



SPIRITUALITY OF SOIL

A LENTEN JOURNEY
FROM COSMIC DUST
TO
EASTER GARDEN

*Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.*

St. Francis of Assisi

SPIRITUALITY OF SOIL: A Lenten Journey from Cosmic Dust to Easter Garden – a five week program, 2019

This material was created to help individuals and/or groups deepen their Lenten experience by increasing their appreciation of E/earth, God's living and acting within it, current threats to our soil, and how we can respond in faith. Each week contains Scripture readings and input that remind us about the awesome gift of fertile dust, seeds, sheaves, trees. It suggests reflections and actions.

Suggestions for convener:

Conveners are encouraged to adapt this material in any way that facilitates sharing, prayer, and community. They are responsible to plan ahead, especially to prepare suggested media or substitutes for each week.

Appropriate music can be found in these albums or others with similar sentiments:

Touch the Earth, Kathy Sherman, CSJ: www.ministryofhearts.org or YouTube

In the Name of All That Is, Jan Novotka: www.JanNovotka.com.

Week One: Before the first meeting, ask each participant to bring a small container (which will be used to contain soil). Convener should have the following: name card for each member; a large container with soil in a center location; a few small containers in case others forget; a scoop for soil; something for cleaning hands if hands are used; copies of *Spirituality of Soil* for each participant (printed on both sides of sustainable paper).

Week Two: Place the container of soil in the center.

Week Three: Have one organic, peel-able fruit (orange or tangerine) and a napkin for each person.

Week Four: Prepare to use either Option A or B.

Week Five: Have a wooden crucifix, scented oil(s), reading, and cloths to wipe fingers.

If the suggested closing rituals cannot be done, a time of silent reflection followed by shared prayer can be substituted — or whatever the group decides.

Scripture quotations are from Today's Missal, Oregon Catholic Press, Portland, OR.

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Ash Wednesday – Lent, Week One

I. Introduction

Distribute booklets and name cards. Invite each member to introduce him/herself (if necessary). Skim the entire booklet.

Use breathing, music, and/or whatever assists the group to prepare for the session. Because soil could be considered "the face of the Earth," pray together this adapted prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and we will renew the face of the Earth. Then read:

O Lord, bless these ashes by which we show that we are dust. (Ash Wednesday Liturgy)
I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given me. (Deut. 26: 9)

Silent reflection followed by sharing: What does Ash Wednesday mean to you?

II. Input

We are actually from *stardust*! Eons ago dying stars exploded particles and gases that came together and attracted more particles that formed new stars. Eventually stars produced required elements for life, like carbon and oxygen. Stellar dust became planets, and one became planet Earth – the only one we know with a living skin that supports life. Approximately 140 - 130 million years ago, Earth became a garden in our galaxy with increasingly diverse and colorful flowers. The complex process of forming fertile soil (dirt) can require over 500 years; humans cannot make it. The divine Life Source lives and acts in our planet as soil forms, erodes, and is formed again. Caring for deep, healthy soil is essential for life.



The second Genesis creation story (Genesis 2:7) reminds us that we come from E/earth. Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, writes: "We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters." (par. 2) The Latin word for soil is "humus," [(h)yoōməs] from which comes "humility." The Hebrew meaning of "Adam" is "earth." Many of us grew up with dualistic thought patterns that made it easy to think of humans as separate from (and better than) the rest of God's creation. We are becoming more aware that we, with our distinct abilities and responsibilities, are kin with the rest of creation — as was Jesus.

Mother Earth's soil/dirt provides food, flowers, seeds, herbs, and trees. It filters water and controls water runoff. It becomes habitat and migration routes for various species. It harbors incredibly complex life within the soil. (A handful of forest soil can contain up to 10 billion bacte-

ria, about a million plump yeasts and fungi, and tens of thousands of other creatures!) One bacterium contains antidepressant bacteria that causes those who inhale or handle it to become happier! How awesome! Mighty trees — and humans — eventually become dirt, dust, earth: “... and unto dust you shall return.” How vital it is for us and future generations of all species!

