



2024 NEWSLETTER

EARTH ALMANAC



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1603 N RIVERFRONT DR
MANKATO, MN 56001

SHARING COMMON GROUND, CULTIVATING CONNECTION

GROWING FORWARD TOGETHER

BY LAURA MARSALA PETERSON

LEC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



With election season upon us, I've been thinking a lot lately about division. So many things these days focus on what separates us rather than weaving us together in a common thread. Our screens bark outrage at us—begging us to shrink our circles, focus our apertures, to be appalled rather than being awed.

Growing spaces do the opposite—they unite us in common awe. I always tease that all is fair in love and tomato growing, and no matter where you come from or your beliefs, the same sun shines down, and we all battle the same rabbits and insects.

The garden is a common ground for all, for better or worse. But it is also where magic is cultivated, where people who wouldn't ever sit down in the same rooms share a zucchini from the same ground, swap garden tips, and even lament together about the weather... the heat... the bugs... and yes, how awful the rabbits are this year.

During these tumultuous times, I double down on the importance of these spaces that organically bring people together to listen to music, learn something new, or grow beans.

We need these spaces to bridge divides and sow common threads that hold us together despite the distance of our beliefs. Community growing spaces have the power to change minds, and while I am not so naïve to think that community gardens are the only solution to all of the world's problems, I have hope enough that they can be the start of growing good things, both tangible and intangible that have positive and healthy reverberations.

Despite the divisive times upon us, I believe places like the Living Earth Center bring added value to our lives and our community, and while the world continues to further divide, we have the ability to grow forward together.



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- Meetings scheduled for the 2nd Monday of every other month
- Next Meeting: September 9
- Welcome to new members: Krista Eichhorst, Kristin Scott, and Madison Vandersee and returning member: Paul Prew
- Thank you to members whose terms have ended during the past year: Becky Bates, Yvonne Cariveau, Kelly Karstad, Joyce Prahm, Laura Stastny, and S. Monica Wagner



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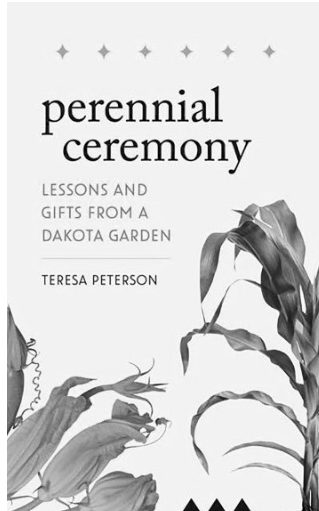
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BOOK REVIEW: PERENNIAL CEREMONY

BY TERESA PETERSON

One of the main themes running through Teresa Peterson's *Perennial Ceremony: Lessons and Gifts from a Dakota Garden* is: Gardening is Ceremony. As Peterson takes us on a journey through the seasons in her Minnesota garden with essays, photos, and recipes, this concept is never far from mind. "My everyday thoughts and practices as a gardener, a lover of the land, a fellow human being, and relative originate as gifts and lessons from ancestors, relatives, allies, and mentors," she writes, "To honor and reciprocate, I offer up this collection of writing in hope that we each find our ceremony to renew a spirit of connectedness and oneness."



sound seems sharper. The crunch of my boots on the snow, my steady breath, and the swish of my coat with each step are acutely heard."

Peterson deftly infuses her Dakota worldview into each essay, sharing ideas with non-Native readers who may not be familiar with this way of thinking. "We have an opportunity to remember, reclaim, and reconnect to the land who provides and cares for us," she writes in a Summer essay *Reclaiming*. "When I get down close to her, dig my fingers and press my feet and toes into cool soils, I begin to restore that sacred memory and connection between us... As I continue to practice behaviors that reflect and honor *makoce kiy* (the land) as a cherished relative, the one that feeds me and sustains me, I understand that I am also being restored."

Topics in *Perennial Ceremony* range from the bucolic, memories of Peterson's youth on a Minnesota farm, recounting the time her young dog Rasta dug up all the pepper plants she had started from seed and left on her porch to harden off (the majority of the plants were rescued, re-planted and survived and Rasta was not too harshly scolded), or stories of time spent in her garden with her partner, children, or parents, to the more

serious topics of battling the installation of carbon pipelines, the theft of her people's land, and the impact of Indian Boarding Schools. Through it all, her gentle reminders that "Gardening is Ceremony" show the reader pathways to peace and reconciliation.

