

Different Shades of Green

By JANE VARNER MALHOTRA



Stinson Beach,
California

*A girl draws in the sand at a
nature art event.*

American communities
celebrate Earth Day in
offbeat ways.



MARK HOFFMAN © AP/WWP

Gaylord Nelson, a senator from Wisconsin, spent much of the 1960s traveling across the United States, giving speeches and working to enact laws to protect the environment. Eventually he grew frustrated that political leaders were, for the most part, ignoring the rising problems of pollution and pesticides. At a conference in Seattle, Washington in 1969, Nelson announced the idea of a teach-in—a mass meeting to discuss a subject of public interest—to raise awareness about the environment. In a statement prepared for the Washington, D.C.-based Wilderness Society not long before his death in 2005, Nelson described the remarkable reaction to the idea: “The wire services carried the story from coast to coast. The response was electric. It took off like gangbusters. Telegrams, letters and telephone inquiries poured in from all across the country. The American people finally had a forum to express...concern about what was happening to the land, rivers, lakes and air—and they did so with spectacular exuberance.”

On April 22, 1970, grassroots events around the United States

attracted millions of people to celebrate the first Earth Day. The events drew unprecedented media attention and political action on the issues of pollution and preservation. By the end of 1970, the Clean Air Act was signed into law, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was established. The Clean Water Act followed in 1972, and the Endangered Species Act in 1973.

Denis Hayes, who as a Harvard law student had helped Nelson coordinate the first Earth Day, organized the first International Earth Day in 1990. Some 200 million people celebrated the event across the globe. Hayes then founded Earth Day Network as the institutional home for Earth Day. It now has a Web site where organizers can register their events and find free resources and event ideas. Raquel Garcia, Earth Day Network’s communications manager, noted that last year 7,000 Earth Day events were registered on the site worldwide. “But we know the actual number of programs was far greater. We estimate that one billion people observed or celebrated Earth Day in some way in 2008 and we expect it to grow in 2009.”

The largest U.S. celebration this year is the Green Apple Festival, held in major cities across the country in partnership

Left: Gaylord Nelson at the Celebrating Community-based Conservation 2001 conference in Wisconsin.



ZACH PINE



ZACH PINE

Stinson Beach

Above: A family with their sculpture titled "Green Peace" at Zach Pine's nature event in California.

Above right: A participant at the nature event does a back flip next to a rock sculpture.

Austin, Texas

Right: Bicycles assembled by Yellow Bikes, a local nonprofit that reconditions broken bikes and releases them to the community; and bikes shaped as bugs, are featured as carbon neutral transportation options at the Earth Day celebrations.



AARON GEISER

with Earth Day Network. Earth Day Tokyo is another major celebration, featuring speeches and concerts with a sound stage fueled completely by recycled tempura oil.

Yet it's those quirky, small-town gatherings that showcase grassroots organizing in the spirit of the original Earth Day. As Nelson had explained, "Earth Day worked because of the spontaneous response at the grassroots level. We had neither the time nor resources to organize 20 million demonstrators and the thousands of schools and local communities that participated. That was the remarkable thing about Earth Day. It organized itself." Four years after his death at the age of 89, the legacy of Nelson's Earth Day lives on.

Stinson Beach, California

Traveling north from San Francisco along coastal Highway 1, follow the sign to tucked-away Stinson Beach on Saturday, April 18, and you'll come across an assorted collection of stones, sticks, and people of all ages building collaborative, natural art. Led by environmental artist Zach Pine, the annual Create-With-Nature Earth Day event offers an opportunity for people to make temporary sculptures with natural objects in the environment where they are found.

Pine began the celebration in 2005, after searching for an event that, "would fit with my desire to celebrate the day not only in a way that would honor the Earth, but also in a way that could have lasting beneficial effects. In my past work as an environmental artist, using natural materials in natural settings to make temporary sculptures, I had felt personally how this kind of creative work can forge powerful and motivating bonds with the environment. I had also just begun to see how collaborative creation, with nature as part of the collaboration, had the potential to bring people together and affirm the force of collective action," he says.

