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BAY AREA

Sustainable love: Bay Area marks Earth Day with festivals, music and education

By [Danielle Echeverria](#), Data Reporter

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Jing Shi (center) shares information about veganism during the annual Earth Day celebration at the San Francisco County Fair Building in Golden Gate Park.



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Sustainable love: Bay Area marks Earth Day with festivals, music and education

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On a sun-soaked Saturday, Bay Area residents celebrated the 53rd annual Earth Day, celebrating and promoting sustainability with festivals, live music, food trucks and nature walks.

At the San Francisco County Fair Building in Golden Gate Park, Earth Day attendees were treated to educational speakers, cooking demonstrations and dozens of booths from nonprofits and government agencies offering information or small businesses selling sustainable or vegan goods.

While the mood was light and celebratory, speakers didn't shy away from taking a serious tone. Between tips on how to cultivate green habits, presenters spoke of the dangers of climate change and political decisions affecting the environment.

Many attendees stumbled into the event on their way to enjoy the weather elsewhere in the park or came to listen and dance to the live music. But event organizers hoped that it would be an opportunity to learn.





Charlotte Canner, educator for the Our Water Our World program, speaks during the annual Earth Day celebration in Golden Gate Park.

Constanza Hevia H./Special to The Chronicle

Monalisa Wallace, who founded San Francisco's annual Earth Day celebration, said one of the most important aspects of the event is that it's a teach-in.



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“We always incorporate activism and the opportunity to really do something,” she said. “We’re trying to encourage celebration and positivity along with these heavy concerns.”

Those ideals are in line with the original Earth Day in 1970, when a Democratic senator from Wisconsin, Gaylord Nelson, along with Bay Area Rep. Pete McCloskey, a Republican, introduced the concept of holding environmental

teach-ins across college campuses on April 22, a date chosen to maximize student participation.

The idea, sparked in part by a huge 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill that shocked the nation, caught on quickly and was accepted across party lines. By the end of 1970, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was created, along with several laws to protect the environment.



Attendees paint the Earth Wall at the annual environmental celebration in Golden Gate Park.
Constanza Hevia H./Special to The Chronicle

The celebration, held across the world every year since, has continued to focus on ways to improve environmental health, large and small. This year, Bay Area activities included learning about sustainable agriculture in Napa, enjoying a sound garden in Saratoga, birding at Point Reyes Station, and cleaning up

communities across cities and counties.

Wallace, an environmental and civil rights activist and attorney, said she was inspired to start the San Francisco event after noticing the absence of organized celebration in the city for years.

“I couldn’t believe there wasn’t one,” she said. “Why wouldn’t San Francisco of all places have one?”

So Wallace teamed up with her fellow activists and made it happen. Now, she said, “it feels like a family reunion for the activist community.”



Works from Poster Alliance SF are displayed at the annual environmental celebration in Golden Gate Park.
Constanza Hevia H./Special to The Chronicle

“It’s a way for us to come together and to meet new people in the community,” she said, adding that the focus changes from year to year, giving people opportunities to learn about different ways to protect the planet.

At this year’s event, many of the informational booths focused on clean energy, transportation and sustainability in water and food.

Popular booths included the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, where representatives collected suggestions on bike lanes, an information booth for California’s high-speed rail and various jewelry and crystal sellers. Behind the booths, attendees could snap a photo in an entirely green room — down to a guitar and a bike painted in green — put together by CleanPowerSF, and outside, they could paint a small section of a mural with an Earth Day theme.

The day also included special guests, including “Diamond” Dave Whitaker, a longtime San Francisco activist, poet and radio host who shared a poem about what Earth Day means to him.





Kelly Tagama (left) and Nicolette Bohn chat with Toyya Bordelon, owner of African Violet Fashion, during the festival in Golden Gate Park.

Constanza Hevia H./Special to The Chronicle

“It’s about love, right?” he said to the audience. “Let love flourish. ... Let life flourish.”

Valerie Ibarra, who has helped organize the event for about a decade and as master of ceremonies introduced speakers and performers, reminded attendees of the little ways they can make an impact. She suggested clothing swaps, for example, rather than getting rid of garments or purchasing more.

“One of the great ways to shop is to shop for free with your friends,” she said.

While individual actions are effective, Ibarra said, environmental justice is also about working together.

“It’s making sure that we’re not just looking out for ourselves but we’re looking out for the systems, and for our society’s systems as a whole, until it gets to a better place,” she said.

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DATA REPORTER



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