

Annual Fall Open Space Planting December 6.

Although acorns were sparse this year, volunteers still managed to collect over 30 pounds of valley oak and live oak acorns from the hills and valleys around Vacaville. These and buckeye seeds will be available to plant on the hillsides north of Lagoon Valley lake. You can park for free at the oak grove parking lot. Follow the signs toward the water tanks. Our staging area will be next to the bike trail. We'll start at 9:30 am and continue until we're done, probably by 12:30 pm.

Remember, all volunteers will need to sign a City of Vacaville liability waiver. Minor children must have a waiver signed by their parent or legal guardian. Bring gloves, shovels, trowels, and water to drink. Wear boots and dress for the weather. We'll plant in light drizzle or scattered rain, but will postpone a week (to Dec. 13) if it's really raining.

Plant perils at Padan Park

Rather than watching oak seedlings grow from the acorns they planted, students at Eugene Padan Elementary School learned a lesson about how well herbicides can work. Small valley oak seedlings planted over the past two years by Padan students were unintentionally sprayed with herbicides by City crews. At last count, only one of these valley oak seedlings is still surviving in Padan Park. Stakes marking planting sites have been repeatedly broken or removed by vandals. Do we give up or try again? I think we keep trying. Take home lesson: it's often much easier to kill trees than grow them.

Beyond Trees: The Other Plants

When we try to rehabilitate or restore native oak woodlands, it makes sense to start with the trees: no trees, no woodland. Even though trees define woodlands and forests, they aren't the only plants in the woods. Native grasses and wildflowers once carpeted the ground in oak woodlands and were an integral part of these habitats.

Unfortunately, many native grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs have not fared much better than the trees. Like the oaks, these understory plants have been largely eliminated from many areas by grazing, clearing for agriculture, and urbanization. Furthermore, many weedy grasses and broadleaf plants were introduced by settlers and later residents and now dominate the understory of most oak woodlands and formerly wooded grasslands. Many of these alien species have thrived in the heavily grazed lands and abandoned agricultural fields and orchards that surround Vacaville.

Some native species have survived in Vacaville's park and open space lands. Unfortunately, many of these remnant local populations are still threatened. California scullcap (*Scutellaria californica*), several native milkweeds (*Asclepias* species), and the wetland herb *Stachys ajugoides* var. *ajugoides* are perennial wildflowers persisting in localized patches that could easily be lost.

Other species, such as the native perennial grasses purple needle grass (*Nasella pulchra*) and creeping wildrye (*Leymus triticoides*) are more widely distributed (on hillsides and along creeks, respectively) but now cover only a fraction of their former range.

If we hope to conserve what is left of our natural heritage, we will need to consider how to maintain healthy populations of these local plants. One way is to propagate these plants and use them in restoration projects. As a start in this direction, VTF volunteers recently seeded a graded slope in Lagoon Valley Park with locally-collected purple needlegrass seed. The seed was collected this spring by a youth community service work crew under the supervision of City of Vacaville staff member Doug Cope. We gave some of the seed to the horticulture program at the California State Prison, Solano to be propagated there for use in other local restoration projects.

The partnership between the City, CSP Solano, and VTF volunteers can provide the resources needed to protect and restore local habitats. However, more community volunteers will need to get involved if this effort is going to achieve its full potential. If you or your organization would like to help coordinate conservation activities for a local native plant or natural area, please give us a call.

Oh, what a ReLeaf!

VTF is pleased to announce that it has been accepted as a member organization of California ReLeaf Network. This network links over 50 local tree planting and stewardship groups throughout the state, providing a forum for exchange, education, and mutual support.

Trees for Schools

Employees of the Vacaville Wal-Mart and Sam's Club stores secured an Environmental Grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation for the purpose of providing trees for student planting projects at Vacaville schools. VTF has been working with Wal-Mart / Sam's Club in support of this worthwhile project.

Schools that elected to participate were Willis Jepson, Will C. Wood, Orchard, Hemlock, Fairmont, and Cooper. More details on the plantings next time.

Great meeting / Small audience

Our March 27 kickoff meeting for the Vacaville Trees 2000 campaign featured several interesting and informative presentations, educational leaflets, and wonderful refreshments. All it needed was a bigger audience to take advantage of this free opportunity to learn about trees and tree care.

Our thanks to those who sponsored and organized this meeting: Bruce Hagen of the California Dept. of Forestry and Fire Protection; Hugh Merriam and Heidi Lian of PG&E; and Jim Ball and the City of Vacaville.

Thanks!

Thanks to all of the volunteers that collected acorns this past fall. Also thanks to our November 9 bunchgrass planting crew: Ernest & Melinda Kimme, Jerry & Dian Hill, John Salerno-White, and Ted Swiecki. Thanks also to Cecil Babcock who helped Liz Bernhardt and Ted Swiecki repair protective cages at the venerable (and still vulnerable) Hidden Valley Open Space planting. Thanks to José Lopez-Lopez for his efforts to protect seedlings and trees near his neighborhood in north Vacaville, to Jim Ball for his work to organize the Trees 2000 campaign, and to Maite Kropp for her special support of VTF.

Thanks also to the California State Prison - Solano for duplicating this newsletter and to the City of Vacaville Community Services Department for underwriting the postage.

VOLUNTEERS ACCEPTED HERE. Interested in helping to conserve Vacaville's trees or other natural resources? To volunteer or for more information, call Ted Swiecki at 448-0230 or Jerry Hill at 446-1239.

Vacaville Tree Foundation -- 1997 Calendar



December 6, 1997. 9:30 am Lagoon Valley Open Space Planting. Meet at Lagoon Valley. (If rained out, we try again December 13).

December 13, 1997. 10 am. Woodcrest Open Space Work Day. Meet at the curve of Alder Crest Way (between Wrentham and Woodcrest). If this date becomes our planting date due to rain, we'll reschedule to after Christmas - call for details.

Dates for other activities will be announced later.