

**PLANTS** Can Help the **Soil** and **Save** our

Watersheds

Carlene Bermann

&

Erika Gibb



# *But shouldn't the soil be helping the plants?*

**Of course!** But now more than ever the dirt (and in turn the whole natural system) could use a helping hand.



Contaminants agriculture, industry, and private consumption have leached into our ground systems:

mercury

arsenic

CRUDE OIL

PCBs

hydrocarbons

CADMIUM

URANIUM

strontium

benzene

aluminum

LEAD

gasoline

chromium

phosphorus

*So what about that earth there?*

We've been puttin' them toxins in for a good long while....

## **Hyperaccumulators**

- \*Plants that can slow and/or *reverse* the negative human impact on the ecosystem
- \*Over 400 types of plants are known to accumulate toxins
- \*Not only can these plants live in soil that would be toxic to most other plants, but many thrive in it
- \*The EPA estimates 40,000 U.S contaminated sites where *bioremediators* could restore the environment

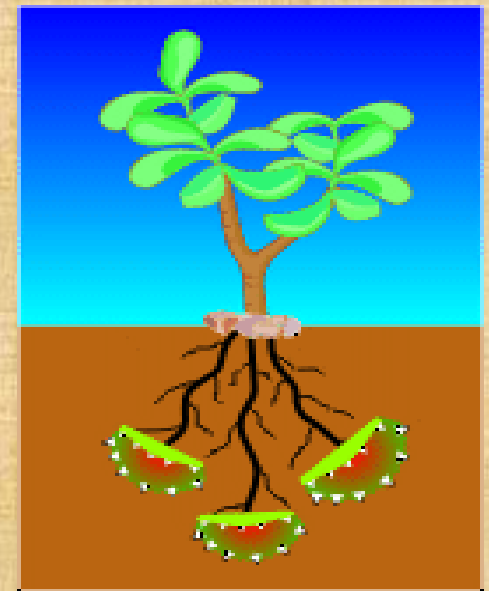
# Phytoremediation

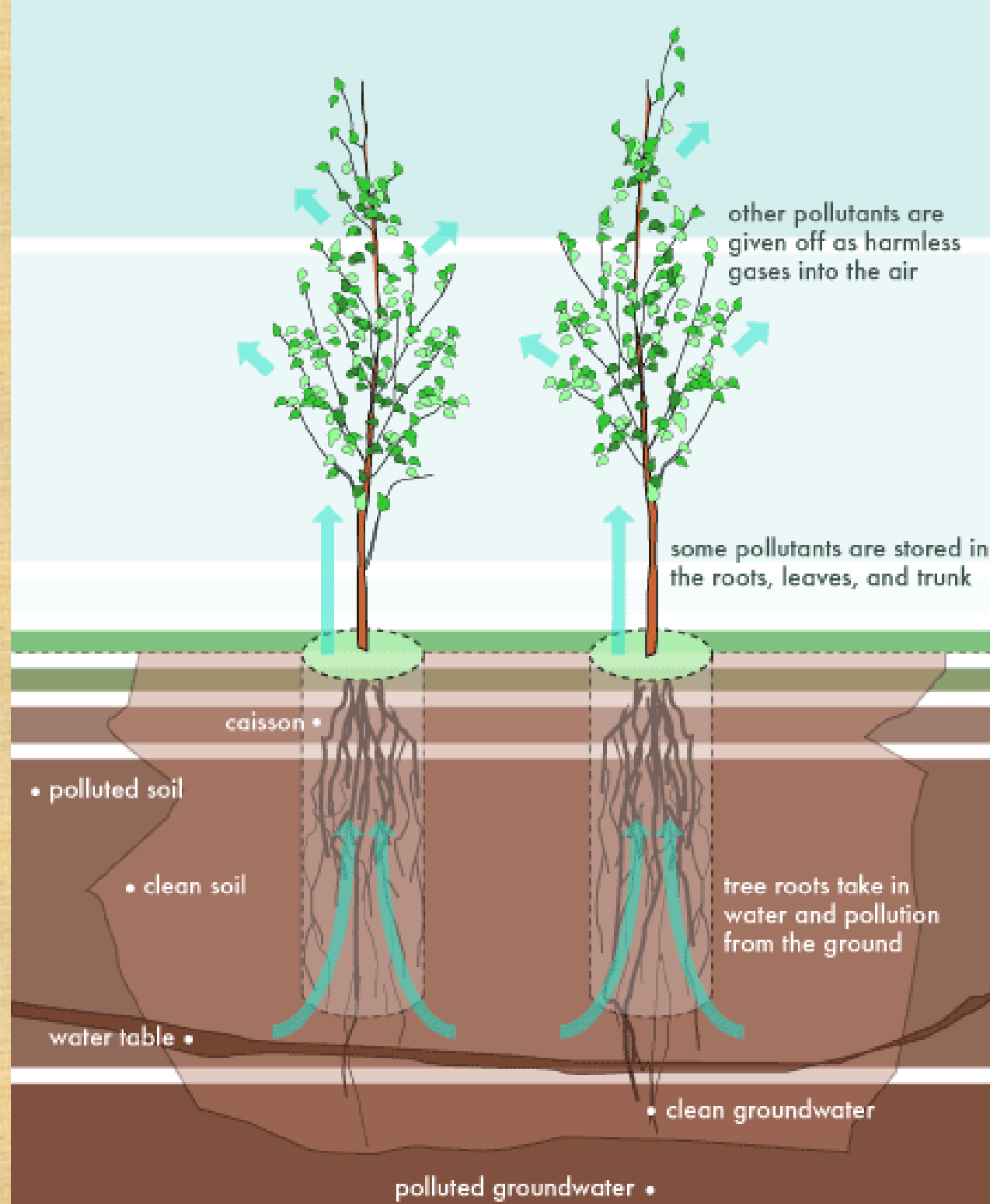
*Use of specially selected green plants to remove contaminants from the water & soil*

