salt Spring. The problem with wood heat relates to air emissions. There are a lot of nasty pollutants that can come out of your woodstove."

She recommends that homeowners invest in new pellet stoves or EPA-certified low-emission woodstoves.

"The first rule is to only burn very dry well-seasoned wood."

Wood boilers are inefficient and polluting, she noted. Likewise, there are no efficiency options for oil appliances — except regular cleaning. But propane or gas furnaces can utilize condensing technology that improves efficiency and reduces emissions.

"Wherever possible, look for Energy Star rated appliances, which is some guarantee of efficiency."

Ultimately, ground-sourced heat pumps give the best performance, but also have the highest capital cost, she said.

Air-sourced heat pumps are available for a fraction of

the cost of ground-sourced heat pumps and now provide effective energy savings, she noted.

But both types of heat pumps require centralized distribution systems like radiators or ducts, she noted.

"For people who are more adventurous, there are other options such as solar heating."

But the Gulf Islands do not provide an ideal environment for most active solar power systems due to the high number of overcast days, she said.

"Evacuated tube collectors are really the only ones that will provide significant space heating."

Islanders can also utilize thermal storage systems with a large hot water reservoir located underground. White is not an advocate of radiant systems (electric or hydronic cables) buried in walls, floors or ceilings.

There is no evidence to support claims that they conserve energy or provide a superior form of heating, she said.

"These systems require very high levels of insulation between the element and the outdoors. Otherwise, as much of the heat will be dissipated outside as will reach the space."

However, hydronic systems do operate better than electric radiant systems, she said. To learn more about energy conservation issues, contact Elizabeth White at 537-2616.

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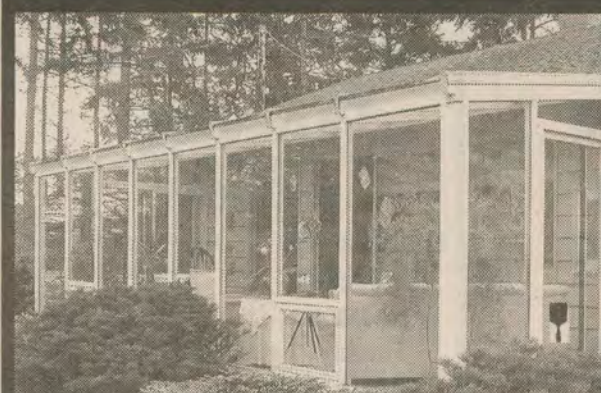
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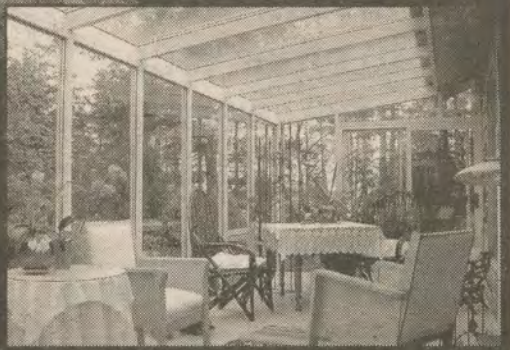
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FRAMED: Students in the carpentry program at Gulf Islands Secondary School learn the ins and outs of framing small structures. Photo by Derrick Lundy

