

Tracks Newsletter



Spring, 2010

Adventures of a "Green" Thumb, Composting and Rain Barrels

By Andrea Johnson, Park Naturalist

Like that fun loving Kermit the Frog says, "It ain't easy being green." But, when I say green, I mean environmentally green. It can be an adventure, but once you get it figured out, it 'ain't' hard as you think and it can be very a positive and rewarding experience.

Last fall I became a proud home owner for the first time. The yard was of incredible importance to me. The yard, in my opinion is another living space. I opted for a smaller house but the yard was big. I actually fell in love with that little house while just driving by. It had nice landscaping and a beautiful, tall sweet gum tree in the front yard.

During my first full year in the house I was able to experience all the yard maintenance that was required according to the changing seasons. Sometimes I wonder if my neighbors think I am crazy because of the things that I do. When you are outside doing yard work, everyone sees what you are doing. But, I am hoping that some of my "green" ways rub off on them.

I had some choices about how I would approach lawn care and how to be environmentally friendly at the same time. Like Kermit said, being "green" isn't always easy. It also is

not always the cheapest or quickest way to get things done.

Since I purchased my home in the fall, one of the first yard work tasks was leaf raking. My grand sweet gum tree is so beautiful with its golden yellow and purple leaves, but those beautiful leaves and gum balls eventually end up on the ground. No leave-blower for me! Who needs a gym to



workout in, when you have a yard to aid in your workout. Raking leaves is great for strengthening your arms, shoulders and back as I quickly discovered.

I have yard waste pick-up and could have simply raked the leaves and bagged them to be composted elsewhere. It is so comforting to know that the yard waste in my city does not go into the landfill. Yard waste can take up to 20% of landfill space and it takes a very long time to decompose in these conditions. I opted for composting at home.

Though many fancy designs for composting bins are available, a simple chicken wire enclosure did the trick. (continued on page 2)

Spring Special Events & Programs

- KC Wildlands Workdays, May 8
- Animal Tales, March 3 & 24, April 7 & 21, May 5 & 19
- Spring Time Preschool Programs, March 6, April 3 & May 8
 - Squaw Creek Birdwatching Trip, March 13
 - Spring Fling Programs, March 15-19
 - Women's History Celebration, March 27
- Kansas City's Passport to Adventure Kick-off, March 27
 - Rain Barrel Workshop, April 10
- TimberRidge Adventure Center Open House, April 17
 - La Grande Birding Fiesta, April 24
- Map & Compass: Orienteering Workshop, May 1
- Yoga & Climbing Camp for Women, May 2

See pages 3 & 4 for details and registration information.

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(continued from page 1) I raked the leaves into my trash can, then rolled them back to the compost. When you recycle 75% of your waste, you don't use your trash can often. So I put it to good use hauling leaves.

The next day, a neighbor I had not met yet, knocked on my door and she had yard waste bags in her hand. She said, "You can't put your leaves in the trash can, the trash man won't pick it up." It was nice of her to look out for me, but she hadn't seen me making the multiple trips to the backyard compost. She said, "I used to compost, but it is too hard." Another neighbor said, "It's so much easier to just buy the soil at the store." I almost think it would be harder to get all the leaves in those paper bags than to simply dump them in the compost.

I also compost my fruit and vegetable waste. I keep a container in the refrigerator to put my food scraps in and when it is full it gets buried in the compost. This way I don't have to make multiple trips to the back of the yard.

I had done some research about composting and you can do a lot of things to speed up the decomposition process. I opted to just let nature take its course and did nothing to the pile, but add more leaves, food scraps and some occasional grass clippings and weeds.

I was so shocked after a year went by how much the compost really decomposed! This past fall I taught a composting class. We examined the compost I pulled out from the middle of my bin and was pretty much all dirt,

good, dark, rich looking dirt. You couldn't tell that it had once been leaves and food scraps. There were even worms that had found a home there. I will be happy to have this fertile dirt to start new gardens this spring. So don't be fooled, composting "ain't" as hard as it sounds. And why buy it, when you can make it?

In the spring I also added a rain barrel to one of the gutters on my house to collect the run-off for watering. I didn't want to buy a pre-fabricated rain barrel. They are a little pricey and you can make them out of a reused barrel. Normally these barrels are used to carry concentrate for the making of soda pop. This also makes it that much more environmentally friendly.

