



# Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH

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# Saanich's Educating Children Outside Program

## Heart-Strong Through Hands-On: Experiential Outdoor Education in Early Childhood

By Chris Filler, Community Recreation Programmer  
District of Saanich, Saanich.ca/eco or 250-475-7107

*"It's important to have knowledge of the heart," he explains.  
"How do you get that? Well, you learn through the soles of your feet,  
the palms of your hands, the seat of your pants. All that knowledge  
has to pass through your heart on the way to the head."*

~James Raffan



Since September 2013, rain, shine or anywhere in between, a group of thirty-six preschool-aged children have been getting to know the lakeside ecosystem around the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary on a very up close and personal level. They are part of Saanich's Educating Children Outside Program (E.C.O.), a unique community partnership program between the District of Saanich Parks and Recreation Department and the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary. The full year early childhood education program provides opportunities for these lucky explorers to engage fully with their senses and surroundings, allowing their own curiosity and appetite for discovery to drive their learning (Full year E.C.O. programs are available at both Swan Lake and Elk/Beaver Lake for Sept. 2014).

The E.C.O program adheres to an emergent curriculum, applied via a play-based philosophy towards its approach to education. The program seeks to combat what Robert Pyle has termed "the extinction of experience" in childhood.

The E.C.O. program has broken ground in promoting an authentic sense of place through the development of a fully experiential ecoliteracy for participants. While building social skills, resiliency, self-regulation, and not to mention physical abilities, children are (re)connected with the natural world, woven directly into the fabric of the watershed itself. By replacing plastic toys and prescribed learning activities with copious opportunities for meaningful engagement, teaching becomes an embodied co-creation led by an inherent sense of wonder and awe which is best described as 'heart knowledge'. As American naturalist John Burroughs stated "knowledge without love will not stick. But if love comes first, knowledge is sure to follow".

If we want children and youth to care for the planet, then they must first learn to love it and understand their place within it.

One of the biggest surprises has been how galvanizing the sense of community has been since the program was welcomed with open arms into the Nature Sanctuary. This amazing sense of belonging has played out in many ways, and whether it's E.C.O. children and their families joining forces with the restoration team at Swan Lake to help keep invasive species at bay, or hosting their nature pen-pals from Ms. Horton's Grade 2 class at Strawberry Vale Elementary the result is the same – these children are becoming firmly rooted in place, learning to care for and be cared by a larger sense of community which includes themselves as a central figure in its continued stewardship.

### References

*Our Kids.* James Raffan, historian — *Camp Kandalore*. Retrieved from <http://www.ourkids.net/camp/james-raffan-camp-kandalore.php#sthash.JCYuu49k.dpuf>

Pyle, R. M. (1993). *The thunder tree: Lessons From An Urban Wildland*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Photos courtesy Ameris Photography



# Building Healthy Landscapes Starts in Early Spring

By Deborah Walker,  
Parks & Environmental Services, Capital Regional District

Spring is the best time to get your landscape into shape for the drier summer months and ready to be as water efficient as possible.

## Fix the Leaks

Before the outdoor watering season begins check for leaks in pipes, hoses, hose connections, faucets, and irrigation equipment. Even a tiny leak can waste over 1,000 litres per month. Immediately repair or replace any equipment leaking water.

## Root Out the Weeds

Springtime and warmer weather is weed sprouting time. Weeds steal water away from other plants, so keep this competition in check by rooting out weeds in the early spring. Remove weeds by hand wherever possible. For pesticide-free gardening tips, visit [www.crd.bc.ca/pesticidefree](http://www.crd.bc.ca/pesticidefree).

## Water Conserving Irrigation

Consider installing a micro-drip system for flower and vegetable gardens. A drip irrigation system can conserve up to 50 percent of water usage and delivers water to the root system, ensuring healthier plantings. Visit [www.crd.bc.ca/workshops](http://www.crd.bc.ca/workshops) for free irrigation workshops, or check out the events listings on page 9.

## Lawn Care

As springtime approaches, a healthy and well-maintained lawn becomes a focus. Lawns can tolerate periods of drought if they have the proper care in the spring.

- Aerate your lawn. This will help air and fertilizer get down into your lawn.
- Rake deep into the soil to remove thatch.
- Always fertilize in moderation with organic products only, and be sure to read and follow all manufacturer instructions.
- If grass needs cutting, adjust your mower blades to leave grass 7 to 8 cm. (3 inches) long. This helps your grass to hold moisture. Make sure your mower blades are sharp.