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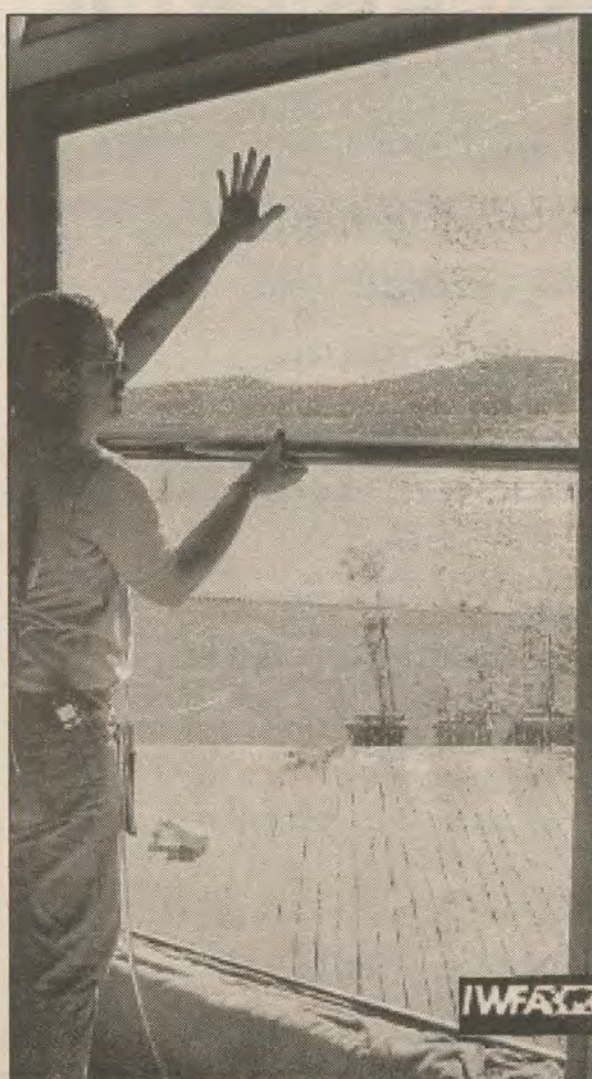
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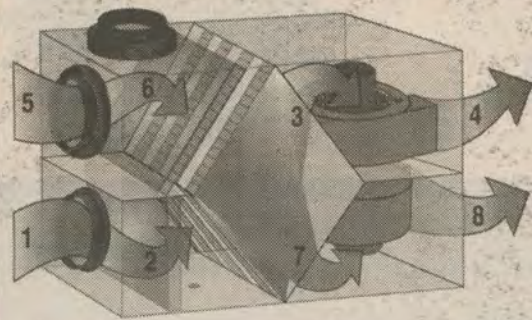
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# Zucchini grown in containers can be turned into fat free chips

By PAM TEMPELMAYR  
Special to the Driftwood  
Are you planning a vegetable garden this year, or maybe a few vegetables as container plants on your deck or balcony?

Don't exclude zucchini from your list, even if in the past your neighbours have been known to hide when they see you coming with your bounty of shiny green "Cucurbita Pepo" (zucchini).

Yes, if you've grown these summer squash once, you will know how prolific one zucchini plant can be, especially if in your spring zeal you planted a few of them.

The first year I grew them I grated zucchini into everything from chocolate cakes to hashbrowns and even I grew not too fond of the sight of them.

So what changed my mind?

Well, my husband. He has created a snack that, to use an old axiom, "kills two birds with one stone."

It uses up as much zucchini as you can grow and it provides a tasty salt and fat-free treat that you can sate yourself on without putting on an ounce.

Sound too good to be true?

Well even the skeptics have fallen under the spell of these zucchini chips — yep, chips.

He slices the long green veggies into thin slices and lays them out and spices them with cayenne pepper, garlic powder and whatever else strikes his fancy.

He then places the slices on screens into our dehydrator and they're ready overnight.

Now, dehydrators aren't exotic, they can be bought at a reasonable price from hardware, health food and quite a few other types of stores and catalogues; or if you're handy you can build one.

Take a look for plans at the library or on the internet.

We got our homemade one from a garage sale a few years back. It's quite simply a plywood box with a front opening; inside it are 10 framed screens, which sit on slats placed on either side. It uses a light bulb for heat and a small fan at the bottom circulates the warm air.

You can also place your slices on cookie sheets and use your oven at 140 degrees F. (It will probably take about four hours.)

At first they may taste foreign but they will grow on you.

So how do you grow them?

Quite easily. Start by preparing your soil, digging down about eight inches to a foot and breaking up the big clumps of soil and working

in humus and a fertilizer like well-rotted manure.

You can sow seeds right into the soil as soon as the threat of frost is gone; they take about 60 days to mature.

If you want to start yours indoors, plant them four or five weeks before your outdoor planting date.

If they are going to be container plants that are isolated from other flowering plants, you will probably have to act as the pollinator.

It's easy: when the zucchini flowers just take a soft paint or make-up brush and brush the inside of the male flower (the flower without immature fruit on stem) then dust it off inside female flowers.

I usually just pick up seedlings from one of many reputable local sources; this way all I have to do is harden them off and plant them out in the prepared raised bed.

The roots do need regular watering, especially on hot days.

The leaves will wilt on hot days, but don't fret as long as the roots are being watered regularly.

As soon as the weather cools a bit those leaves will perk right back up.