So I signed-up for a rain barrel workshop where you actually make the barrel and take it home. That barrel was full of water after just one rain. Did you know that with just 1 inch of rainfall a 1,000 square foot roof can harvest 600 gallons of water?! I use this water to water the plants around my house and it is free.

This saves me money and helps the water quality and flooding in area creeks and rivers. Imagine if everyone had a least one rain barrel hooked up to their houses. Millions of gallons of water would be saved, and not "go down the drain" into



our storm drains eventually making their way to the local water shed.

One of my neighbors asked me about the rain barrel and then purchased one for her father for Father's Day. So I guess my green ways rubbed off on at least one person so far. It has been an adventure figuring out some of these "green" practices, but I am proud of myself for trying them. It gives me joy to know I am helping do my part. This summer I will be adding some native plants and a vegetable garden with the help of my compost and watering them from the rain barrel.

If you would like to make your own rain barrel, Ernie Miller Nature Center is offering a Rain Barrel workshop on April 10. You know the saying, "April showers, bring May flowers." See page 5 for details.

Special Thank yous

Thank you to the following people who donated to the Holidays for the Animals program:

- McDaniel Family • Cindy Brickman
- Loraine Stovall • Gabriella Kusko
- Bob Breyfogle • Lori Taylor
- Lisa Flaucher • Debbie Underwood
- Bill Rosher • Brian Geller
- Mike Caldwell • David Markham

Donations will be used to care for the many animals that we use in nature awareness programs given to thousands of people every year. In addition we will use donations to feed the animals in the wildlife viewing area. If you would like to make a donation please contact the nature center at (913) 764-7759.

We would also like to thank the **Chrysantas Club** for their donation of \$25.00 in continued support of the purchase of plants for our butterfly garden near the Outdoor Discovery Camp shelter.

Nature Center Programs

Some of the following programs require preregistration. Please call (913) 831-3359 Voice or (913) 831-3342 TDD for registration information. For a complete listing of programs, see the JCPRD Activities Catalog or visit www.jcprd.com

SPECIAL EVENTS



Women's History Celebration (Ages 6 & Older and must be accompanied by Parent/Guardian or one adult chaperone per group of 5) Saturday March 27,

10am Join us in the morning to celebrate women's history month. Travel through time to meet some amazing women from the past, including Rachel Carson, Harriet Tubman, Amelia Earhart, and Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scouts. These adventurers, explorers, and rebels used individual talents and strengths to overcome hardship and adversity. They opened doors for women and made the world a better place for all. Let their "her-stories" inspire you, then explore non-traditional careers with some accomplished women of today and celebrate with creative activities honoring women. **For reservations and more information call (913) 764-7759. Reservations are required. 1-2 hr. event - \$7 per person including adults. (\$8 nonresidents) Paid at site.**

Spring Break: Spring Fling Fun (All Ages) March 15-19,

10 am & 2 pm Come enjoy spring with a trip to Ernie Miller Nature Park. Visitors are welcome to view the aquarium and hike the trails all week. Park naturalists will entertain guests with a special program each day. Every program will feature live animals.

MON. - Hear Native American myths and see live animals.

TUE. - Live animals illustrate the webs of wildlife in the prairie, forest, and water.

WED. - Wear your green and celebrate Celtic stories, music, and traditions.

THU. - The amazing feats of feathered creatures, the Birds of Prey will highlight this program

FRI. - Discover reptiles up-close with live native snakes, turtles and lizards..

For more information call (913) 764-7759. **1-45 min. session - \$2.50 per person including adults, paid at site.**



KC WildLands Workdays (All Ages) Sat., May 8 , 9 am, Ernie Miller Park Interested groups and individuals



are invited to assist with prairie restoration efforts at a small prairie remnant during two spring workdays planned in conjunction with Kansas City WildLands, a local conservation coalition. This will focus on prairie restoration, and involve the planting of prairie species. These are great opportunities to help with hands-on conservation work on the metro area's dwindling wild acres. Participants should dress for the weather - long pants are suggested. KC WildLands will supply work gloves and drinking water. Some tools will be provided on-site, but participants are encouraged to bring their own loppers, small saws, and hand shovels. **For more information or to register for either workday, call KC WildLands Coordinator Linda Lehrbaum (816) 561-1016 x116 or email to linda@bridgingthegap.org**