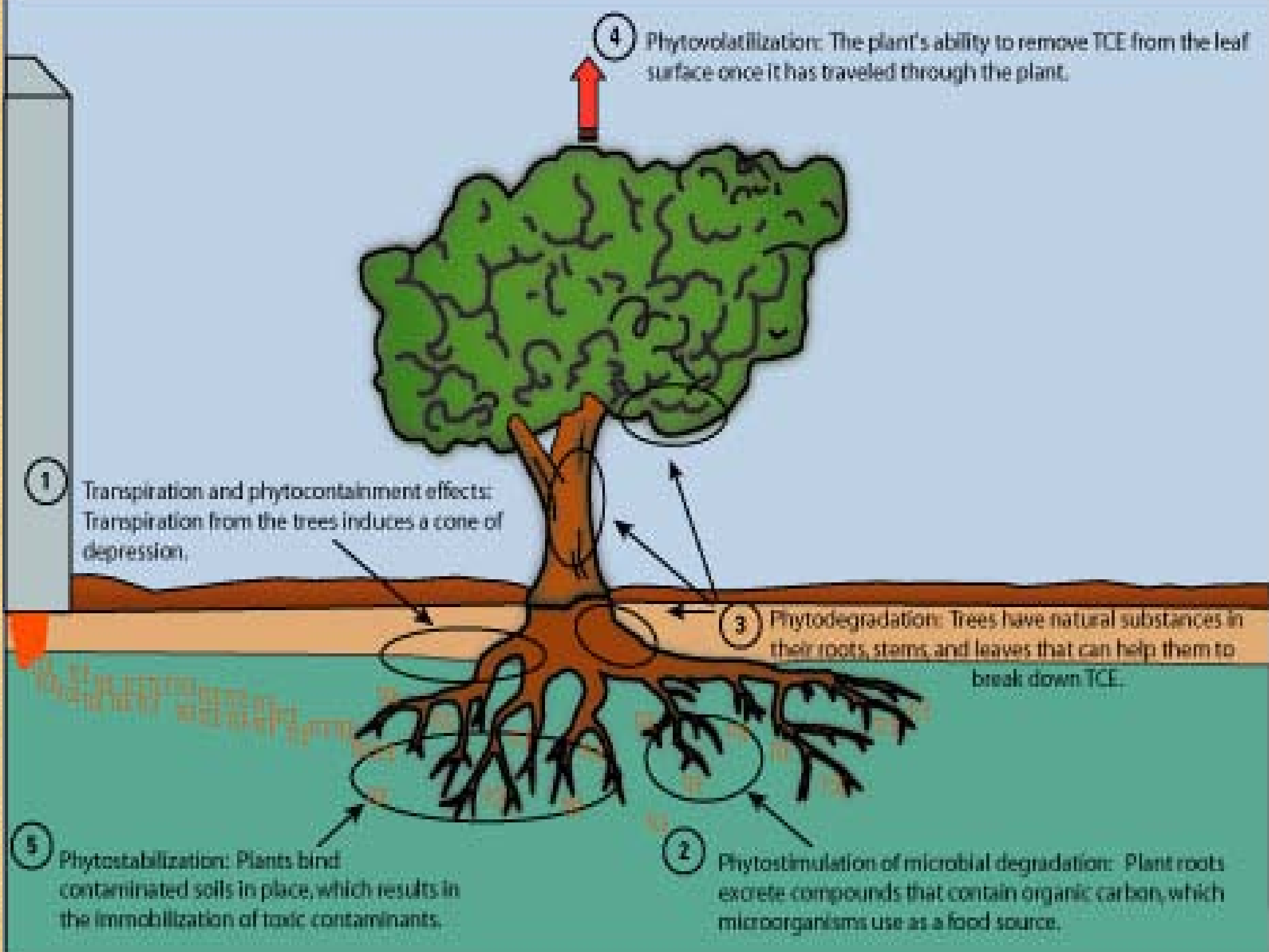
How the plants do it:

1. Store chemicals in their roots, stems and leaves.
2. Transform the toxins into less harmful ones.
3. Change toxins into gases, which are exhaled and reduced to harmless trace amounts when combined with the air.

Letting nature clean up our slip-up







4 Phytovolatilization: The plant's ability to remove TCE from the leaf surface once it has traveled through the plant.

1 Transpiration and phytocontainment effects: Transpiration from the trees induces a cone of depression.

3 Phytodegradation: Trees have natural substances in their roots, stems, and leaves that can help them to break down TCE.

5 Phytostabilization: Plants bind contaminated soils in place, which results in the immobilization of toxic contaminants.

2 Phytostimulation of microbial degradation: Plant roots excrete compounds that contain organic carbon, which microorganisms use as a food source.

# Common phytoremediators:

Members of the mustard family

Pigweed

Cabbage

Poplars

Sunflowers

Duckweed

Juniper

Fescue

Grasses

Alfalfa

Pine

Dogwood

Corn



Some organisms are just good at what they do.

**Reishis** have long been revered in Asia as the "supernatural mushrooms". For over 2000 years they have been used in Traditional Chinese medicine as Detoxifiers of the human body.



Lingzhi, or Reishi mushrooms  
(*Ganoderma lucidum*)



Oyster Mushrooms  
(*Pleurotus ostreatus*)

Oyster mushrooms naturally detox the earth of petroleum and PCBs

# *You got any research on that?*

Mel Chin

## Revival Field

Chin's project attempted to detoxify a 60 square foot section of the Pig's Eye landfill in St. Paul, Minnesota

### **Functional design**

Intersecting paths create four fields & each were tested separately

- six types of plants
  - two pH
  - two fertilizer tests
- Control plot of local grasses.

### **Project conclusion**

Research showed that Alpine pennycress was the best at leeching heavy metals, although no plants were effective enough at cleaning up the land.