Tip: Try to water your zucchini vines at the root without wetting the foliage. Wet foliage is the cause of fungi, mildew and related diseases.

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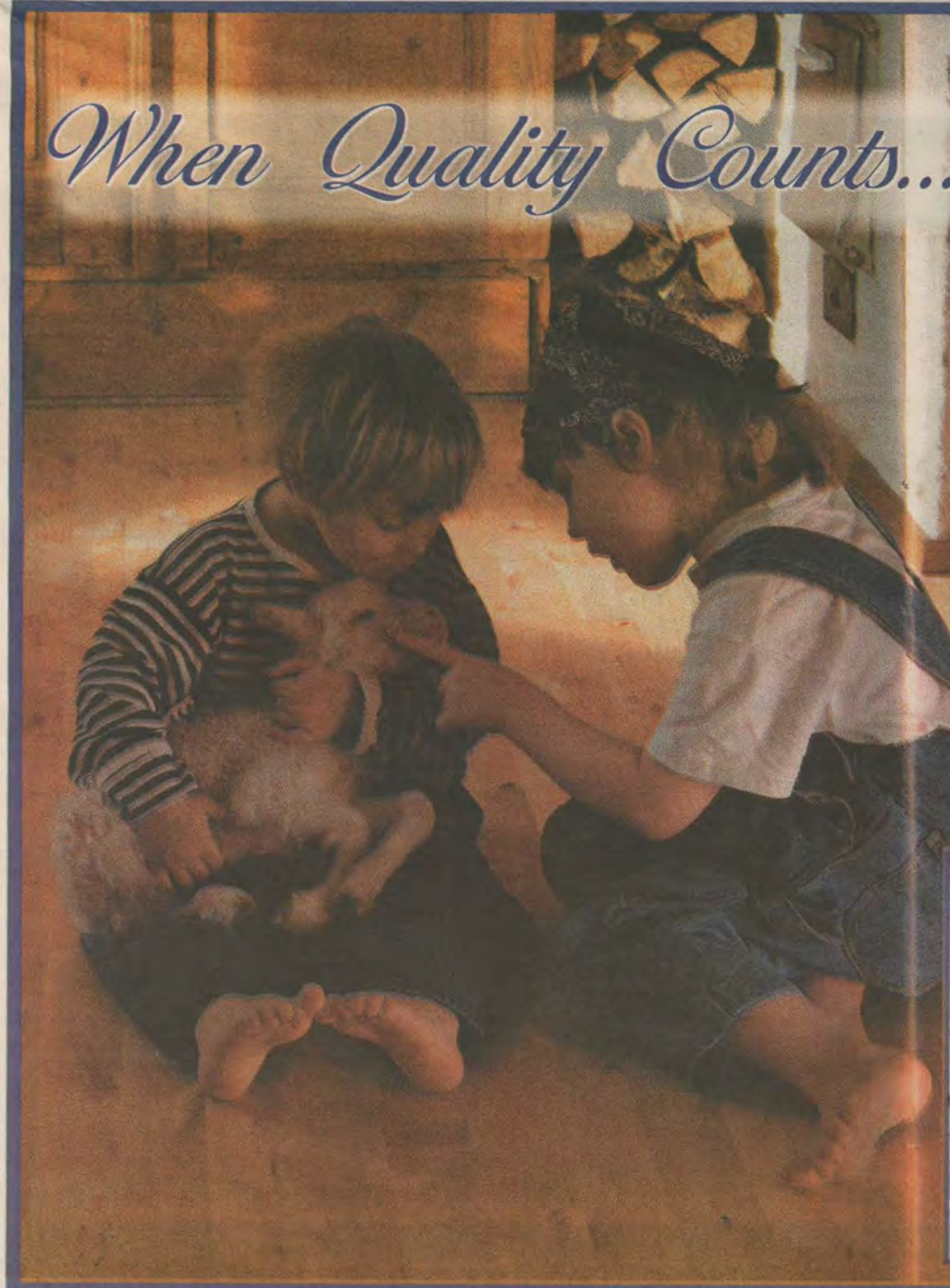