La Grande Birding Fiesta (Ages 6 & Older - Children must be accompanied by one Parent/Adult chaperone per group of 5) Sat., April 24, 9 am - Noon,

Celebrate Earth Day with the birds! Join us to welcome back hummingbirds, orioles, warblers, and other feathered friends from their winter vacation in Latin America. Take a guided bird hike through the park and learn the basics of birding. Participants may also visit bird-related information booths and children's activity stations at their leisure. See live birds of prey! Make a bird feeder to take home, and find out how to attract birds to your yard. In the event of rain the booths and stations will be moved indoors. Appropriate for school-age children and beginning birders. Great activity for small scout groups! **For more information call (913) 764-7759. 1-3 hr. event—FREE in conjunction with Outdoor Kansas Kids day.**



TimberRidge Adventure Center Open House, 9 am - 3pm, (All Ages) & Climbing Tower, 9 am - Noon (Ages 12 & Older), Both

Saturday, April 17 If you have not seen TimberRidge Adventure Center yet, now is your chance! During our annual Open House, choose from several activities: canoeing, kayaking, pedal boating, hiking, BB-gun shooting, and archery range activities. All ages are welcome to participate in the Family Fun Treasure Hunt from 11 am– 2 pm. Catch and release fishing also available, however participants age 16 and older are required to have Kansas fishing license. Licenses will not be sold on site. Cops n' Bobbers will be on site with poles and bait available for use or you may bring your own. Guided tours of the challenge course will be available. Visit and see all the programs and amenities that TimberRidge has to offer. Experience the Hawk's Nest Climbing Tower! An open climbing event for interested parties ages 12 and older will be held. Climbers will need to pre-register as space is limited. Climbing participants are required to complete medical and liability releases prior to participating. Children under the age of 18 must have parent or guardian's signature. **Climbing enrollment is limited to 40 people. To register call (913) 856-8849. 1-6 Hour event—Free**



Kansas City's Passport to Adventure 2010 Kickoff (All Ages) Saturday, March 27, 1-4 pm, Bass Pro

Shop, Independence, MO Gather your family and start an adventure at the 2010 Kansas City Passport to Adventure Kickoff. Visit booths and discover the treasures of local history, see live animals, and participate in hands-on activities. Then pick up your 2009 Passport to Adventure that you can take to area natural and historical sites and get stamped each time. For more information call (913) 764-7759. Once you have completed the passport, turn it in to any participating site by October 31 to receive a special prize. **1-3 hr event - FREE**

Nature Center Programs

PRESCHOOL

Preschool Package: Spring Time Series (Ages 4-5) Don't miss any of the action. Bring your preschooler to Ernie Miller on Saturdays to find spring budding all around! Enroll in the package for the whole spring series or choose your favorite one. The spring preschool package includes Busy Bees, Spring Fling and To Mother Nature...With Love **3-90 min. sessions - \$37 (\$41 nonresidents)** Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class Code: 02-2142-016-01

Preschool: Spring Time 1 - Busy Bees (Ages 4-5) Sat. March 6, 9:30-11am Soon spring will be here and the honeybees will begin their honey-making tasks. Do a bee dance and taste a bee-made snack. **1-90 min. session - \$14 (\$15 nonresidents)** Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 02-2142-016-02



Preschool: Spring Time 2 - Spring Fling (Ages 4-5) Sat., April 3, 9:30-11am Spring has arrived at Ernie Miller Park. Explore the signs of spring as you take a natural scavenger hunt. Return to the Nature Center and make a springtime creation of your own. **1-90 min. session - \$14 (\$15 nonresidents)** Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 02-2142-016-03

Preschool: Spring Time 3 - To Mother Nature... With Love (Ages 4-5) Sat. May 8, 9:30-11am It's an Earth Day celebration for Mother Nature. Learn about the gifts she has for us to enjoy - wild plants and animals! Discover what you can do to help wildlife, especially animals who are hurt or orphaned. Make a special gift, take a walk, and discover Mother Nature's gifts to us! **1-90 min. session - \$14 (\$15 nonresidents)** Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 02-2142-016-04



Storytelling: Animal Tales — Wednesdays, 10 & 11 am (Ages 2-6 with Adult) Visit the Nature Center for stories, songs, and surprises geared to preschool children. Come listen and learn. Meet a special animal friend every time. All small children must be accompanied by an adult. Join us at Ernie Miller Nature Center. **1-30 min. session - \$2 per person including adults, paid at site**