In a Fall essay *Planning and Preparation*, Peterson reflects on how her continued seed saving practices both connect her to and help her heal from past traumas. "Seed saving in and of itself is a deliberate act in sustainability, sovereignty, and regeneration... [It] is about reclaiming a way of life. All that has happened in between these generations, the deliberate acts of genocide and colonization, were countered by small deliberate acts that our ancestors took in preserving the varieties of traditional and heirloom seeds."

I found this book an absolute joy to read. Even though Peterson does not shy away from hard and serious topics, reading *Perennial Ceremony* felt like a respite from the troubles of the world. Peterson's calm and deliberate demeanor, and her commitment to living a life in relation with the world around her is an inspiration and gentle encouragement for the reader to learn from her wisdom. She writes, "My garden has always been a space for me to work through my own everyday problems or to reflect on issues too big for me to solve." It is a gift to us readers to travel with her on this journey of ceremony.

Perennial Ceremony is arranged into 4 sections, one for each season from spring: "In the spring, as I am planting seeds, my connection and relationship with all of creation is renewed and reminds me there is no separation between me and the seedlings. Faith is planted with each seed and an ongoing cultivation and connection nurtures our symbiotic relationships. To access this *taku wakaj* (sacred space and place), I simply walk out my front door," to winter: "There is something about winter landscapes that evokes attentiveness. Every

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, November 2nd
19th Annual Earth Conference



education • collaboration • inspiration

ANNUAL
WINTER SOLSTICE
CELEBRATION



SATURDAY, DEC 21ST

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

PIPPY JOHNSON

My name is Pippi Johnson, and I am studying conservation biology and horticulture at the University of Wisconsin Madison. I will be a junior this coming semester and love everything related to plants and caring for the environment. I am most passionate about gardening with anything edible and figuring out the best ways to make farming as sustainable as possible.

Every summer at my home in Mankato, I grow a flourishing garden with a variety of different foods. I grow food for my family, as well as my four rabbits. I enjoy growing plants because it's like a science project. The act of trying to give the best environment to each individual plant and finding what they need to thrive on top of being as sustainable as I



can, I find very exciting. There are so many possible ways to grow plants and I can never get enough of it.

This summer I knew I wanted to grow my résumé and get more experience with what I love, so I researched online gardening places I could go to volunteer in Mankato. The Community Farm was the perfect match for what I was looking for.

Every time I go to the farm to volunteer, I never get bored and never fall short of a good time. Yes, I weed a lot, but the people I spend time with doing these tasks and the little time I spend doing them (1 - 2 hours each visit) makes it fun and exciting. Apart from weeding, I have also planted seeds and I am always excited to come back next time

to see them flourishing. I always leave learning something new.

I also like how it is a laid-back environment. We are encouraged to take water breaks whenever we need to and told not to push ourselves too hard when it is hot out. The farm manager is very understanding and makes working fun. She always makes me want to come again!

Spending time outside and in nature is really something that I think helps me personally to rejuvenate my soul. I just love being around plants, and knowing that what I'm doing is also helping people in need helps me find purpose as well.

Want to volunteer at the Community Farm?

For more information about how you can be involved, scan the QR code or email communityfarm@livingearthcentermn.org



YOUR DONATIONS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

There are many reasons to donate to LEC. In giving, you are actively contributing to the growth and nourishment of the organization, in addition to the community that we serve through our Community Food Connection Program (CFC).

The CFC directly connects people to the land and to healthy, organic produce. LEC works with our Community Partners to create pathways to food and land access and agency over food choices.

Donations in any amount will make a difference in your community.

As we grow to meet community need, our expenses are growing as well. If you donated last year, we encourage you to increase your 2024 donation amount. We also encourage you to become a monthly donor - a donation of \$5/month gives a total of \$60 annually to LEC.

If you are interested in becoming a legacy sponsor by putting LEC in your estate plan, please contact our Executive Director Laura Marsala Peterson at lpeterson@livingearthcentermn.org.