Only 12% of Earth’s land area is suitable for human habitation because of climate extremes and water availability. The United States loses nearly two acres of soil every minute from cropland because of improper management, deforestation, overgrazing, and industrial activity. Much land is covered with asphalt and cement. It takes more than a century for less than an inch of soil to be formed, assuming the required conditions are present. We cannot make it!

Without healthy soil (and water and sun), Christians could not have bread or wine for Eucharist. Soil can be considered miraculous and sacred. It thus deserves reverence and care. Human life depends upon it. What growing things delight and /or restore you? (Share.)

III. What is God saying to us?

What stories do we have from/about Jesus that include soil, seeds, plants, etc., and what lessons can we glean from these stories? (Share.) How can our understanding of Lent be deepened by reflecting on soil/dust? (Share.) Complete this statement: I am like soil because



IV. For Lent this week

If possible, place your container of soil (from the following closing) somewhere at home during Lent. Let it remind you of your interconnectedness with the whole communion of being that dates to stardust and exists in God's love, and/or of how you are like soil. Prepare to share next week any poetry, news, or experiences that relate to soil as life-source and as metaphor. Reflect: How can I help God keep my "soil" healthy this Lent?

V. Closing

Take a moment to save any thoughts from this meeting that you want to keep.

Play, sing or read (p. 15) the chorus of “Touch the Earth with Gentleness” (from Touch the Earth). When completed, each takes his/her container to the large one and fills it by hand or with a scoop. Then divide into pairs, take turns using the soil, symbol of life created from stardust, and bless one another for this year's Lent. (E.g., Maria, may this soil be a reminder that you both need and give nourishment; John, let this soil remind you that you came from stardust and interconnect with everyone and everything.) When finished, repeat the chorus.

Socialize.

Lent, Week Two

I. Introduction

Place the name cards of any absent members in the center and remember them during the meeting. Have a container of dirt in the center that will be passed at the end.

Play or say one verse of Touch the Earth or whatever assists the group to prepare for this session.

Read the Scripture excerpts:

To your descendants I will give this land. (Gen. 15:18)

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living. (Psalm 27: 13-14)

Silent reflection followed by sharing: How do/can those readings apply in our time? What soil-related poetry, news, or experiences did you think of during the last week?

II. Input

Jesus gave many examples of his closeness to land. Think of settings for his encounters and of his parables that dealt with soil and life that comes from it. Be sure to include his choice of bread ("which earth has given") and wine ("fruit of the vine").

Because Jesus' environment was not threatened, he did not specifically ask followers to appreciate and care for it. Today, however, things like overuse of fertilizers, superfund waste sites, landfills, mining, deforestation, damaged farmland, droughts, floods, and extinctions of plant species violate the respect for, and care of, land that God gave to us and all creation.

People sometimes forget that items like plastic bottles contribute to land abuse. The vast majority of plastic bottles end up as garbage or litter. In California alone, more than one billion water bottles end up in the state's trash annually. Plastic bottles take some 1,000 years to biodegrade.



What circumstances might require valid use of plastic water bottles? What circumstances don't? What other problems are caused by bottled water? Share ways you do, or could, reduce the use of plastic bottles.

Another source of blight on God's sacred land is the mining and production of coal, oil, and gas. Damage from these fossil fuels threatens all life forces: soil, air, water, climate. Fossil fuel industries are eager to retain their profits, are deceptive in their advertising, and lobby lavishly,



but citizen efforts can result in the development of clean, renewable energy sources. Consumers must demand renewable energy and conserve the finite resources available. What do you know about the damage done to earth (and water and air) shown in these photos?

Watch one of these videos about hydraulic fracturing (or fracking):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEB_Wwe-uBM (17:53)

"Time for an Energy Change" - [Media | ecospirituality resources](#) (13)

III. What is God saying to us?

Jesus made it very clear that when we feed hungry people, we "do it unto him." Try creating a story taking turns adding sentences to this story: "One day Jesus and his disciples came upon a fracking site." Keep the story going as long as needed. Everyone is invited to complete, and share, an ending for the final sentence: "Then Jesus said:"

IV. For Lent this week

At each meal include thanks for the soil that gives us our food and for the farmers who care for God's dirt. At Mass, remember the soil that ultimately makes the Eucharist possible. Contact state and national legislators and ask what each is doing/will do to develop jobs in clean, renewable energy or to stop mining practices that harm creation (especially children) in any way.