Animal Homes	3/24
Mother Nature	4/7
Turtles	4/21
Insects	5/5
Snakes	5/19

ADULT

Go Green: Rain Barrel Workshop (Ages 18 & Up) Sat., April 10, 9:30-10:30 am April showers bring May flowers! Save water and save money by harvesting rain water from your own rooftop with a rain barrel. During this class participants will construct a rain barrel and learn how to hook it up when they get home. For more information call Park Naturalist Andrea Johnson at (913) 764-8580 ext. 23. **1-60 min. sessions - \$45 (\$50 nonresidents)** Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class Codes: 02-2120-016-01



Map & Compass: Orienteering Workshop — Sat. May 1, 9-12 am (Ages 16 & Older and Children accompanied by Parent/Guardian) Do you like to hike cross-country but fear losing your way? This beginner's workshop introduces you to orienteering, a fun way of learning the basic skills for using a topographic map and a magnetic compass. This class includes a practice orienteering hike in the park. Workbook and loan of compass are provided. Dress for the weather. Instructor: Possum Trot Orienteering Club. **\$15 (\$17 nonresidents)** Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 02-2112-016-01

Adventure: Yoga & Climbing Camp for Women Sun., May 2, 9am-3pm Unleash your inner daredevil with a yoga and climbing workshop. Use the power of ancient yoga movements to discover your strength as a climber. For beginners or experienced, you choose your level of challenge. Each participant will need to complete a health and liability form to participate. Participants need to bring a sack lunch. **For more information call Park Naturalist Molly Postlewait at (913) 764-8580 Ext. 26. \$45 (\$50 nonresidents)** Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class Code: 02-2103-015-01



Outdoor Adventures Cancellation Policy
No refunds within ten business days of trip unless a replacement can be found.

Trip: Squaw Creek Bird-watching (Ages 18 & Older) Sat., March 13, 8 am-3:30 pm, Meet at Antioch Park Join us for our late winter birdwatching trip to Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Observe the migration of ducks and geese as they fly north to their breeding grounds. Other wildlife we may observe include white-tailed deer, pheasants, and the bald eagle. For lunch, we will eat at Camp Rulo, which is famous for fried catfish and other entrees in Rulo, Neb. We will leave Antioch Park at 8 am and return around 3:30 pm. Van transportation and tour guide services are included. Participants must provide own meal expenses and should bring binoculars. For more information about the trip call (913) 438-7275 ext. 391 or to register call (913) 831-3359. **1-7½ hr. trip - \$33 Pre-registration required.** Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 02-2109-011-01



For more field trips around the Kansas City area check out Burroughs Audubon Society's Field Trips page at <http://www.burroughs.org>



Mud Pies



Hands-on nature activities for children

Little Cedar Reader: Children's Literature Corner

Pitter patter, pitter, patter
Hear the raindrops chatter
(tap fingers on the floor)

Raindrops water the trees and flowers
(extend arms overhead like a
tree growing up)
For oh, so many hours

But when the raindrops go away
We can go out and play!

Poem from Channels to Children



Language Development

Ask your preschooler these questions.

- Is rain wet or dry?
- Is it hot or cold ?
- What does rain sound like?
- How does a thunderstorm make you feel?
- Should you play outside during a storm?
- What do you wear when it is raining?
- Why do we like the rain?

Nature Activity: Rainy Days and Worm Hunts

With spring weather slip on a rain poncho and splash through the puddles.

Worms often emerge from the soil when the ground is soaked so this is great time to observe worms, touch worms, maybe even take a worm home.

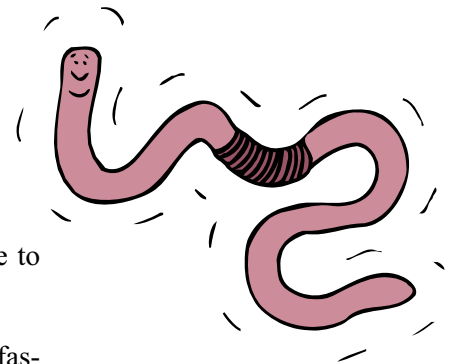
Here is a great family activity.... build a worm farm. Worms are helpful to us and fascinating to preschoolers. Worms are harmless when handled, but may be wiggly and slimy. It is ok for a little apprehension when first touching a worm. The experience of touching a worm can be a wonderful hands on teaching moment. As adults we can help kids understand by letting them build a worm farm.