# *Revival Field, Mel Chin (1990-present)*



Pig's Eye Landfill, St. Paul, Minnesota

# Taking on Blue Mountain

Zinc Pile Located on Blue Mt. in Palmerton, Pennsylvania

1898 – 1981; it was a site for major zinc smelting operations

2.5 miles; 255 acres; 33 million tons of waste material had been left behind

850 acres were re-vegetated at Blue Mountain. Ten years later the site has retained more than 70 percent of its vegetative cover



# Blue Mountain Zinc Pile

<b>Contaminant</b>	<b>Initial Concentration</b>	<b>Media</b>
Cadmium	364-1,300 ppm	Soil
Cadmium	250 ppm	Sediment
Cadmium	1-1,670 ppm	Ground Water
Lead	1,200-6,475 ppm	Soil
Lead	3,600 ppm	Sediment
Lead	1-1,630 ppm	Ground Water
Zinc	13,000-35,000 ppm	Soil
Zinc	27,000 ppm	Sediment
Zinc	40-2,122,00 ppm	Ground Water

# Alpine Pennycress

Most plants can tolerate about 100 ppm of zinc in their systems and 1 ppm of cadmium, and would be poisoned with as little as 1,000 ppm zinc and 20-50 ppm cadmium in their shoots

According to the USDA, Pennycress can accumulate up to 30,000 ppm zinc and 1,500 ppm cadmium



# Chernobyl

Iodine, cesium-137, strontium, and plutonium--concentrated in the soil, plants, and animals within a 30 km radius of the disaster site

EPA estimates it could be over 200 years before the site is completely decommissioned



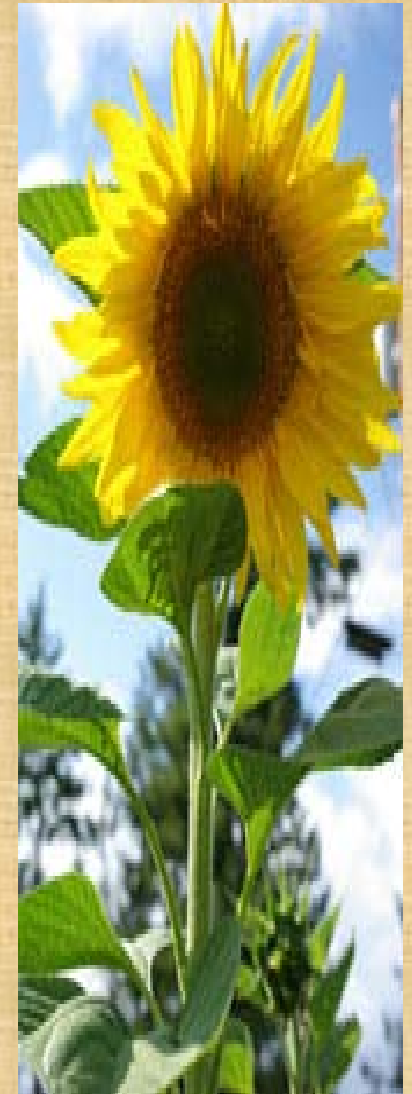
*Experimental sunflower plantation in Silesia, Poland. Heavy metals are directly applied on the top soil by dispenser designed at the Institute for Ecology of Industrial Areas - Katowice, Poland. (Photo: IETU)*

