



Change is good, especially if it's your oil

Your vehicle will get better gas mileage and will pollute less with clean oil than with dirty, so follow recommended oil change intervals.

As oil is used in the engine, it breaks down, increasing the friction in the engine. The lower the friction, the better the engine operates, the better the fuel economy.

When you shop for oil, look for the words "Energy Conserving" on the American Petroleum Institute's service symbol. It means the oil contains friction-reducing additives.

You also will improve your gas mileage by 1 percent to 2 percent (that's 2 to 5 cents per gallon) by using the grade of motor oil recommended by the manufacturer, according to the U.S. Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency. There is also a slight increase with synthetic oil.

What you do with used oil has a significant impact on the environment as well. The EPA estimates nearly 200 million gallons of used motor oil are improperly disposed of each year. Used motor oil is easily recycled into new oil and processed into fuel oils and other products. Pour it from the drip pan into a clean plastic container with a tight-fitting lid. Take the container to a local service station or recycling center. Some centers also accept used filters. Monroe County provides three locations (Cudjoe Key, Long Key and Key Largo) where you can drop off used motor oil. Call 295-4314 or visit www.monroecounty-fl.gov/pages/MonroeCoFL_Waste/faq for more information.

Green Living & Energy
Education is sharing a weekly tip to help boost the 4 Rs — Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rot (compost) — in the Keys. This tip courtesy of GLEE's Diane Marshall. Send questions to info@KeysGLEE.com.

green solutions

Inaugural season yields lessons for gardeners

By MICHAEL WELBER
Keys Sunday contributor

Stories about vegetable gardens are sprouting everywhere. Fed by the recession and greater concern about where food comes from and its safety, people all over the country have caught garden fever. Seed sales are up as much as 75 percent for some suppliers, the Washington Post reported. Clearly, gardening is in.

Key West has actually been ahead of the curve. Last fall, a group of committed gardeners created a community garden behind May Sands school on land donated by the school district. The group put together a plan in record time, built raised growing beds, and reaped an amazing bounty of nearly everything from arugula to zucchini.

Now that the growing season is over in the Keys, some of the participants are evaluating their successes and some of the future challenges they have to overcome for next year's garden.



Photo by JODY SMITH WILLIAMS

A simple raised bed with good soil and fresh compost made on site produces some lovely leafy greens in Key West's community garden. While most of the garden's plots are empty now, gardeners will be back at work in the fall.

One of the real successes didn't directly involve what was grown. A group of students from what's known as the Ombudsman program participated. Their curriculum provides individual study for students who may otherwise drop out or are not thriving in a traditional classroom.

Community gardener

Kathryn dePoo, who acted as the group's adviser, said the garden had a major impact on the kids.

"It was a very beneficial experience," she said. "Not only did they work hard, but were also exposed to foods they weren't used to eating at home."

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ideal bite

Want to save water in minutes?

When leaks gotta go, they gotta go.

The bite

Leaks can waste a surprisingly high amount of water. Fix them, and you're in for some decent water/sewer bill savings.

Even a slow drip can waste more than 100 gallons of water per week. Plumbers can cost \$50 or more per hour, but a medium-size leak can set you back over \$100 per month.

Want to try?

- ◆ A 15-minute, sure-fire way to find out if you've got a leak: Turn off all the H₂O inside and outside your house, then look for your water meter. If the meter's hand is moving, you've got a leak. If it's not moving, note the position of the meter and recheck it in 10 minutes. If it moved, you've got a slow leak.

For toilets:

- ◆ If your toilet sounds like it's running long after

you flush or you have to jiggle the handle to get it to stop, it's probably wasting water.

- ◆ The dye test: Flush the toilet, then add a teaspoon of food coloring to the tank — don't flush it. After an hour, check the bowl. If you can see any dye, your toilet's leaking.

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earthtalk

Peat plays key role in carbon capture

Dear EarthTalk: Is it true that the loss of the world's peatlands is a major factor in the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere? If so, what can be done about it?