Living Earth Center Community Food Connection Program Includes:

- **Youth Gardening Initiative** - Includes weekly classes with over 70 MY Place youth ages pre-K to teens. In spring of 2024, we began our hands-on educational Seed to Sauce Program in collaboration with ISD77.
- **Produce Donation** - Last year over 3300 lbs of fresh, organic produce was donated to community partners like ECHO Food Shelf, and FOCP Summer Food Program.
- **Emerging Growers** - Program has grown from 3 to 18 participants, we are working to create pathways for growers to enter the local food economy.
- **Community Garden Partnerships** - Our flagship partnership with MNSU School of Allied Health and Nursing running the dementia-friendly Eng-AGE-ment Garden is in its 6th year!
- **Community Garden Scholarships** - Annually LEC provides an average of 12 scholarships, insuring that anyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, has access to land to grow food for themselves and their families.

HELP SUSTAIN SUSTAINABILITY!

Become a sustaining monthly donor: a convenient, budgeting-friendly way to make a lasting commitment to LEC's mission



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LIVING EARTH CENTER
1603 N RIVERFRONT DR
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www.livingearthcentermn.org

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- \$1000 \$500 \$250
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Name _____

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LEC could not operate without the donations of time, talent, and treasure from such a vibrant and generous community of supporters.

Our sincerest thank you to each and every one of you.

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Eva Jacobsen
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Lyn Kruckeberg
David Lamson
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Dawn McCrea
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Emma Morin
Alan Thom
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Micol Alzetta
Zac Anderson
Blethen Berens
Ryan Bolte
Megan Brandner
Victoria Burt-Heun
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Jordan Dylla
Abigail Eggersdorfer
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DONOR SPOTLIGHT LAURA STASTNY

Laura Stastny has been a long-time LEC supporter. She served on the Board of Directors from 2022 - 2024. While she has long been an LEC donor, she made the decision earlier this year to commit to becoming a monthly sustaining donor.

“I care deeply for the mission of the Living Earth Center,” Stastny said, “so donating is important to me.” She said she became a monthly donor partly because of the convenience. “I’m busy and I often miss special appeals and campaigns so signing up for a monthly recurring donation just made sense to me - to ensure I am always showing my support,” she said.

“As a non-profit employee myself, I know how critical sustaining donors are. They provide a predictable monthly income stream that can be counted on to consistently deliver the services of the organization,” she said.

As a small non profit, Living Earth



Center relies on individual donations to fund programming, pay for staff time, and to cover overhead costs such as rent and insurance.

“For me,” Stastny said, “showing my love for LEC through this kind of support is the right thing to do.”

If you would like to become a monthly sustaining donor, either scan the QR code to the right or return the pledge card on the previous page, and check the “make this a monthly donation” box.



LOCAL FOOD GRANT BENEFITS GROWERS & LEC

In partnership with Region 9, South Central MN Food Recovery, and Wooden Spoon, LEC has been awarded a MN Department of Agriculture Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Grant.

The goal of LFPA Grants is to connect food from local farmers and growers to underserved communities in south-central Minnesota. LEC will use grant funds to support both their Produce Donation Program and Emerging Growers. Through the grant, any food donated to community partners will be reimbursed to the grower at market-value rates.

“We are very excited for the opportunity to participate in this program,” said LEC Finance Manager Melissa Martensen. “It is really the best of both worlds. Community partners like ECHO and CADA House will continue to receive the donations of fresh organic



Through the MDA's LFPA Grant, participating Emerging Growers will be compensated for produce they grow and donate to community partners like ECHO Food Shelf.

produce at no charge to them, but growers will now be compensated with grant funds just as if they were selling their produce at a Farmer's Market.”

One of the goals of LEC's Emerging Growers program is to assist interested growers in entering the local food economy. The LFPA Grant is one avenue for Growers to receive monetary compensation for the food they are growing. “Receiving grant funding for food that they donate benefits both the Growers and the community partners receiving the produce,” said Martensen. “For the Growers, it is a convenient way to “sell” their excess produce, and the Food Shelf receives more donated produce.”

So far this year, six Growers have registered to participate in the program that will run through the end of the 2025 growing season.

2023: A LOOK BACK



We partnered with LocAle Brewing Co as the location for our 2023 Common Ground Series. Here, Amanda Anez from Key City Bike discusses Bike Polo. Audience members then heard from local author Melody Taylor about Vampire Novels and then worked together to find the commonalities between the two topics. A second event was also held where we worked to discover similarities between pickling and pickle ball.