## Mulch

Mulching garden beds helps to slow the evaporation of moisture from the soil and keeps the soil and roots cool. Try to stick with organic mulches that slowly break down and add organic matter to the soil.





# 2014 Saanich Environmental Awards

*Recognizing people and organizations  
that make a positive contribution to the natural  
environment in Saanich since 2000.*

Saanich Environmental Awards are an initiative of the  
Saanich Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee (ENA).

Award recipients receive a framed certificate awarded by Council and have  
their names engraved on a permanent plaque at Saanich Municipal Hall.

*For more information on the awards, please contact Environmental Services,  
250-475-1775 or go to [www.saanich.ca/enviroawards](http://www.saanich.ca/enviroawards)*

## Award Categories

### INDIVIDUAL

### VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

### BUSINESS

### YOUTH GROUP / SCHOOL

### BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

*To recognize local conservation efforts  
towards a species, habitat, or ecosystem.*

### LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT

*To recognize a lifetime of local  
environmental effort by an individual.*

### SUSTAINABILITY

*To recognize a local contribution towards  
sustainability, integrating environmental,  
social, and economic values.*



### About

Saanich Environmental Awards are an initiative of the Saanich Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee (ENA). Nominations are received by the ENA and evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Significance of the project
- Duration/magnitude of effort
- Degree of innovation
- Longterm sustainability of the project
- Past efforts



### Past Recipients

Past award winners have participated in such projects as invasive species removal, environmental education, native plant propagation, waste reduction, and conservation of private property. Business awards have been given for innovative green services, sustainable development, and energy efficient facilities.



### Eligibility

The awards are not limited to Saanich residents, but the effect of the nominee's work must be in our municipality. If the nominee is employed in an environmental field, the nomination should indicate how their work exceeds their job requirements. Members of the ENA, Saanich staff, and Saanich Council are not eligible to receive awards.



**Deadline for nominations is  
Friday, April 25, 2014 at 4pm**



[www.saanich.ca/enviroawards](http://www.saanich.ca/enviroawards)

# On Your Mark...

# Get Set...

# Go!

## Invasive Season Begins!

By Carolyn Richman,  
Environmental Education Officer, District of Saanich

It's that time of year. If you started wondering where all those weeds in your garden suddenly came from, you are not alone. That also means it is the season to start watching for and dealing with high priority invasive species in the region. The public's help is needed throughout the region at this time of the year to report and help deal with invaders.

Saanich, along with its partners in the Capital Region Invasive Species Partnership (CRISP), focus available resources on:

- preventing new high risk species introductions
- managing high risk invasives that are new or in small populations
- containing and controlling species that are established, such as Scotch Broom, in important natural areas

### Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*



One of the earliest priority invaders is Lesser Celandine, which starts to grow in late winter in our region. It forms a dense groundcover eliminating native plants and impacting wildlife. It is toxic to most mammals and can be dangerous for livestock.

Reports of this species have been increasing in our region over the last few years, especially in areas such as Bowker Creek where it has been found dominating some of the riparian areas.

***If you find Lesser Celandine in Saanich, please call or email Saanich Parks at: [parks@saanich.ca](mailto:parks@saanich.ca) or 250-475-5522***

A Lesser Celandine identification and alert sheet is available: [www.invasives.saanich.ca](http://www.invasives.saanich.ca) (click on Invasive Species Brochures)

**A few high priority species for the region include:**



[Knotweed]



[Fire Ants]



[Hogweed]



[Knapweed]

**For more information or to report priority invasive species:**

In Saanich: [www.invasives.saanich.ca](http://www.invasives.saanich.ca)

In the Capital Region: [www.coastalisc.com/regional-committees](http://www.coastalisc.com/regional-committees)

# Pulling Together - Growing, Growing, Green!

*an assortment of the latest news from our program*

By Jenny Eastman, Coordinator of Volunteers  
jenny.eastman@saanich.ca

Our thanks to the following groups and businesses for volunteering to remove invasive species in Saanich Parks over the past few months.

- Coast Capital Savings
- Saanich Baptist Church
- Pearson College
- North Quadra Community Association
- 1st Cedar Hill Scouts
- 1st Douglas Scouts
- Victoria Youth Custody Centre
- 5th Douglas Scouts
- Scouts Canada – Greater Victoria Area.