"...I suddenly realized that the ideal event for me was one I could lead and take part in at the same time—returning to a favorite beach from my childhood and inviting others to engage in a celebration of the Earth through collaborative creation."

A crowd arranging large stones into precarious towers, or pebbles interlaced with spiraling seaweed on the sand, invites curious passers-by to join the creative community. "I especially enjoy this aspect of the event," explains Pine. "It reaches people who may not have previously attached much meaning to Earth Day or even to the environment or environmental action." Some participants are inspired to write or recite poetry. Some ask Pine to photograph their creations. Others just keep building until the ocean or the wind reclaims the fragile pieces.

Like a mandala created from sand, impermanence is an underlying theme for Pine's event. "As an artist, it frees you to not

For more information:

Gaylord Nelson

<http://wilderness.org/content/gaylord-nelson>

Earth Day Network

<http://www.earthday.net/>

Zach Pine

<http://www.naturesculpture.com/>

Austin Earth Day

<http://www.austinearthday.com/index.html>

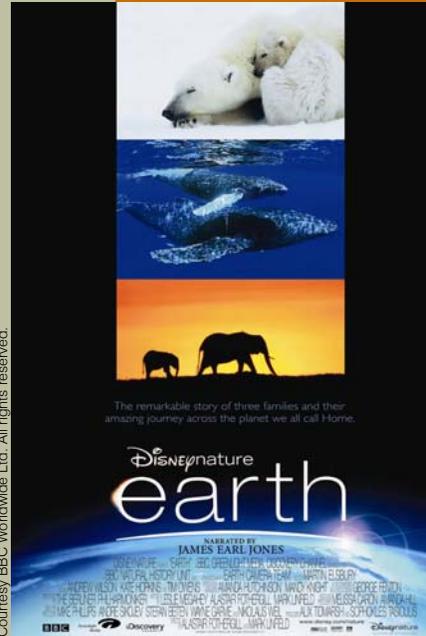
Coming to a Theater Near You?

In theaters across the United States on Earth Day 2009, Disney plans to release the movie *earth*, the first film from the new DisneyNature banner. Co-shot with the successful BBC series, the story follows the lives of three animal families over the course of a year, as a way for audiences to get to know our planet more intimately.

Although Disney has not yet announced plans for the film's release in India, several other nature documentaries are available on DVD. And while watching a movie may not be everyone's idea of a green activity for Earth Day, if a group gathers to watch it together, at least that reduces each individual carbon footprint. Check out these titles for learning about environmental issues and getting in touch with nature, even if it's through a big screen:

- *An Inconvenient Truth* (Al Gore on global warming)
- *Planet Earth* (BBC nature documentary series)
- *The Eleventh Hour* (Leonardo DiCaprio on global warming)
- *March of the Penguins* (life cycle of the Emperor penguins)
- *Winged Migration* (birds around the world)
- *Rivers and Tides* (Andy Goldworthy's natural art)
- *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* (a man connecting with a flock of urban parrots)
- *Baraka* (view of the world in stunning, wordless imagery)

An Inconvenient Truth and *March of the Penguins* are available at the American Library in New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai.



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worry about the outcome and lets you enjoy the process," he says. "I see it as a practice for daily life, outside of our art making, to be accepting of the impermanence of things."

Austin, Texas

The state capital of Texas, with a population of 700,000, hosts a weekly downtown farmer's market that blossoms into a full-blown festival for Earth Day each year. "Environmental leaders are getting behind the idea of local, organic food production as

Austin, Texas

The Austin Earth Day festival features art made from reusable materials like this climbable archway from tires.



SCOTT MELGER

our most effective, first step to engaging the broader community in change that affects carbon, green jobs, social network capital and safety," explains event organizer Randy Jewart. He describes the festival as a celebration of green arts, featuring dancers, musicians, sculptors and other artists and performers presenting environmental issues.

Organizers try to model environmental responsibility in the production of the event, such as using a solar-powered amplified music stage, and banning plastic water bottles. (They use big,

refillable jugs of filtered water, and paper cups). Even the event signs are recycled from used, full-sized vinyl highway billboards donated by a billboard company.

