



SIT HERE!

What a great place to meditate! Bamboo floor, lots of windows, a space attuned to both simplicity and comfort, and a kind of wrap-around porch which we don't use but which is very cool nonetheless. Such is the second floor of the Yoga in Daily Life building, in the Del Ray section of Alexandria, Virginia, where we have been sitting since July.

Our previous meditation venue, in Old Town, Alexandria, was also a wonderful place. It had real character—the kind that only older buildings possess—but other claims on that space made it impractical for us to continue sitting there. Hence the migration.

We like to say that when we work in the field, we just work; when we sit, we just sit. But it matters—it matters a lot—where one just does these things. Deciding where and when to make an effort is a very important

part of the effort itself.

So why choose this new space? What does it offer, as far as meditation is concerned? Maybe three things. You could say that it feels “significantly empty”—not empty like an unused room, but empty in the sense that accumulation has been avoided. It also feels mildly therapeutic—not like a venue for physical therapy but like a place that celebrates the human physique in some way or other. And all of that natural light suggests an interest in reaching beyond the space itself, towards the life that surrounds it.

Those three things sit well with us! We practice a kind of emptiness: meditation, at least for us, is an exercise in discarding the unnecessary, if only for a short period of time. We respect physical effort: as anyone who has ever tried it knows, meditation is a form of physical as well as mental culture. Sitting still and paying attention to your

breathing turns out to be a lot harder in practice than it may seem in theory.

And finally, of course, we don't call ourselves the Earth Sangha for nothing. For us, meditation should be a way of opening up our small selves to the Sangha as a whole—not just to our fellow meditators, not just to people in general, but to the immense fabric of living and dying that clothes our world.

We sit on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, and on Sunday mornings, on the first and third Sunday of the month. You're welcome to join us. There's more information on the meditation page of our website.

Photo: Above, Lisa Bright (at left) leads a Dharma discussion in our new meditation space.

On line: For more on our meditation sessions, go to earthsangha.org/act/med.html.

EARTH SANGHA

BUDDHIST VALUES IN ACTION

The Earth Sangha is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity based in the Washington, DC, area and devoted to ecological restoration. We work in the spirit of Buddhist practice, but our members and volunteers come from a wide variety of religious and secular backgrounds.

Want to donate or join the Sangha?

You can support our work by becoming a member. Membership starts at \$35 per year. Donations are tax-deductible. You can send us a check in the mail or donate online. We will send you a receipt and include you in our mailings. Our mailing address is: Earth Sangha, 10123 Commonwealth Blvd., Fairfax, VA 22032-2707. Our web site is: earthsangha.org. Comprehensive program information is available on our web site.

Want to volunteer or meditate with us?

We work with volunteers at our Wild Plant Nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia and DC.

We meditate in the Del Ray section of Alexandria on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. For more information on volunteering or sitting, see our web site or call Lisa Bright at (703) 764-4830.

The Acorn

The *Acorn* is produced with “print on demand” technology, which consumes far less energy and materials than does conventional printing. This paper is 100% post-consumer waste recycled, process chlorine-free, and manufactured entirely with wind-generated electricity. This issue © copyright 2009, Earth Sangha.



EVERYTHING BUT THE COFFEE

Our Tree Bank / Hispaniola program, along the Dominican Republic – Haiti border, is now a nearly complete system. Consider what we've built in the three years since we started:

We have a nursery, where we are now growing 11 species of native Hispaniolan trees, including one species listed by the IUCN / World Conservation Union as near-threatened, another as vulnerable, and yet another (West Indian mahogany) as endangered. Given the extensive deforestation in our project region, it's a pretty safe bet that the local populations of all the native tree species are in decline.

We have an expert Nursery Manager, in the person of Gaspar Pérez Aquino. Gaspar not only knows how to run a nursery; he also knows the local plants, and because he's a farmer himself, he's someone that the other farmers respect. Gaspar has lived in our project region all his life—he's 56—and he has seen for himself the loss of the forest and the wildlife.

We have a group of participating farmers who believe in the project's aims, who volunteer at the nursery, and who are interested in helping to develop the program. Of course, we have local skeptics too, but that's okay. Skepticism is good! What we don't have is hostility. Some people doubt that we'll be able to manage this over the long term, but it's fair to say that just about everyone would like it to work.

