

307 words, column #43
Java Talk
(for February 21 to February 27, 2008)

Every Age Is The Best Age

Good Neighbours

For me, the seed was planted almost four years ago, when Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) launched their *Good Neighbours* project around Mill Hill Regional Park, in Langford. This Park was selected "because of the area's unique and nationally significant ecology." HAT sent out press releases, and then letters to nearby residents. They visited many, to share information about this sensitive park, plus they contacted some neighbours, such as me, by phone, in order to offer and provide an evaluation of the natural features of our properties.

On August 10, 2004, after an eye-opening evaluation and grateful appreciation for the rich Garry Oak ecosystem already flourishing in my yard, I signed a Good Neighbours Stewardship Agreement, with HAT, promising to be an environmental steward of my own land, as well as nearby Mill Hill Regional Park. I agreed to do things that I was already doing, such as composting food waste and garden clippings, but now I was also agreeing to "protect, nurture, and plant native species; allow leaves and woody material to form soil-building mulch; practice efficient irrigation and drought-resistant gardening; provide food, shelter, and water for wildlife;" etc.; and to stop mowing my lawn and begin learning about naturescaping.

In return, HAT agreed to assist me with my Garry Oak Ecosystem restoration goals by providing vast and ongoing relevant information, resources, and connections; and they gave me an Environmental Steward plaque that identifies my property and involvement, along with other neighbours who are also creating or conserving buffer habitat.

"Many species depend on a larger area than the park for sustenance and survival. It takes a coordinated management approach to preserve the integrity of the entire ecosystem." In my agreement with HAT, I also promised to "spread the word about our endangered Garry Oak ecosystems." There is much more information about this and HAT, at <http://hat.bc.ca/>.

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