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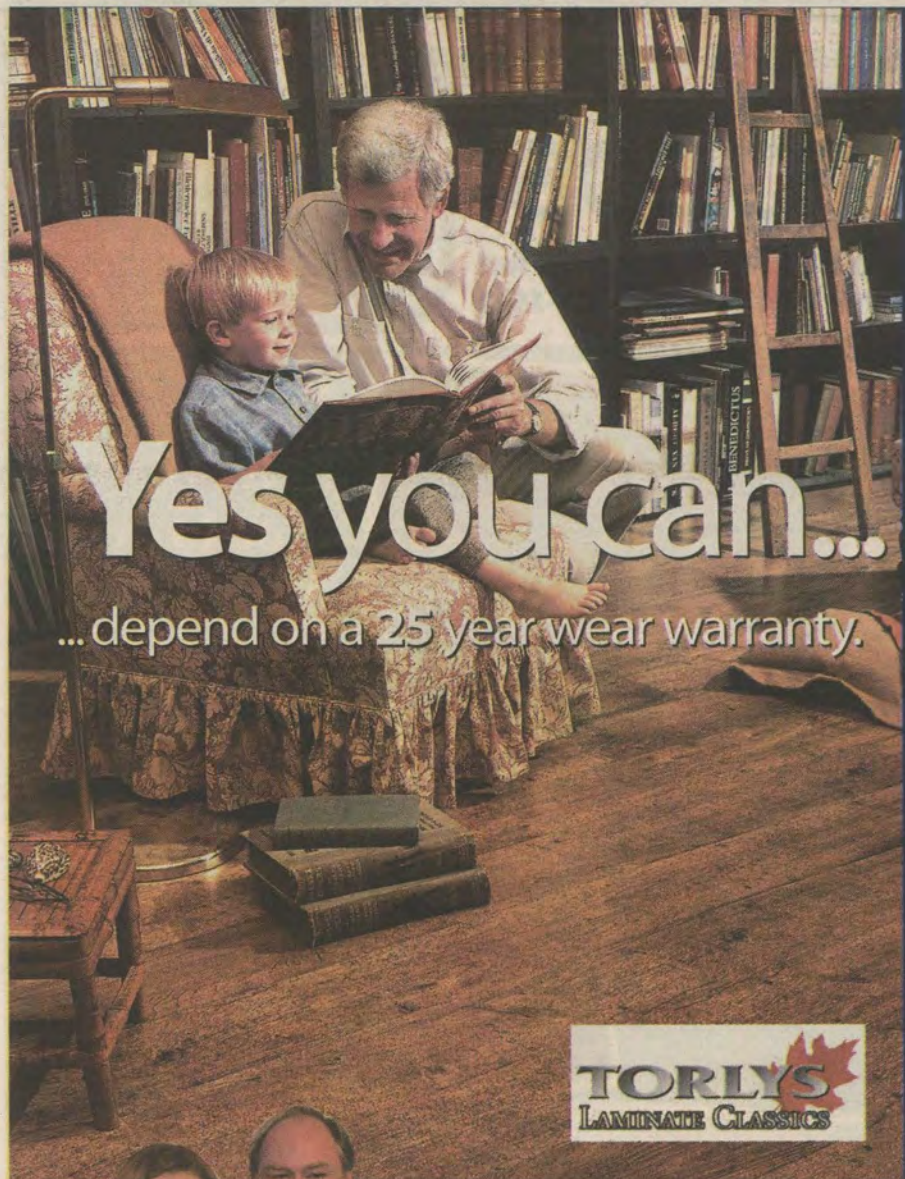
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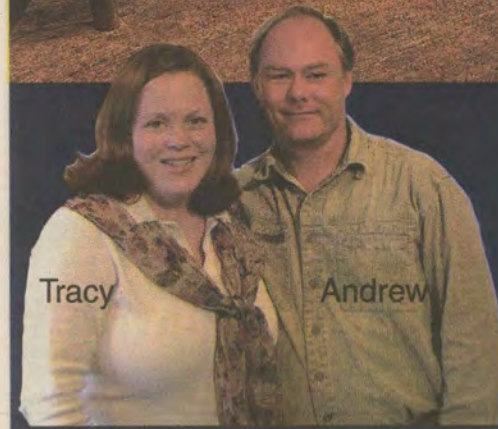
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Spring has sprung at the St. Mary Lake alpaca farm

Photo by Derrick Lundy



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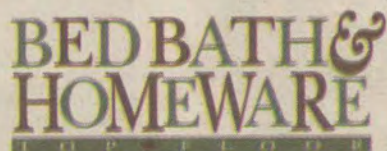
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