If you have a team, a faith community, a club, or a business and would like to volunteer, please visit our website for more information. We provide training, tools, and refreshments. [www.saanich.ca/pullingtogether](http://www.saanich.ca/pullingtogether)



## Saanich Parks Welcomes Andrew Burger As The New Natural Areas Technician

By Cory Manton, Saanich Parks Natural Areas Manager

Andrew has had a strong connection with nature throughout his life: from fishing and canoeing with his family as a kid in the land of lakes of Ontario to hiking, camping, skiing, and mountain biking throughout British Columbia as an adult. Currently, he enjoys teaching his young son Eli about the wonder of British Columbia's natural environment.



Andrew began his formal education in environmental science in Victoria, where he enrolled in the Environmental Technology Program at Camosun College. He gained valuable experience through field labs and became an avid birder in the process. Andrew continued his education and acquired a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resource Management from the University of Northern BC in Prince George.

He completed a Co-op internship with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans at the Chehalis River Enhancement Facility and followed that with a four-year contract working jointly with the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Chehalis First Nation conducting stock and habitat enhancement programs.

After his contract ended, he worked for three years as an environmental consultant, doing project coordination and detailed site investigations all over the province. Andrew eventually ended up in Vancouver, where he worked for six years as a Natural Areas Technician for Surrey Parks. He was involved in all aspects of management from habitat restoration projects, access and recreation programs, and environmental stewardship events to promote the conservation and enjoyment of our natural environment.

Andrew is excited about returning to the Island to reconnect with the natural spaces here and continuing his career in natural area park management with the District of Saanich.

## Pulling Together Volunteer Profile

# Colleen O'Brien

Queen of the Camas, Defender of the Violets, and Protector of Playfair Park, Colleen O'Brien is right where I'd expect to find her - kneeling in the wildflower meadow at Playfair Park, a look of concentration on her face. This well-loved park is known for its spectacular show of rhododendrons and azaleas in early spring, but it also has one of Victoria's most stunning native wildflower meadows. Colleen spends so many hours volunteering in the meadow that sometimes visitors assume she lives in the park's little supply shed! A volunteer with Saanich Parks since 1995, Colleen has spent more than 3,000 hours tending the at-risk Garry Oak meadow and thoughtfully researching restoration methodologies. She spends many hours on her knees (in all weather), delicately hand-pulling invasive grasses and herbaceous weeds, so wildflowers like Camas, Shooting Star, Western Buttercup, and White Fawn Lily can flourish.

Growing up in the wilds of "Outer Metchosin", Colleen discovered early on that nature and parks were her source of solace and happiness, "I've always loved the outdoors and I've always been someone who does things to make things better", she says. Her successes at Playfair Park include reaching out to dog owners to encourage them to help her protect the meadow by ensuring their pets don't trample wildflowers. She now counts the regular dog walkers amongst the staunchest supporters of her ecological restoration work. ("And the dogs do keep the deer from sticking around to chow down", she points out). As well, her tending of the meadow has seen a species-at-risk population increase dramatically.

When not deep in Playfair's meadow, Colleen sings, plays fiddle and guitar, and is active in the bluegrass and old-time music communities. She's an avid reader and has a yard of her own to tend that's spitting distance from her retirement project in Playfair. Our thanks to Colleen for her many years of exceptional volunteering. And yes, she is looking for volunteers who are happy to help care for Playfair Park.