- 1) Collect worms or even purchase worms at a bait shop.
- 2) Layer dirt and sand in a container. Use a squirt bottle to moisten the soil.
- 3) Add food scraps/ compost items on the top.
- 4) Put worms on top and watch as the worms begin digging tunnels.
- 5) Cover the worm farm. Worms like the dark.
- 6) Release the worms in the garden after a few days.

Share the following information with your preschooler:

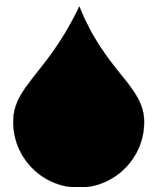
Worms dig tunnels helping to turn the soil over and mix up the dirt. Worms are good for our gardens. They help reuse and recycle the compost. Our garbage is treasure to the worms. Although people don't eat worms, they are the favorite food of many animals. Birds, turtles, fish and salamanders all love to eat worms.

Splash in the puddles and be a puddle explorer. Don't forget to make a mud pie!



The rain did it! **Art experiment.**

- 1) Sprinkle powdered paint on a sheet of paper.
- 2) Place outside right before it rains.
- 3) Watch as the raindrops create art.



Ernie Miller Nature Park



JOHNSON COUNTY
PARK & RECREATION
DISTRICT

ERNIE MILLER NATURE CENTER

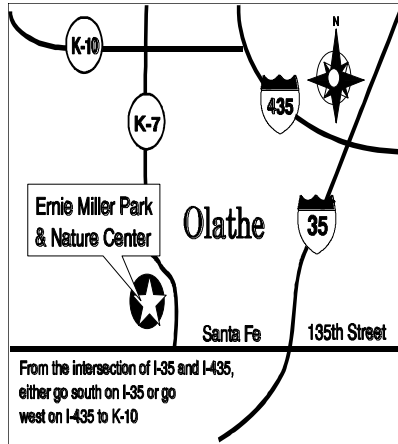
909 North Highway 7
Olathe, Kansas 66061
Phone: (913)764-7759

<http://www.erniemiller.com>
<http://www.jcprd.com>

**BE PART OF THE FEW,
THE PROUD,
THE ERNIE MILLER PARK
VOLUNTEERS!**

Training and support will be provided.
Must be at least 18 years old.
Call Molly Postlewait (913) 764-
8580 x 26 for more information.

Directions
(At the intersection of
127th and Hwy 7)



From the intersection of I-35 and I-435,
either go south on I-35 or go
west on I-435 to K-10

*Johnson County Park and Recreation
District does not discriminate on the
basis of race, color, national origin,
sex, religion, age and handicapped
status in employment of the provision
of programs and services.*

Hours

Monday—Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Winter hrs. run from Nov. 1 to Mar. 31
(close at 4:30)

**Park trails open every day
dawn to dusk**



Nature Center Staff

Cindy Lawrence...Interpretive Assistant
Leon Gordon.....Park Supervisor
Bill McGowan.....Outdoor Education
Manager
Molly Postlewait...Snr. Park Naturalist
Andrea Johnson... Park Naturalist and
Tracks Editor
Jason Watson.....Park Naturalist

Nature's Corner Gift Shop

at the
Ernie Miller Nature Center

Looking for something
naturally unique?

Edible bug treats ❖Books❖Jewelry❖
Polished Rocks ❖Field Guides
Old-fashioned toys❖Coloring Books



Discover/Mastercard/Visa accepted

SUMMER CAMP ENROLLMENT HAS BEGUN!



**Do you want your child to have a fun, outdoor experience
this summer? Johnson County Park and Recreation offers a
number of nature and outdoor summer camps.**

Outdoor Discovery Camp at Ernie Miller and Shawnee Mission Parks

**Blast from the Past • Off the Beaten Path • Junior Naturalist •
Fishing & Canoeing • Fine Art of Nature • Girl Power
Summer Vacation • Climbing & Rappelling**

**Space is limited and camps are filling up fast. All camps require
pre-registration. For more information visit www.jcprd.com or
see the JCPRD Activities Catalog that can be found at all Johnson
County Park facilities and libraries. Or call (913) 764-7759
and speak to one of our Park Naturalists.**