V. Closing

Take a moment to save any thoughts from this meeting that you want to keep.

Play "Touch the Earth" while passing the container of dirt (with a cloth) for each to touch gratefully. End with thanksgiving together: We give you thanks, almighty God, for these and all your gifts which we have received from your bounty, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Socialize.

Lent, Week Three

I. Introduction

Place fruit in the center with the name cards of any absent members. Play or say one verse of Touch the Earth or whatever assists the group to prepare for this session.

Place your feet thoughtfully on the floor and remember, wherever we are, we are grounded on firm foundation, going all the way to Earth's core.

Read the Scripture excerpt:

An angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of a bush . . . God said, ‘Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ (Ex. 3: 5)

Silent reflection followed by sharing: What can this story mean to us in the 21st century? Read silently Mary Oliver's poem on p. 15. Share your reaction to the last three lines.



II. Input (Read quietly, followed by Sharing.)

Many great religious encounters recorded in Scripture took place near or in bushes, sheep pastures, deserts, the wilderness, on mountains and the shores of rivers and seas. Quietly count the ones you remember.

Holy ground is essential for many things, as noted the first week. Given today's — and tomorrow's — population, food growth will be especially important. In the 14th century, global population was approximately 370 million; by the late 19th century, totals reached around one billion. World population is currently close to 8 billion! Feeding that many people is obviously challenging. It requires protecting land, water, and seeds; growing food sustainably; minimizing causes of climate change; and developing adequate transportation systems. Variations in climate, soil conditions, cultures, creative technological advances, government regulations, and business agendas all affect finding solutions. Keeping up to date and making informed personal choices about what to purchase and eat can be an expression of religious belief.

A study of the pros and cons of some controversial farming methods shows that judging them “Good” or “Bad” is difficult. Better to think of a continuum, pro at one end, con on the other. Then, using the variables mentioned above, to make choices, aware that future developments might cause the need to alter them.

What we can say for sure is that fertilizers and herbicides are needed to feed vast populations. However, over-use of fertilizer components like nitrogen can damage the soil. Its run-off can result in algae blooms and dead zones in water. Insecticides and herbicides are also needed to feed multitudes, but can be dangerous for farm workers and can harm insects and lead to their developing resistances. Poor farming practices, including producing one type of crop year after

year (monocrops) can deprive soil of nutrients and organic matter. These can result in loss of soil structure and fertility.

The health of farmworkers must always be protected, and farmers must be allowed to maintain their own seed banks (especially in developing countries). Multinational agribusinesses must allow input of native people and farmers when making decisions, and they must protect their human rights and land.

In the mid-twentieth century Norman Borlaug, the “father of the Green Revolution,” won prestigious awards for his innovations in plant breeding; he is credited with saving millions of lives resulting from these improvements. Over time, companies continued to develop ways to genetically modify organisms (GMO), a process causing strong opposing positions today. CRISPER (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats) enables the cell’s genome to be cut at a desired location, allowing existing genes to be removed and/or new ones added.

Choosing organic produce, dairy, and clothing (grown with natural fertilizers and pesticides, without artificial agents) benefits holy ground, which then protects our environment, our farmworkers, and other species. Any extra cost can be considered an offering to protect our sacred soil, to protect farmworkers, and to encourage organic farmers.

Roughly one third of the food produced in the world for human consumption every year gets lost or wasted! Much of this loss is out of our control, but we can do our part by buying only what is needed, storing it wisely, and serving amounts with the goal of no left-overs. Compost anything (not meat) that cannot be used. (Google “local compost opportunities.”)

Sharing: Any comments on above information? If possible, share any one moving experience you have had with dirt used for growing flowers and food. Or, share any other food-producing innovations about which you know (e.g., hydroponic, aquaponic, and vertical farms).

III. What is God saying to us?

We need to make sure that Christ's imperative to feed the hungry is always possible. We need to remember and plan for both current and future generations.

IV. For Lent this week

Be aware when shopping that every dollar we spend in some way affects Earth and Earth’s people, flora and fauna. Purchase some organic food or coffee during Lent. Find time to watch the soul of the earth, p. 15.