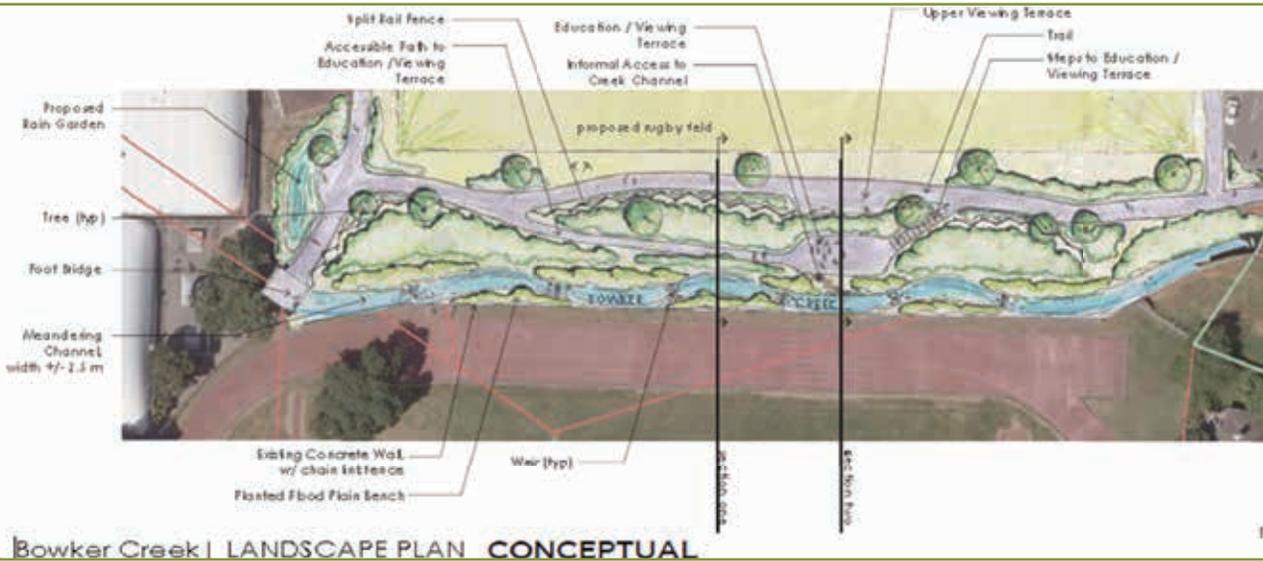
Photo: Volunteer Lead Steward, Colleen with some wildflower respecting pals.



# Bowker Creek Restoration Project

## at Oak Bay High School

By Nikki Curnow, Bowker Creek Initiative (BCI) Coordinator  
www.bowkercreekinitiative.ca



The Bowker Creek Initiative (BCI) is a community and multi-jurisdictional (Saanich, Oak Bay, and Victoria) effort to improve watershed management efforts in the Capital Region. A recent milestone in BCI's 10 year history is the Bowker Creek Blueprint which was developed to assist municipalities, land stewards, and community groups identify short and long-term actions to meet the goals of the 2003 watershed management plan.

Recognizing the time required for significant change in the urban environment, the time horizon for completing actions in the Blueprint can be as long as 50-100 years from now. Fortunately, by funds awarded by the Gas Tax/Public Transit Management Service Innovations Fund, there exists an immediate opportunity to restore the section of Bowker Creek through Oak Bay High School lands by working cooperatively with the current redesign of the school, and construction of a neighbourhood learning centre and playing fields (scheduled for 2014-15).

This will be the largest restoration project along the creek and a joint project of the District of Oak Bay and the Bowker Creek Initiative in collaboration with School District 61 and Oak Bay High School. The creek restoration project will improve flow conveyance, create habitat, improve water quality, provide a community-accessible outdoor classroom space, and refurbish a greenway. Kerr Wood Leidal Consulting Engineers was the successful interdisciplinary project team awarded the contract in February 2014.

In 2014 the collaborative detailed design for this restoration project will be developed through a series of educational workshops, a facilitated design charrette, and community open houses.

Since the Creek runs through the high school property, place-based learning opportunities exist to involve the students in all aspects of the creek restoration, from channel design process to planting and monitoring water flows, and from learning about related careers and community and volunteer opportunities, to the creation of curriculum where the naturalized creek becomes an outdoor classroom and a community amenity.



A series of six short "Creeks and Careers" interactive workshops is being planned at the school for this spring. The Objectives of these workshops are to introduce the members of the interdisciplinary project team and to engage and prepare a cohort of interested students and staff who will be invited to participate in the one day restoration site design charrette (May 2014).

The design charette works will then take the detailed design to 80% completion. At this stage the design will be presented again to the community in an open house (June 2014) for final review and comments prior to being completed (August 2014). Completion of the Oak Bay High School redesign will occur during the 2015 fisheries window by the successful bidder.

# Land, Sea, & Sky

By Leila Lustig and Diane Berry

It started over coffee with a germ of an idea: Victoria composers who find inspiration in our beautiful back yard wondering if it's enough just to write music about it. Can we do anything about the challenges facing our natural world?

So we decided to use our talents and our music to put together a concert for Earth Month that would not only celebrate our corner of the Earth, but the people and organizations who are working so hard to protect it.

