



Building a compost pile is one way to show gratitude toward nature and your ecosystem. Connie Gannon

[THE CAMBRIAN](#)

7 ways to practice gratitude toward the natural world

BY CONNIE GANNON

Special to The Cambrian

November 29, 2017 08:44 AM

During this season of Thanksgiving and winter holidays, we hear a lot about the value of being grateful. Practicing gratitude, psychologists say, improves our social relations, our self-image, our mood and even our chances of being successful in life. We are encouraged to be thankful for our health, for our families, for our friends, for our bank accounts, for beauty and creature comforts.

But what about the hidden blessings all around us? The bacteria that break down compost to feed our gardens? The Monterey pine's winged seeds that descend like tiny helicopters to the forest floor to create a new generation of trees? The fuzzy bees that pollinate our orchards? The dead branches that fall in Santa Rosa Creek and create nursery pools for tiny steelhead fry? How often do we stop and thank all the invisible workers that keep our local ecosystems functioning?

Oh, some might say, that's just nature doing its thing. It doesn't care if we notice or not. Maybe not. On the other hand, 20th century physics tells us that every time something or someone interacts at any level with an object or being, even at enormous distances, it shifts the energy and the behavior of the other.

What if our gratitude is an action on our part that helps move the world around us toward healthy equilibrium? Especially now, when global warming, floods, fires and various forms of air, water and land pollution, overpopulation and misuse of resources smack us in the face daily as we watch, read or listen to the news.

How can we practice gratitude toward the natural world? Here are some ideas:

- Compost. Building a compost pile and then spreading the resulting loam on our gardens and around our properties helps increase the carbon sequestering potential of the soil, as well as giving a welcome meal to the microorganisms in the ground, which in turn help to convey moisture and nutrients to the roots of plants and trees.
- Pick up trash, especially along the creeks and on the beach. Around here, we call it "squibbing," after Paul and Louise Squibb, retired educators who were tireless in their efforts to make Cambria a more beautiful and healthier place. Picking up plastics, metals and cigarette butts keeps this dangerous waste out of our forests and waterways, out of the habitats and diets of birds, fish and marine mammals. It may seem like a single dropped cigarette butt is no big deal, but this past September, on

international Coastal Clean-up Day, 1,863,838 cigarette butts were collected. Here in Cambria, along Moonstone beach, Greenspace and ECOSLO volunteers gathered hundreds.

- Grow a cover crop this winter. If you're farming, or even if you have a large family vegetable garden, plant clover, vetch, even peas, to help fix nitrogen in the soil and sequester carbon, increasing the nutrient load available for next year's food crops.
- Plant native plants in your gardens. Not only will they save critically needed water, they will also provide havens for native animals and birds. Planting native perennials such as toyon, coffee berry, purple needle grass or locally sourced wildflowers connects us with the physical land we call home. Greenspace will be opening our new Native Plant Demonstration Garden at Pocahontas Park (Wilton Street just off Burton Drive) this coming year. The garden will offer opportunities to learn about using native plants for residential and commercial landscaping.
- Become a beekeeper, or plant native flowers that bloom sequentially throughout the year to provide food for pollinators. The Central Coast Beekeepers Alliance offers workshops and a website where you can learn the art of beekeeping and how to raise a bee colony and reap the benefits in honey.
- Plant trees. One of the single most important things people can do to offset carbon in the atmosphere is to plant trees. Yes, there is a certain cost in water to growing a tree, but here in Cambria, the native Monterey pines actually play a role in the water cycle. Their respiration increases ambient humidity, and they effectively use fog drip as a source of moisture in the summer and fall months when there is little rain. You can plant your own, or join Greenspace volunteers in December to establish native pine seedlings on our reserve land.
- Get involved in Greenspace and other local organizations that work to protect the web of life in Cambria. Tree planting, trash removal, growing native plants, brainstorming other ideas to express our gratitude to nature — all of these things are a lot more fun done together in groups of friends and neighbors. In addition, helping to educate others in the community, especially our children and grandchildren, is a huge boost to feelings of hope.

What might happen in Cambria if we took some time to express our gratitude to the earth by building an active community of environmental restorers to counter climate change? Great things, I think. This little village could become a model of environmental resilience and a beacon of hope. Happy holidays, neighbors. Thank you for caring about small hidden wonders.

The Greenspace column appears quarterly and is special to The Cambrian. Email Greenspace at info@greenspacecambria.org or visit www.greenspacecambria.org.