V. Closing

Take a moment to save any thoughts from this meeting that you want to keep.

Use the Tangerine Meditation on pp. 9-10.

Tangerine Meditation

While "Touch the Earth" or similar song plays, each takes a napkin and an organic peel-able fruit from the table. Do not peel it yet. **Read quietly:**

This fruit is the result of dirt, water, air, the labor of multiple forms of life, farmers and pickers. Look carefully on this piece of fruit. Feel and see its texture, note its colors, and any distinguishing features. Follow its story back to the seventeenth century, when Galileo Galilei wrote the following words:



"What greater stupidity can be imagined than that of calling jewels, silver, and gold "precious," and earth and soil "base"? People who do this ought to remember that if there were as great a scarcity of soil as of jewels or precious metals there would not be a prince who would not spend a bushel of diamonds and rubies and a cartload of jewels just to have enough earth to plant a jasmine in a little pot, or to sow an orange seed and watch it sprout, grow, and produce its handsome leaves, its fragrant flowers, and fine fruit."

Fruit dates to about 130 - 100 million years ago when fruit first blossomed and diversified on Earth. (It, too, started with stardust.) Picture the tree, bush, or plant from which it came, and the land on which it grew.

Imagine the blossoms of your fruit in the sunshine and in the rain. See the petals falling down and the tiny green fruit appearing. The sunshine and the rain continue, and the tiny fruit grows. When ripe, someone picks it, probably a migrant worker. While considering the life of those workers, continue examining your whole fruit with gratitude. What follows are excerpts from "Roberto Acuna, Migrant Farm Worker," from Studs Terkel's *Working* (1974).

"According to Mom, I was born on a cotton sack out in the fields, 'cause she had no money to go to the hospital. When I was a child, we used to migrate from California to Arizona and back and forth. . . .

"I started picking crops when I was eight. . . . We used to work early, about four o'clock in the morning. We'd pick the harvest until about six. Then we'd run home and get into our supposedly clean clothes and run all the way to school because we'd be late. By the time we got to school, we'd be all tuckered out. Around maybe eleven o'clock, we'd be dozing off. Our teachers would send notes to the house telling Mom that we were inattentive. . . . School would end maybe four o'clock. We'd rush home again, change clothes, go back to work until seven, seven thirty at night. . . . On Saturday and Sunday, we'd be there from four thirty in the morning until about seven thirty in the evening. . . .

“I’d go barefoot to school. The bad thing was they used to laugh at us, the Anglo kids. They would laugh because we’d bring tortillas and frijoles to lunch. They would have their nice little compact lunch boxes with cold milk in their thermos and they’d laugh at us because all we had was dried tortillas. Not only would they laugh at us, but the kids would pick fights. My older brother used to do most of the fighting for us and he’d come home with black eyes all the time. . . .



“The growers don’t recognize us as persons. That’s the worst thing, the way they treat you. . . . They haven’t any regard as to what safety precautions are needed. The pesticides affect the farm worker through the lungs. He breathes it in. He gets no compensation. They don’t investigate the cause. If people could see — in the winter, ice on the fields. We’d be on our knees all day long. We’d build fires and warm up real fast and go back onto the ice. We’d pick watermelons in 105 degrees all day long. When people have melons or cucumbers or carrots or lettuce, they don’t know how it got on their table and the consequences to the people who picked it. . . .”

Leader reads the following: Think gratefully of the people who have handled this fruit. Peel it slowly, noticing the mist and the fragrance. Study the inside structure. Now begin to eat, reverently. Eating the blessed earth is no ordinary thing! Savor each bite. Reflect on how this fruit will become part of you, and how we are affected by the quality of soil, water, and atmosphere that fed it.

End together: We give you thanks, loving Source of All Life, for the gift of this fruit, for all food, for those who grow and harvest it. Thank you for your presence, living and acting in us and all our world. May we deepen our awareness and appreciation of your presence and how all creation is interconnected. Amen.

(Thanks to Katy Didden for adapting this from Thich Nhat Hahn's Peace Is Every Step.)

If possible, compost the peels.

If desired, sing “Dirt Made My Lunch,” p. 15.