Each piece of the program is dedicated to a local environmental group. They include a piece for flute and loon calls dedicated to The Rocky Point Bird Observatory, a sax quartet called "*The Language of Bees*" dedicated to the Western Wilderness Committee, "*Song for the Earth*" for harp and cello for The Land Conservancy and "*I Shall Miss The Sea*" for flute and voice dedicated to the Dogwood Initiative. Three of the pieces were written just for this event, and will be world premieres.

The first performance will be in the Sanctuary of First Unitarian Church, where there's room for displays about each of the groups and the work they do. It's a chance for audience members to learn more about what's happening in their own community, their own back yard.

The second performance will be new music in a new space, the Swan Lake Nature House. This will be a first for Swan Lake, usually home to lectures and presentations. With seating for only some 50 people, the atmosphere is intimate and unique.

We live in an amazingly rich and beautiful part of the world. The composers and musicians are hoping this concert will be a chance for all of us to celebrate it together.

**April 4th, 7:30 pm at the First Unitarian Church of Victoria**

**April 26th, 7:30 pm at the Swan Lake Nature House**

tickets are \$20 and will be available at Ivy's Bookstore in Oak Bay, Long and McQuade, by calling 250-472-2590 and at the door.

## **RAINY DAYS AT THE COMPOST EDUCATION CENTRE!**

**Saturday April 12th 10am-3pm**

**Compost Education Centre**

**1216 North Park**

Join us in our fabulous demonstration gardens to learn more about rainwater harvesting systems and practices in your community. Rainwater management looks at how we can work to maintain or restore natural water cycles and use rainwater as the resource that it is! In partnership with the CRD, we'll be bringing together community and municipal groups involved in rainwater management, as well as hosting two free workshops about stormwater education, rainwater harvesting, and choosing the right systems. You will be entered to win a free rain barrel too!

**Register for the FREE rainwater harvesting workshops at Eventbrite [www.eventbrite.ca](http://www.eventbrite.ca)**

# Upcoming Events

## Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

[www.saanich.ca/resident/recreation/](http://www.saanich.ca/resident/recreation/) 250-475-5408

### Sunday Hikes (FREE Drop-In)

Sundays, 1 pm - 3:30 pm

With Penny Stevens & Robert Newell

These FREE Saanich Parks guided hikes are open to adults of all ages. Please wear sturdy and supportive footwear and carry adequate drinking water. Walks go rain or shine.

Apr 27 - Mystic Vale & Herons of Cadboro Bay

Meet by tennis courts at Henderson Rec Centre, Cedar Hill X Rd

May 25 - Cedar Hill, Braefoot and Playfair Park

Meet at Garnet Rd behind Nellie McLung Library

Jun 22 - Swan Lake to Bow Park

Meet in lower parking lot behind Saanich Hall, 770 Vernon

### Gentle Walk & Talk (FREE Drop-In)

Thursdays, 9:30 am – 11 am

Enjoy fresh air, beautiful scenery, a friendly chat and gentle exercise as we walk through our Saanich parks & trails.

Suitable for all walking abilities, but wear suitable footwear.

Dogs not permitted.

Apr 10 - Bow Park

Meet at Gordon Head Rec Centre lobby, 4100 Lambrick Way

Apr 17 - Cadboro Bay to Mystic Vale

Meet at Cadboro Gyro Park end of Sinclair, beside washrooms

Apr 24 - Tod Inlet

Meet at Tod Inlet access on Wallace Dr. opposite Quarry Lake

May 1 - McMinn-Kentwood-Outterbridge

Meet at McMinn Park, beside tennis courts, off Maplegrove

May 8 - Cedar Hill to Playfair

Meet at Cedar Hill Rec Centre, main entrance parking lot

May 15 - Mt. Tolmie to Finnerty Gardens

Meet at Henderson Rec Centre's main door, on Cedar Hill X

May 22 - Rithet's Bog to Brydon Park

Meet at kiosk on Dalewood, off Chatteron Way

May 29 - Blenkinsop Trail

Meet at Lochside Elementary School, on trail

Jun 5 - Mt. Doug

Meet at washrooms in parking lot off Cordova Bay Rd at Ash

## CRD Parks & Environmental Services

Our naturalists lead guided walks, hikes, canoeing, and drop-in events for all ages. Most are free, all are fun! The Parks Spring Nature Outings and Events brochure is now out:

<https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/parks-pdf/spring-nature-programs-2014.pdf> 250-478-3344

### CRD Efficient Irrigation Workshops

April 12, 2-5pm

All-Efficient Irrigation

Oak Bay

May 1, 7-9pm

Controller Scheduling

Saanich

May 24, 2-5pm

Micro/Drip Irrigation

Sooke

A properly installed & maintained irrigation system will conserve water! Irrigation experts will explain system components and discuss scheduling & maintenance tips. Please call the CRD at 250-474-9684 to pre-register or visit:

[www.crd.bc.ca/workshops](http://www.crd.bc.ca/workshops)

## Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

[www.swanlake.bc.ca](http://www.swanlake.bc.ca) 250-479-0211

### Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

Every Wednesday and Sunday, 9:00 am

Bring your binoculars and walking shoes and meet in the parking lot for this walk.