Close to 100 exhibitors from nonprofit environmental groups and small, green businesses participate in the event. Recycled materials are used to construct artistic installations. The popular Green Art Kids area features hands-on activities relating to environmental issues, including fun with the Greater Austin Garbage Arts, where people learn how to turn

Dirt Cake

Since Earth Day happens to be my birthday, I've been celebrating it most of my life. Here is a fun recipe for Dirt Cake that my mother makes—full of processed foods but delicious, and it always surprises the guests when you start scooping it from the flower pot onto the plates.

—Jane Malhotra

Ingredients:

- 1 (550-gram) package of chocolate sandwich cookies (like Oreo or Dark Fantasy). If you don't have these specific ingredients, just make sure that the top layer looks like dirt.
- ¼ cup melted butter
- 1 (220-gram) package of cream cheese
- 2 cups milk
- 1 small (100-gram) package of instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 (220-gram) tub of non-dairy whipped topping (like Cool Whip)

Crush cookies into crumbs. Set aside. Cream together butter and cream cheese. In a large bowl, combine milk and pudding, then add butter and cream cheese mix and whipped topping. Beat together until thoroughly combined. Line a flower pot with foil and put in a layer of cookie crumbs, then pudding mix, alternating until you end with a layer of cookie crumbs. Top with an artificial flower and some gummy candy "worms" and you have the perfect Earth Day treat for kids.





Courtesy Susan Kiskis

Left: Bumbada Women's Drummers performing at the 2008 Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Earth Day festival.

Below: Billy Brage signs a quilted flag on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. as part of Earth Day celebrations in 1995. Kids for a Clean Environment club unveiled the flag containing colored squares made by children in 49 U.S. states and 18 countries.

everyday detritus into interesting objects. Milk cartons are converted into purses, and scraps of material crafted into no-sew dolls using knot-tying.

The Austin celebration is infused with a festive creativity that, as Jewart notes, "leaves attendees with a tangible feeling in their gut of what a sustainable community might look, feel, taste and sound like."

Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

The small town in rural Pennsylvania is gearing up for its second Earth Day festival, to be held on Saturday, April 25. With a population of about 9,000, Mechanicsburg began the celebration last year "to enrich the quality of life in our community while providing a new, fun and meaningful experience surrounding global and local environmental initiatives," according to its Web site (www.mechanicsburgearthdayfestival.com/).

Event organizer Susan Kiskis grew up in New York City, where she enjoyed volunteering for the Earth Day Festival. She now owns an organic clothing shop in town, and had a personal



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vision for creating an Earth Day event for Mechanicsburg and the surrounding area.

"In its first year, the Earth Day festival was Mechanicsburg's second largest event of the year, with a couple thousand attendees. We had a speaker from Al Gore's Climate Change Project, which was a big draw," Kiskis notes. This year the activities include a Green Film Festival, with submissions from around the world by aspiring filmmakers with eco-friendly messages. Musicians, local organic farms, and vendors featuring some kind of green component will be

on hand. Products that have been up-cycled—a term used to describe the remaking of waste material into something better—will be on sale. One example is skirts made from fabric scraps.

Attendees include many people who are already "green-minded" and want to learn more, and many who are just out to enjoy a community festival and end up leaving with a greater awareness of the importance of environmental issues. "Folks come out for the festival and come home with a message about how one small change can make a difference." Kiskis herself is an example of the impact one person can make. "Caring for the environment is extremely important no matter where we live. Start small," she suggests, "and organize a group of 10 or 20 friends to celebrate Earth Day, and next year it will grow into a block party, and soon it will be heightened awareness across the globe."



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Below left: Ava (from left), John and Jessie Tarnoff plant a sapling along the Los Angeles River during a community tree-planting and clean-up effort as part of Earth Day celebrations.

Below right: Fourth graders from an elementary school in Garden City, Kansas, enjoy a frog foot race organized by the local zoo for Earth Day.



BRAD NADING © AP/WIDEWORLD