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by Stephen Hart

Burlington County Earth Fair gives visitors green



thoughts

Carl Kosola/Staff Photographer

Burlington County Recycling Coordinator Ann Moore explains some recycling tips to Diane Fanucci of Pemberton during the 21st Annual Earth Fair in Eastampton Sunday morning.

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By **Steven Hart Staff Writer**

EASTAMPTON — Whether you're organizing a fair or making compost, gardening expert Mike McGrath will tell you it's all about finding the right mix.

McGrath, who hosts "You Bet Your Garden" on WHYY National Public Radio, was the featured guest Sunday at the Burlington County Earth Fair, where he gave a talk on composting and signed copies of his books.

He also sang the praises of the fair's setting in Historic Smithville Park and the fair itself, which he called "one of the greatest things you can go to." The event's mix of family-themed activities and straight information on eco-friendly topics such as recycling, solar power and, yes, gardening, add up to what he called "serious fun."

"The first time I came here," McGrath said, "I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the grounds, the coolness of the mansion, and the horticulture. I can't imagine living in this area and not coming to this event every year."

McGrath wasn't the only Philadelphia-area visitor to Smithville. A contingent of volunteers from the Rancocas Nature Center in Westampton introduced youngsters to the wonders of nature in their area, presenting a talk on "Fabulous Frogs" and giving them the chance to handle a corn snake.

John Courtney, an associate naturalist at the center, said the brightly colored (and non-venomous) snake had to be brought from Pennsylvania, because poachers have caught so many in New Jersey for sale to pet stores.

"It's an endangered species in New Jersey," Courtney said. "It's too pretty for its own good."

Along with food vendors, face-painting and ring toss, the fair offered a sustainable living tent with information on eco-friendly activities. Visitors strolled the sprawling grounds and paddled canoes along Rancocas Creek.

McGrath drew a large, intent crowd of avid gardeners. During his class, Composting 101, he warned against adding grass clippings to the mix if the grass has been treated with herbicides. He advocated leaving cut grass on the lawn to provide natural fertilization.

"Removing grass clippings to apply fertilizer just doesn't make sense," he said.

By mixing dry leaves with grass clippings and "your highest quality household waste," such as nitrogen-rich coffee grounds, gardeners can create something far superior to commercially made gardening products, McGrath said.

He also sounded the theme for the day by quoting Al Gore's maxim that recycling is preferable to tossing things in the garbage, because one can never throw something away.

"You're not throwing it away," McGrath said. "There is no such thing as throwing away. You're giving it to somebody else to deal with."

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