LEC Garden Manager and local music sensation, Mal Murphy, hosted monthly Open Mic Nights in the Community Garden during the summer. Both gardeners and community members attended to share talents including music, poetry, and more.

Here are a few of our 2023 highlights:

- Just over 3300 lbs of fresh organic produce, grown by LEC Staff and Volunteers, was donated to our community partners
- Our Community Garden was full with 104 gardeners and their families, growing healthy food and quality relationships. 19 garden scholarships were awarded, ensuring everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, had access to land to grow food.
- In its second year, our Emerging Growers Program grew from 3 to 18 participants. Growers tended larger plots at the Community Farm, where they grew culturally significant foods such as saga and managu.
- Worked with 105 youth from Mankato MYPlace, Loyola School, and YMCA Day Camps at both the Garden and Farm, learning about the wonders and benefits of gardening by tending garden plots.
- Hosted 20 unique events and programs - from Annual Summer and Winter Solstice Celebrations, to a Native Pollinator Class, to our 2nd Annual Fall Fun Fest at the Farm.
- In April, we moved our office off of the SSND Campus and into our current space, just down the hill on North Riverfront Dr.



In June, we hosted our second ever Wine & Cheese Pairing fundraiser. Attendees tasted 6 different pairings, with wine provided by Morgan Creek Vineyards and cheeses selected by retired St. Peter Co-op Cheesemonger and former LEC Board Chair Jim Vonderharr, while enjoying the idyllic beauty of the Community Gardens.



In November, our 18th annual Earth Conference, *Bridging the Divide: Our Collective Role in Reconnecting Relationships*, was held at the MNSU Centennial Student Union in partnership with the MNSU Environmental Committee. Pictured above, LEC's Executive Director Laura Marsala Peterson moderates a panel discussion between conference speakers, Carolina Ortiz of COPAL, Reggie Haslett-Marroquin of Tree-Range Farms, Paul Ebbenga of Blue Earth Project, Mohamed Alsadig of Mankato Diversity Council, and Kathryn Lozada of ISAIAH.

GROWING FROM SEED TO SAUCE

A CONVERSATION WITH PROGRAM MANAGER CORA UYIGUE

Seed to Sauce, Living Earth Center's new Youth Gardening Initiative Program launched earlier this spring. It was designed in collaboration with ISD77, getting LEC staff into the classrooms to talk about growing food and getting the students out into the Garden and Farm. By providing hands-on planting, tending, and harvesting experience, Seed to Sauce fosters a curiosity about environmental stewardship, encourages healthy eating, and introduces the joys of growing ones own food.

Each participating student starts two seeds: one to take home and one to be planted at the Community Gardens or Farm. A wide variety of plants, from tomatoes and peppers to herbs and flowers, have been started in this year's program. Students participating in summer programs come out to the Gardens or Farm to help tend to the plants; watering, weeding, and learning about the benefits of sustainable agriculture practices. The program culminates in the fall with students gathering for pizza parties where they learn to make sauce using the vegetables they started in the springtime. Remaining produce will be donated to Community Partners such as ECHO Food Shelf, allowing students to experience first hand how community gardening supports the community around them.

In this its pilot year, Seed to Sauce is growing faster than weeds in a plot of peppers! Already our Program Manager Cora Uyigue has met with over 1,000 area youth. Participating groups include Jefferson Elementary, Dakota Meadows Middle School, MY Place, YMCA, Loyola Summer Program, Rosa Parks Summer Program, and Generations Child and Memory Care.

At the end of July, about halfway through the first growing season, we sat down with Cora to talk all things Seed to Sauce.

LEC: Can you talk a little about the reasons for starting Seed to Sauce?

CU: We wanted to expand our youth programming to include more Mankato youth to experience growing food from seed and to participate in supporting their local community. When Mankato youth plant seeds with LEC, those seeds go to the Community Farm where they will be grown and donated to local food shelves. By involving youth in the process of caring for seeds, they get to practice environmental stewardship, learn about local food systems, support community agriculture, and gain a deeper appreciation for where their food comes from.

LEC: How did collaborating with ISD77 staff help make the program stronger/more beneficial?

CU: Partnering with ISD77 has allowed LEC programming to reach hundreds of students in Mankato schools who would not otherwise



have had the opportunity. Thanks to the support of ISD 77 staff, these kids got to plant and care for their own seedlings, send seedlings to the Community Farm, and then visit the Community Farm to practice hands-on environmental and community stewardship.