### Wildflower Weekend (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, April 27, 12 pm - 3 pm

Celebrate the wonderful world of wildflowers with tours of our native plant garden, hikes to Christmas Hill, crafts for the kids, and our wildflower musical revue.

### Bee Day (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, June 29, 12 pm - 3 pm

What's the buzz about bees – are they good dancers? Bee songs, crafts and some bee spit to taste. You'll be amazed, bee enchanted, and bee happy. Bee there or bee square.

## Victoria Natural History Society

Visit [www.naturevictoria.ca](http://www.naturevictoria.ca) for more programs

### Natural History Night (FREE Event)

Arctic Plants and Animals (Tuesday, Apr 8, 7:30 pm)

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

### Botany Night (FREE Event)

Ethnobotany of Asian melons (Tuesday, Apr 15, 7:30 pm)

Swan Lake Nature House

### Birder's Night (FREE Event)

Paraguay Birding (Wednesday, Apr 23, 7:30 pm)

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

### Marine Night (FREE Event)

Ecosystem-Based Ocean Management (Apr 28, 7:30 pm)

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

### Camas Day at Beacon Hill Park

Saturday, April 26, 7 am - 3 pm

[www.friendsofbeaconhillpark.ca](http://www.friendsofbeaconhillpark.ca)

Guided walks about Birds, insects, Wildflowers, Archaeology and First Nations. Meet at the flag pole atop Beacon Hill.

### Coastal Connections Conference

Thursday-Sunday, May 1-4, 2014

<http://rpbo.org/bcnatureagm.php>

Registration is now open for this amazing event featuring a roster of excellent speakers, four days of field trips, a banquet, reception at the Bateman Centre, and much more!

## Habitat Acquisition Trust

Visit [www.hat.bc.ca](http://www.hat.bc.ca) for more programs

### Victoria Native Plant Garden Tour

Sunday May 4th 2014, 1-4 pm

For your copy of the tour guide email [Todd@hat.bc.ca](mailto:Todd@hat.bc.ca), or call 250-995-2428. You'll see some of the six public and four private gardens of all sizes and ages. Some gardens are strictly native while others incorporate them with ornamentals. Meet the garden owners and professional native plant experts at each location.



# 2014 ANNUAL NATIVE PLANT SALE

**SATURDAY & SUNDAY  
MAY 17 & 18  
9:00AM TO 3:00PM  
SWAN LAKE NATURE HOUSE**

OVER 4,000 PLANTS & HUNDREDS OF SPECIES

PRE-ORDERS OVER \$300 AVAILABLE, CALL 250-479-0211

PLEASE BRING BOXES OR FLATS FOR YOUR PLANTS

PARKING IS LIMITED, PLEASE CARPOOL IF POSSIBLE

SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR PLANT LIST & EXTRA PARKING LOCATIONS



**SWAN LAKE**  
CHRISTMAS HILL  
NATURE SANCTUARY

[www.swanlake.bc.ca](http://www.swanlake.bc.ca)





*Once seen in abundant numbers throughout forests, on trails, and around lakes, the nature preschooler is making a comeback in the Capital Region. Easily identifiable by its brightly coloured pinnie, well worn mud gear, and rosy cheeks, winter plumage will soon be shed for hats, sunglasses and short sleeves. Programs such as the ECO program which operates out of Swan Lake and Elk/Beaver Lake are helping to bring kids back to nature, setting solid roots that will last a lifetime.*

## Join the *Our Backyard* mailing list!

Be kept up to date on local community stewardship projects and environmental issues. Subscriptions to this quarterly newsletter are free and available in electronic or paper version. To subscribe, please send your contact information to the editor or visit the following website [www.ourbackyard.saanich.ca](http://www.ourbackyard.saanich.ca)

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