— Larissa S., Las Vegas

Answer: Peatlands are wetland ecosystems that accumulate plant material to form layers of peat soil up to 60 feet thick. They can store, on average, 10 times more carbon dioxide (CO₂), the leading greenhouse gas, than other ecosystems. As such, the world's peat bogs represent an important "carbon sink" — a place where CO₂ is stored below ground and can't escape into the atmosphere and exacerbate global warming. When drained or burned, however, peat decomposes and the stored carbon gets released into the atmosphere.

A 2007 United Nations Environment Programme study of the role peatlands play in human-induced climate change found that the world's estimated 988 million acres of peatland, which represent about 3 percent of the world's land and freshwater surface, are capable of storing some two trillion tons of CO₂ — equivalent to about 100 years worth of fossil fuel emissions.

As such, the widespread conversion of peat bogs into commercial uses around the world is serious cause for alarm. In Finland, Scotland and Ireland, peat is harvested on an industrial scale for use in power stations and for heating, cooking and use in domestic fireplaces.

But the problem is most urgent in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, where economic hardships force people to drain peatlands to create farms and plantations. Marcel

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green solutions

Garden holds wide variety of veggies

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The kids grew tomatoes and collard greens for their families but they harvested so much food that they were able to donate it to the Key West soup kitchen.

DePoo partnered with a friend on two plots of vegetables and was able to reap a bounty herself of cherry tomatoes, beans, eggplants, broccoli and collard greens. Her advice to others who want to plant a garden this fall is to research what actually grows well in the Keys and will produce in a short time, such as lettuce and arugula.

"Some people planted corn," she said. "They got stalks but no ears. Those who put in plants like lettuce were able to pick it over and over again."

Jody Smith Williams, one of those who helped launched the community garden, also brought in a wide range of vegetables including a variety of peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, eggplant and arugula.

Committed, as was the entire group, to keeping the garden organic, Smith Williams applied mixtures of garlic, hot peppers, soap and

How to dry herbs

The easiest plants to grow in the Keys are herbs. Basil, dill, tarragon, oregano all thrive here, even during the hot months. Those who have no room for vegetables can easily raise herbs in a window box or in small pots.

In fact, herbs grow almost too well. Many people have more basil than they can use, even if they are fans of pesto. Same with rosemary and oregano.

One solution to the glut of herbs is to dry and store them. It's easy, costs practically nothing and replaces those wimpy ones available at the supermarket.

First, cut stems of the herbs without removing the leaves. Wash and dry them carefully.

Next, tie the stems with a string at the bottom and put the plants in a paper bag with small holes cut in it.

Then hang the bag with the herbs hanging down in a dark and cool closet for two weeks.

Take the stems with the dried leaves out of the bag and remove the leaves. Run the leaves through a food processor or just crunch them by hand and then store the herbs in a jar in a cabinet.

Voila! Dried herbs ready for use in your favorite recipes.

olive oil to keep pests away. She also interplanted herbs with the vegetables to keep the critters at bay.

"We had few problems, but did notice that as the weather got warmer, the pests were more of a challenge," she said.

DePoo noted that during the time when migrating birds came through the Keys, the bugs were more easily kept under control.

Smith Williams really appreciated the community

aspects of the garden, with people learning from each other. Working together also helped. For example, the group fertilized the crops with compost made from piles of garden and kitchen waste that everyone in the group contributed.

Most plots stopped producing in April, so the gardens are at rest now. But they — and their caretakers — will be back in full force in November.

While community gardening in the Keys won't enable



Photo by JODY SMITH WILLIAMS

An eggplant nears maturity a couple of months ago in the community garden behind May Sands in Key West.

KeysNet.com

◆ If you need some inspiration, check out a list of the crops the Key West garden produced.

Green Solutions

people to become subsistence farmers as they might be able to on large fertile plots in the Midwest, the gardens can provide a substantial portion of a person's food, especially for vegetarians. Growing your

own food guarantees that it's safe and that the process uses far fewer of the earth's resources.

Smith Williams hopes that the Key West gardens will build on this year's successes. GLEE, the Keys-based environmental group that helped sponsor the Key West effort, is now working to establish similar gardens in other parts of the Keys.

Anyone interested in working to create a community garden in other areas of the Keys should contact GLEE at info@keysglee.com.