Lent, Week Four

Both Option A and Option B begin with the Introduction.

I. Introduction

Place the name cards of any absent members in the center Play or say one verse of Touch the Earth or whatever assists the group to prepare.... Decide if refreshments are wanted after next week's session and, if so, make plans.

Read the Scripture excerpt:

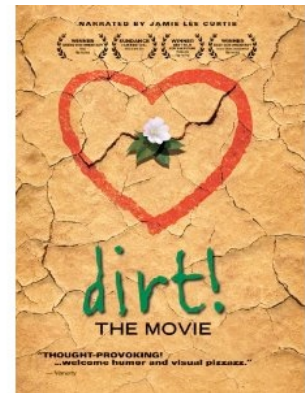
. . . on the plains of Jericho they celebrated the Passover on the evening of the 14th of the month. On the day after the Passover they ate of the produce of the land. . . . Joshua 5: 9-12

Silent reflection followed by sharing: When is Jewish Passover this year? When is Holy Thursday? Why is healthy soil essential for both services?

II. Input

Option A:

Watch *Dirt! The Movie*, which can be purchased, borrowed, or rented (Amazon, 7-day rental for \$3.00). It takes 80 minutes, so begin immediately after the Introduction and stop the film in time to allow for socializing.



Option B:

Watch "Healing the Land that Feeds Us,": <https://vimeo.com/33866598> (c. 7:10 minutes). As you watch, take note of your reaction to these images and words.



Share reactions to this meditation and how E/earth-care connects with our sacraments.

When our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate Passover, as when we come together for Eucharist, all eat and drink the "produce of the land." The bread and wine and other ritual necessities do not originate in stores, but ultimately from dirt. Healthy soil is also needed for our holy oils. Sacraments and sacramentals depend on E/earth.

"Junk" food and drink damage the soil and our health. Overeating is a food hazard for people in some countries, while others face starvation. Obesity rates in the U.S. are among the highest in the world with an average of over 60% of adults being overweight or obese. What are some causes and ramifications of overeating? How might we make healthy food more available and affordable for all?

Fasting and abstinence are traditional Lenten practices. We can choose to fast from foods that damage our health and our environment, and/or that increase hunger in countries that, e.g., grow grain to feed animals in wealthy countries rather than to feed the local populace. Depending on the type of grain used, one pound of beef requires from 7 - 16 pounds of grain. On factory farms, livestock are forced to eat grain and to live in cramped spaces. These animals require antibiotics to stave off diseases resulting from these conditions. This results in the development of drug-resistant bacteria. "Vegetarians" avoid eating meat, and "vegans" avoid all animal byproducts. Why might people choose to eat less meat? What about eating local, grass-fed meat?

How could the following food-activities be done more sustainably: buying, serving, using leftovers, or disposing of them wisely (e.g., composting)?

III. What is God saying to us?

Each new plant, blossom, and flower this spring is an unrepeatable revelation of the divine life living and acting in us and in our world. What message(s) to *you* hear from them?

IV. For Lent this week

This week avoid "junk" food and drink. Consider reducing beef intake and/or paying extra for grass-fed beef. Buy organic products whenever possible. Remember the hungry if any money is saved.

V. Closing

Share any experience(s) you have had, or experiences of others, with people who suffer from hunger. Offer spontaneous prayers for those suffering from hunger right now.

Socialize.



Lent, Week Five — Holy Week

I. Introduction

Place the name cards of any absent members in the center Play or say one verse of Touch the Earth or whatever assists the group to prepare....

Read the Scripture excerpts:

Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves. Psalm 126: 4-6

Behold, behold the wood of the Cross . . . O come, let us adore. . . ." Good Friday

Silent reflection on Scripture followed by sharing: How have trees influenced your life and spirituality?



II. Input

The humans and animals suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition due to droughts, floods, and fires from climate change are surely cause for tears. Higher temperatures and more erratic weather patterns mean widespread crop failure and often the ruin of land for future use.

Trees play a vital role in protecting land, water, air, and climate. Humankind's continued existence depends on trees. Trees "inhale" our carbon dioxide and "exhale" oxygen, thus cleaning our air and reducing climate change. Trees provide food and habitat for humans, birds and animals; they provide medicines, absorb noise, and give shade; they inspire prayer and poetry; they teach us lessons about time, endurance, death and new life.

