

In Season with MGPW

the quarterly of the
Master Gardeners
Prince William

Spring 2023

Juniper with rain drop
photo by Jason Alexander

Spring

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The busiest time of year is about to overtake us. Spring flowers are blooming, tree leaf buds are forming, and everything outside is taking on that magical hue of "new-growth-green." We can put away the plant catalogues that inspired us over the winter and visit plant nurseries to buy more plants than we need.

I want to thank, in advance, all of the Prince William Master Gardener volunteers that are about to give up a significant portion of their free time to help educate and assist residents throughout the County. Volunteers are the backbone of every community, and your selfless efforts often go unnoticed. On behalf of all residents of Prince William County – I want to thank all of the volunteers who have generously donated their time and energy to make a positive impact in our community and to the local environment. Your selfless dedication to helping others and improving your community is the reason we are able to make a difference in Virginia. Thank you for all that you do - you are making the world a better place.

Garden On!!

-Janene Cullen, PhD, President, MGPW Board

THANK YOU NANCY BERLIN!

Since 2007, Nancy Berlin has been serving our community as an environmental educator and Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator (read: *wrangler*). The end of March marked the beginning of Nancy's next chapter.

Nancy, we will miss your impressive wisdom, boundless grace, and unfailing leadership as part of the Master Gardener program! We do hope to continue to learn from you, and enjoy your fellowship. May our garden paths cross often!



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- Prized Plants
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- Insights
- Taking Action
- Gift Ideas
- In the Community
- Plant NOVA Natives
- Conservation at Home
- Plant NOVA Trees
- Critter Neighbors
- Free Classes / Helpdesk

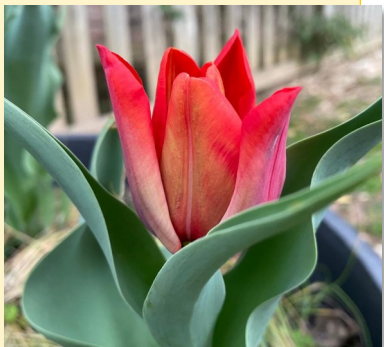
LAWN CARE FOR PWC

Virginia is part of a transition zone between areas where cool and warm season grasses thrive. This can make lawn care in our area challenging. If you're a first time homeowner, new to Prince William County or just looking to better manage your lawn, [Virginia Cooperative Extension can help](#).

We offer help with interpreting soil test results, information on cultural practices, pest identification and pest control recommendations.

For more assistance with lawn care, contact the Virginia Cooperative Extension Environmental Educator at 703-792-4037 or BESTlawns@pwcgov.org.

The [BEST Lawn](#) Program can sample and measure your lawn for you and provide you with a fertilizer schedule that will help promote a healthy lawn.



Tulip (*Tulipa*)
photo by Jason Alexander

LAWN: BREAKING THE SPRING SEEDING CYCLE



podcast developed by John Freeborn, Horticultural Research Specialist at Virginia Tech

This podcast explains the futility of seeding a lawn in spring, and outlines the best strategy for establishing a healthy lawn.

Here are a few highlights:

- * Although spring seeding is very common for garden crops and many other plants, seeding lawn in the spring is not the best time to establish a healthy lawn.
- * Grass planted in the spring may come up looking great, but it won't have time enough to establish a deep root system to help it survive the hot and drier summer.
- * When managing cool season grasses, pre-emergent products are usually applied in the spring to control weeds like crabgrass, the most common weed in lawns. "Pre-emergent products work by preventing seed germination and they cannot be utilized with new seeding because they will also prevent the new desirable seed from coming up."
- * "The best chance for grass plants to survive the stress associated with summer is for them to develop as many roots as possible and to be as mature as possible before summer arrives. To accomplish this, fall is the time to plant."

For the full article and podcast, [click here](#).

Contact the Horticulture Helpdesk with questions, or sign up for the [BEST Lawns program](#) (mastergardener@pwcgov.org; 703-792-7747) ♦♦

PRIZED PLANTS: TULIPS

by Maria Stewart, Master Gardener Volunteer

It wouldn't be spring without tulips! Tulip cultivation has been long-established, making available a wide range of colors and varieties, except true blue. There are over 3,500 names associated with tulips currently listed in the taxonomy.

Enjoying the spring show takes a little planning, though. Plant tulip bulbs in the fall, about 4-6 inches deep, 2 to 5 inches apart. In clay soil, plant a little closer to the surface.

