Arboretum Presents 2012 Summer Exhibition: 'Dirt-O-Rama'

*Explore mysteries from the underground June 2 - Oct. 14*

CHANHASSEN, MN (April 26, 2012) - Get the real dirt on the surprising world beneath your feet during the "Dirt-O-Rama: Intriguing Tales from the Underground" summer exhibition at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, running June 2-Oct. 14.

Out of sight, and often out of mind, a fertile soil is filled with life. "Scientists report we literally stand on the rooftop of another world, and there’s more life below ground than above," said Sandy Tanck, exhibit curator. "Soil is more than bits of rock and decay. It also teems with life, from microbes to insects and larger animals. Knowing how it all works is the secret to successful gardening."

Yet soil is a gift we take for granted. Rising human population and its increasing needs place growing demands on the land to produce food and feedstock, fiber, bioenergy and other crops. Development takes its toll.

"This exhibit will focus on ways we can all be wise stewards of our soil, to preserve its fertility now and for the future," said Dr. Ed Schneider, Arboretum director. "This is an important and timely topic. Visitors will discover sustainable steps they can take at home. Between the whimsical art and the Clayhouse Project, youngsters will have a great time too."

Presented by Randy’s Blue Bag Organics, Dirt-O-Rama will comprise three distinct display areas and a full round of special programming. Here's a summary of what visitors will find at Dirt-O-Rama:

'Art of the Earth' Juried Outdoor Display

Five winning teams of a juried art competition dig into the mysteries of soil and present their whimsical, thought-provoking and decidedly unique perspectives. Step inside a sculpture of a giant anthill, visit a garden of “sonic flowers” to hear sounds of the forces that shape earth’s crust, check out a giant Earth composter and more. Here are the five winning designs you'll encounter on the Arboretum grounds:

- "Ant Venture" by Albert Belleveau of Poposky, MN
- "The Amazing Mother Earth Composter" by Seitu Jones of St. Paul, in collaboration with students from Gordon Parks High School
- "Earthly Coat" by Wendy J. Johnson of Crystal Bay, with collaborators Colleen Werdien and West End Welding
- "Eco-Earthworms" by Paul Rieffer, Donna Tabat and Jill Spohn of St. Paul.
- "Underground Sound" by Daniel Dean and Ryan Wurst of Minneapolis.

Compost: Gardener's Gold

Visit the Compost Corner to discover how to turn yard and kitchen organic waste into rich, valuable compost. Learn the environmental importance of removing yard waste and leftover kitchen organics from the landfill stream and how to compost these materials instead. Discover how adding compost in the soil helps plants and gardens flourish, and in the process, learn about all the critters who help make it happen.

-More-
Dirt Lab

Successful gardeners know that plants thrive when soil’s alive. Stop by the Dirt Lab in the circular garden island fronting the Oswald Visitor Center to pick up tips on “growing” healthy soil, including how to test soil, a hands-on soil texture station and plantings that demonstrate the value of adding compost to your garden beds. Visitors can compare sandy, silty and clay soils and find out how compost can improve plant growth in all these soil types. Volunteer guides on Saturdays will staff a hands-on Discovery Cart with special tips and activities.

Clayhouse Project

For three weeks in July, Arizona clay artists and adobe builders Athena and Bill Steen will create a Clayhouse, a playful, child-friendly earthen structure in front of the Learning Center. Visitors, especially the young, are invited to get their hands dirty and help build on weekends during their stay (from July 14-31). The Clayhouse will be constructed of local clay, woods and fibers with a circular shape and exterior winding staircase. The Steens have created earthen buildings internationally, and have authored several books on building with natural materials. They recently completed a Clayground residency at the Denver Museum of Art as part of the museum's "Marvelous Mud" exhibition, and they also assisted in the construction of "Always Becoming" at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall.

Display: Is Biochar Good for Home Gardens?

Watch for results as University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardeners evaluate garden beds amended with Biochar, a carbon-rich byproduct of making biofuel, at the Arboretum this summer. The Cenusa Bioenergy Project is a four-year national study funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Summer weekends will also feature a busy “MudPie Kitchen” for kids at the new Green Play Yard – cocoa bean mulch for frosting, anyone? Weekend Family Fun sessions invite visitors of all ages to delve into underground mysteries with a new theme monthly.

Sponsor's statement from Randy's Blue Bag Organics: "We think that visitors young and old will see dirt in a whole new way," said Jim Wollschlager, director of company operations at Delano-based Randy's Environmental Services. "And they'll be amazed by the amount of food waste Minnesotans throw away every day - organic waste that could be put to good use as compost, fortifying the soils of lawns, flower beds and backyard gardens. We hope they'll take action and consider composting themselves or through a hauler offering curbside composting."

Come Dig In! "Dirt-O-Rama" opens June 2 and continues through Oct. 14. It is free with Arboretum gate admission.