Planting trees engenders hope for the future. Studies show that fewer crimes are reported in "green" areas, possibly because vegetation alleviates mental fatigue and promotes a sense of community. What can you share about local efforts to protect/plant/reverence trees?



saves trees.

How we use paper is one way to show reverence for God's gift of trees. Don't print unless you need to and when you do, print on both sides of sustainable paper. Recycling paper is important, but it will end in a landfill or incinerator (both bad for Earth) unless we purchase the products made from it: paper, tissue, and toilet paper. Use wood that is recycled or has been accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council. Every 500 reams of recycled office paper used instead of virgin paper saves 20 trees and 523 cubic feet of landfill space. Stopping junk mail (CatalogChoice.org) also

Tropical deforestation causes more global warming pollution than the total emissions of every car, truck, plane, ship, and train on Earth! Deforestation causes both drought and landslides. Assuming they will be properly cared for, planting trees is an important way to protect our future. We can also support international agreements and legislation necessary to prevent deforestation. Consider gifting friends with donations to groups like Trees for the Future - Official Site.

Paul Coleman ("Earthwalker") has planted over 11 million trees in Chile and other countries. Dorothy Stang, SND, was murdered in Brazil, 2005, for her work protecting farmers and rainforests. Wangari Maathai received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her efforts to plant trees and conserve the environment. How does planting trees connect with peace?

III. What is God saying to us?

Trees have been important in Sacred Scripture from its beginning to its end. Name a Scripture story featuring trees and share what it means to you.

IV. For the rest of Lent

Ponder the possible history of Jesus' cross. Think of the trees that have been used for crosses throughout the world and throughout the years. Imagine the trees in the garden when Jesus arose. Reflect reverently on every cross, crucifix, and tree you see this week.



V. Closing

Discuss the benefits of oils and which ones were used to anoint Jesus' body. One person reads from Scripture or any book containing a section on Good Friday (e.g., [A Woman Wrapped in Silence](#), pp. 260-261) while each member in turn reverently anoints the corpus and kisses the crucifix. When the group finishes, everyone sings or says "*Behold, behold the wood of the cross on which has hung our salvation! Oh come, let us adore.*"

(Thanks to Nancy Bujnowski for this ritual.)

Evaluation

Share one word that sums up this five-week experience for you. After each has shared, pause to remember anything you feel called to save that will help you deepen and "grow" your spirituality.

Socialize.

Resources

Touch the Earth chorus: Touch the earth with gentleness, Touch the earth with love, Touch her with a future by the way you live today. God has given us the power to create the world anew if we touch the earth, together, me and you.

Beans Green and Yellow

In fall
it is mushrooms
gathered from dampness
under the pines;
in spring
I have known
the taste of the lamb
full of milk
and spring grass;
today
it is beans green and yellow
and lettuce and basil
from my friend's garden —
how calmly,
as though it were an ordinary thing,
we eat the blessed earth.

Mary Oliver

Dirt Made My Lunch

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCeyXW64cns

Dirt made my lunch, Dirt made my lunch.
Thank you Dirt, thanks a bunch,
For my salad, my sandwich, my milk and my
munch
'cause Dirt, you made my lunch.

Dirt is a word that we often use,
When we're talking about that earth beneath our
shoes.

It's a place where plants can sink their toes;
In a little while a garden grows. Chorus.

A farmer's plow will tickle the ground,
You know the earth has laughed when wheat is
found.

The grain is taken and flour is ground,
For making a sandwich to munch on down.
Chorus.

Another thought-provoking poem: “I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast” in book by same name, by Melissa Studdard (2014, St. Julian Press)

For beautiful and informative information and photos about seeds: thesouloftheearth.com
Go to Journals and see any of the three on seeds: The brilliance of seeds; The toxic gamble: genetically engineered seeds; and Saving seeds

For The Price of Carbon: 3.26 min. video: <http://climaterealityproject.org/the-price-of-carbon/>

For “beginners” information about Green Burials: [What is green burial? | Green Burial Council](http://www.greenburialcouncil.org/what-is-green-burial/)