LEC: What has surprised you about Seed to Sauce during its first year?

CU: I've been surprised by how much the students truly enjoy the activities. The amount of enthusiasm and excitement they show when taking home their plant, or learning how seeds grow, or eating the food with the ingredients they have grown always brings a smile to my face. It reminds me how much kids need these experiences with nature for their development and self-confidence.

LEC: How have you seen the youth involved grow and change their perception of gardening and/or vegetables?

CU: I have seen kids demonstrate their knowledge of gardening in profound ways, especially students I get to meet with more than once. They make connections based on their prior experience in the garden, like that worms help make room in the soil for new roots, or that tomatoes need fences to help them grow tall, and that by having a greater variety of plants in a garden we can support wider varieties of animals. I have seen students change their minds on food they previously did not like or would not have tried, but because they grew the ingredients and made the food, they discovered they really like it!

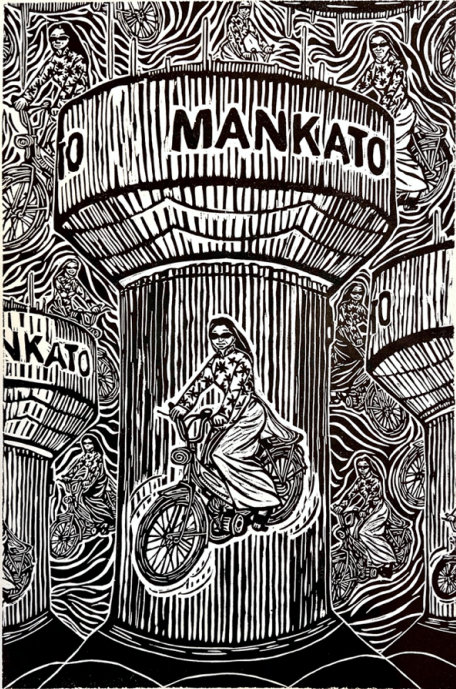
Sometimes when kids come to the garden, they are having a bad day and are grumpy, but by the time they leave, they have a whole new attitude. I remember a girl came to the garden declaring, "I don't want to be here! I want to go home!" She ended up participating beautifully during our activity, which was nature journaling. She made detailed drawings of all her experiences, including being bit by mosquitos! She was so eager to share all her observations with me and left the garden excited to nature journal at home.

LEC: Anything else you want to add?

CU: It has been so rewarding to experience how much students get out of having hands-on experiences with nature. I believe having intentional relationships with nature gives kids an opportunity to express themselves in new and important ways. These experiences provide them with a deeper understanding of the world around them and their role in helping to care for and nurture their home. I am so excited to see this programming grow and to plant seeds with even more kids next year!



LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



Originally from Vietnam, Mai Tran is a Minnesota-based printmaker who specializes in woodcut printmaking.



Through printmaking practices, Mai illustrates the connection between different cultures, mythology, and history, as well as human and animal interactions.

Mai has exhibited collections of work and is featured in various newspapers and TV channels in the United States and Vietnam. One of her woodcut prints is currently presented on Minnesota State Highway 22's billboard, and another one is participating in the "Art on Hennepin Avenue" in Minneapolis through 2024.

You can discover more about Mai and her work at her website: www.maitranarts.com



REAL FOOD FOR REAL PEOPLE

Banana Cake from Melissa Martensen, LEC Finance Manager

This is a recipe passed down from my great-grandmother Emma Cain (1889 - 1962). While I never got to meet her, I feel connected to her when I bake my family this cake. I'm honestly not sure how this is any different from bannana bread... but the fact that it's *called* cake means I get to put cream cheese frosting on it, which as far as I'm concerned makes everything better.



Banana Cake

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1/4c Crisco | 2c flour |
| 1c Sugar | 1t baking powder (in flour) |
| 2 eggs, well beaten | 1c mashed bananas |
| 2/3 c sour milk* | 1t vanilla |
| 1t soda in milk | pinch of salt |

Bake in 350° oven for about 45 minutes

*this was my first experience with a recipe calling for sour milk, a quick google taught me that an acceptable substitute was to put 2/3T white vingear in a meausring cup, then fill to the 2/3c line with regular milk and stir.