We have a small but growing number of native forest plantings. So far, seven of these plantings have been established and, at the time of writing, five more have been started. We hope to create about five new plantings every year. Farmers who plant part of their land in native trees receive a small annual subsidy; the amount is determined by the size of the planting and growth of the trees. The subsidy was important in catalyzing the program, but we are revising it. (See the next item.)

We have basic agreement on a credit program. Credit—making loans to the farmers—is a better incentive option than the current subsidies. Credit will make far larger amounts of money available to the farmers than we could possibly pay them in direct subsidies. (Our

farmers know how to use credit but it is hard for them to get loans. Even when they can, they're stuck with interest rates equivalent to 40% per year or more.) Credit also makes sense for the program as a whole because it keeps the money in our system—loans must be repaid—whereas the subsidies remove money from it. For both of these reasons, we plan to move our subsidies gradually to credit.

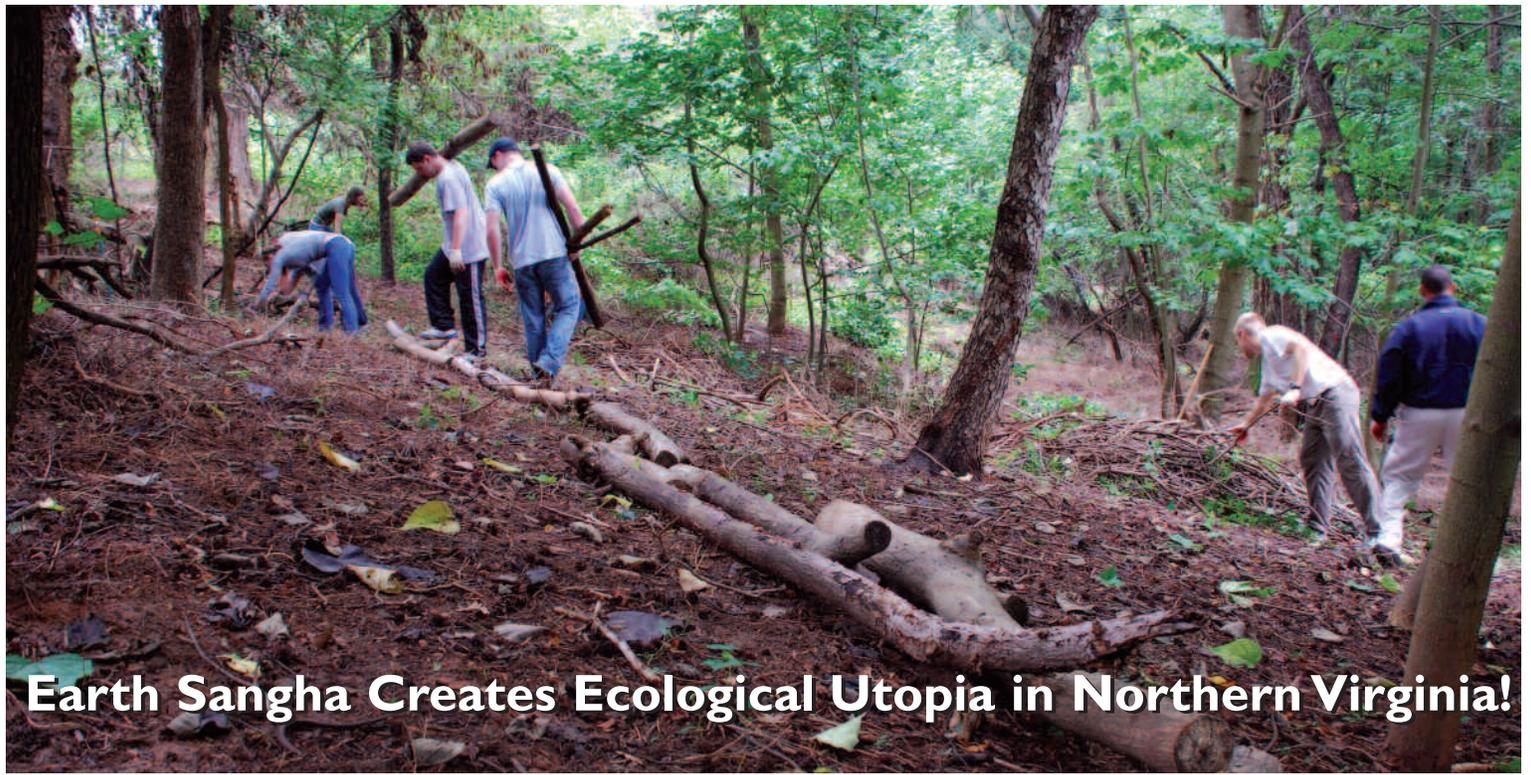
We have agreement about protecting extant patches of forest on the farms. The Tree Bank began as a way of replanting forest, but replanting won't bring the forests back unless we can also slow the loss of standing forest. We think we can do this by linking the credit program to the preservation of on-farm forest fragments. The efficiency of credit could dramatically extend the program's reach.