# Bring it to the classroom!

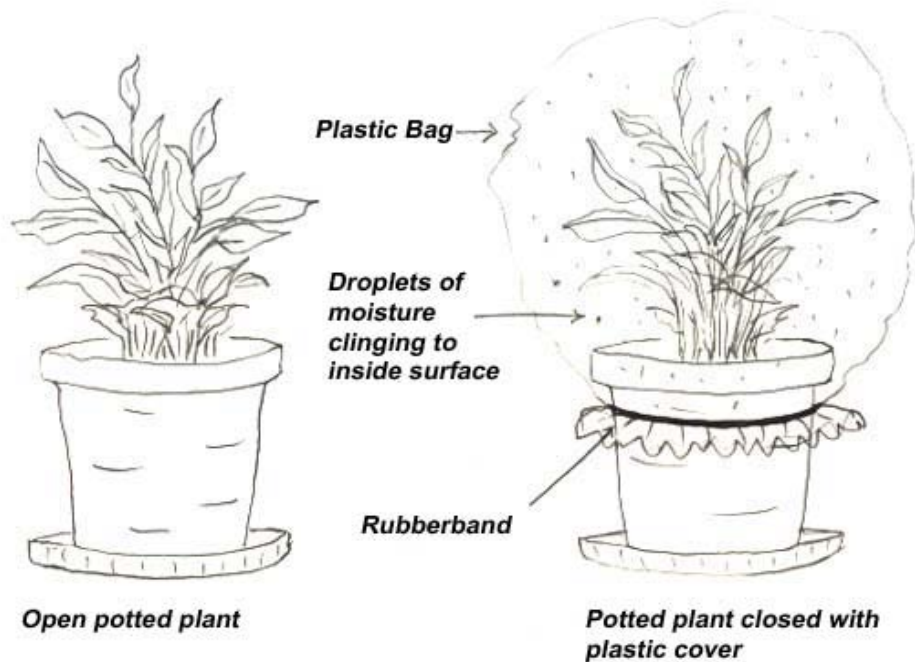
Sunflowers are an easily recognizable and beautiful plant. Since they are often planted in gardens, and in yards, sunflowers are a good introduction for students

Sunflowers specialize in absorbing heavy metals from the soil (up to 1% of their dry weight)

· Ideal for planting near the edges of parking lots to absorb run off!



## Plant Transpiration



Evidence that the plant is breathing

# Achieving Success

## Effecting Factors

- Species and number of plants used
- Type and amount of harmful chemicals present
- Size and depth of polluted area
- Type of soil and conditions present

Plants may have to be replaced because of bad weather or animal interference

It can take anywhere from three to ten growing seasons to get results

**Phytoremediation** is most effective when the contamination is located at or just below the soil surface.

# New England projects

What's working here---are plants being used to remove chemical waste? Why/why not?

Woonsaquatucket river restoration project (buffer)

New Bedford waste site----factory? *Brownfield*

# Resources

*Reclaiming the Spoils of Mining*, L.A. Times

*Phytoremediation: A new hope*,

*Plants, a good way to clean up soil toxins*, Jeanne Roberts

<http://www.celsias.com/article/plants-a-good-way-to-clean-up-soil-toxins/>

<http://www.epa.gov/aml/tech/palmerton.pdf>

*Cleaning up the soil and water*, Food & Fertilizer Technology Center

<http://www.agnet.org/library/nc/136c/>

*Phytoremediation: a solution to safer decontamination?*

Anindita Nayak; [http://climatechange.thinkaboutit.eu/think4/post/phytoremediation\\_a\\_solution\\_to\\_safer\\_decontamination](http://climatechange.thinkaboutit.eu/think4/post/phytoremediation_a_solution_to_safer_decontamination)

*Phytoremediation: Using Plants To Clean Up Soils*, USDA

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/jun00/soil0600.htm>

*Phytoremediation: Using Plants To Clean Soil*, McGraw Hill

[http://www.mhhe.com/biosci/pae/botany/botany\\_map/articles/article\\_10.html](http://www.mhhe.com/biosci/pae/botany/botany_map/articles/article_10.html)

[http://www.epa.gov/athens/education/PhytoLessonPlan/learnp\\_05.html](http://www.epa.gov/athens/education/PhytoLessonPlan/learnp_05.html)



**Paul Stamets**, *6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save the World* on Ted Talks (TED.com), and *Bioremediation with fungi*, YouTube

**Leon Kochian**, plant physiologist, U.S. Plant, Soil, and Nutrition Laboratory at Ithaca, New York (Agricultural Research Service)

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