And of course, we have plans for a lot of things that we don't yet have the money to do. Most of these things are necessary for scaling up our work—for example, as most members of the Sangha already know, we still need to buy a pickup truck!

There's just one big piece of the project that's still missing: the coffee. Our farmers produce excellent coffee and importing it into the US could greatly benefit the project. The farmers would earn more, and coffee sales could help us explain the project to many more people than we currently reach. But we cannot export the coffee from the Dominican Republic until we have an exporter of record, and that means that our local partner organization (the Agroforestry Association of Los Cerezos) must be officially incorporated. Gaspar has been trying to accomplish this feat for months. We're hoping that this ordeal is nearing its end. We'll keep you posted. In the meantime, you could help us with a donation for that pickup truck!

Photo: Above, Adonis swings from the branches of a coffee grove in fruit. (Adonis is a grandson of Gaspar's sister, Catana.) Just after this photo was taken, that swing broke. No damage to Adonis or coffee.

On line: For more on how the Tree Bank works, go to earthsangha.org/tb/tbhw.html.



Earth Sangha Creates Ecological Utopia in Northern Virginia!

Well, maybe not quite yet. Here's a little news round-up instead.

Our colleagues in weeding: All summer and into fall, volunteers from an impressive array of organizations helped us yank invasives and plant natives at our Native Arboretum project in McLean. In addition to our own volunteers and students from several middle and high schools, we were pleased to host groups from: the Mountain School of Vershire, Vermont; Phillips Academy of Andover, Massachusetts; the Worldwatch Institute; the National Cathedral School; Georgetown University; the Tzu Chi Foundation (a large, international Sangha originally from Taiwan); Greater DC Cares; and McLean's own Immanuel Presbyterian Church. Our thanks to everyone who came out!

An award from Fairfax County: In September, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors presented us with the County's 2009 Environmental Excellence Award for organizations. These awards honor one organization, one business, and one county employee every year for "advancement or support of the Board and County's

environmental goals and policies; dedication of personal time and expertise beyond normal fiscal or civic responsibilities; and leadership as role models for others." The Sangha was recognized for our Wild Plant Nursery, Native Arboretum, stream buffer restoration, and our efforts on behalf of the park system. As for the leadership angle, we see our hard-working volunteers as the real role models—and we hereby pass the County's thanks along to them.

Ernst & Young at Meadowood: Also in September, local employees of the international consulting firm Ernst & Young helped us launch our fall planting effort at the BLM's 800-acre Meadowood Recreation Area, on the Mason Neck Peninsula. About 60 EY employees put in over 200 trees and added more native grasses to our four-acre Ecological Display Site. A retired horse pasture, this site is one of three that we are currently restoring at Meadowood. It now contains a big, undulating native-grass drainage swale that we call the "River of Grass" and several little patches of incipient forest. This fall, we're starting work on an acre or so of "woody oldfield," a kind of transition community between meadow and forest. Eventually, the site will also have a pool and wet meadow.

In excellent company: The Sangha has been selected for the *2009-10 Catalogue for Philanthropy: Greater Washington*. The Catalogue profiles innovative and effective DC-area charities with budgets under \$3 million. (We definitely meet the latter criterion.) We are very pleased to be among the 68 organizations chosen this year, from a field of over 250 applicants. The Catalogue is intended to promote donations to small charities, which usually lack sophisticated fundraising capabilities of their own.



Photos: Above, volunteers work to prevent erosion at our Native Arboretum project. Left, a tiger swallowtail dines on wingstem nectar at our Native Arboretum pollinator garden.

On line: Many more updates are available on our news page, at earthsangha.org/news.html. The new *Catalogue* web site will go live on November 1. There will be a link on our home page.