Tulips can be grown as annuals or perennials. If you're growing them as perennials, promptly remove spent blooms, but allow the foliage to yellow before cutting back. Most tulips will decline after the second year of growth. Therefore, many growers grow them as annuals.

For more information on tulips see: [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Tool Box](#). ♦♦



CARTER FARMS

GARDEN TO TABLE: CARTER FARMS, AN ETHNIC VEGETABLE AFROTOURISM TEACHING FARM

by Maria Stewart, Master Gardener Volunteer

If you were lucky enough to attend Master Gardener Recertification in 2020, you were treated to an enlightening presentation by Michael Carter, Jr., an 11th generation American and farmer, and the 5th generation to farm on [Carter Farms](#), his family's century farm in Orange County, Virginia. (The code of Virginia established the century farm program "to honor farm families in the Commonwealth whose property has been in the same family for 100 years or more.") He is also the Small Farm Resource Center Coordinator for the Small Farm Outreach Program with Virginia State University, among many other leadership roles in the community.

As explained on their website, Carter Farms "specializes in growing ethnic, African tropical vegetables organically. Michael Carter Jr.'s operation is an ethnic vegetable afrotourism teaching farm that shares its Africulture interdisciplinary platform."

[Africulture](#), the non-profit arm of Carter Farms, "highlights, explores, teaches, and enhances the principles, practices, plants and people of African descent that have contributed to agriculture." Africulture offers a wealth of services including workshops, trainings, and seminars addressing topics such as Emotional Intelligence in Boys, Agricultural Research, Educational Resources related to African aspects of history, African/African American History and contributions, Agricultural workshops, and Cultural Competence & Implicit Bias Training.

Offering so much more than what's typically offered at the grocery store and even at the farmers market, Carter Farms raises nutrition-packed super foods such as amaranth, feather cockscomb, African eggplant, spider flower plant, nikotomere, jute mallow, and moringa. Did you know moringa contains 92 nutrients, 46 anti-oxidants, and 36 anti-inflammatories, just to name a few benefits?



[Michael Carter, Jr. Environmental Champion](#)

During his presentation at Recertification in 2020, Michael Carter, Jr. not only encouraged us to explore these valuable plants, he also shared *Afrimericals*—introductions to people of African descent who made important contributions to agriculture and society.

Carter Farms—explore all the ways to nourish the body, mind, and spirit. ♦♦♦

RECIPE

Traditional African Moringa Dish by Rosalie Sadou, Cameroon (2018)

INGREDIENTS

- * Moringa leaves
- * oil
- * onions
- * tomatoes
- * peanut paste
- * salt
- * rock salt
- * meat (tripe)
- * gravy
- * water if necessary

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1) Fry the onion and the tomato.
- 2) Add the meat and its juice and simmer a little because the meat has been previously cooked
- 3) Add the rock salt and the moringa which are left to cook.
- 4) Add the peanut paste and salt and cook.
- 5) This sauce is eaten with corn couscous, millet rice or tubers, piled or not.
- 6) Add pepper to taste.



source: [AMH Online \(Africa Moringa Hub\)](#)

OUT AND ABOUT: THE GLENCARLYN BRANCH LIBRARY COMMUNITY GARDEN



[The Glencarlyn Branch Library Community Garden](#)

by **Jamie Nick, Master Gardener Volunteer**

Located at 300 South Kensington Street in Arlington, the Glencarlyn Branch Library Community Garden is a teaching garden maintained by the [Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia](#), in partnership with the Library. It's open dawn to dusk.

The Garden's mission is to provide resources for Arlington residents to learn how to create gardens in both the suburban and urban landscape.

The Garden is comprised of many smaller gardens including herb, shade, sun, tropical, dry, container, and native gardens. There's even a literary garden featuring plants found in books of literature or poetry. Visitors are invited to find the books in the library.

Enjoy visiting this gem of a garden! ♦♦♦

[MASTER GARDENERS PRINCE WILLIAM TEACHING GARDEN](#)

The Teaching Garden is a project of the Master Gardener Volunteers. It began as a garden to grow fresh produce for the Plant a Row for the Hungry project and a place where Master Gardeners could teach homeowners how to grow vegetables. The Teaching Garden displays low maintenance gardening techniques that homeowners can implement in their own gardens. It also features plants that grow well locally.

View the [Teaching Garden Brochure](#) which contains a map of the teaching garden bed layout. View the upcoming events at the Garden [here](#) as well as other horticulture classes offered by the Master Gardeners.

**Sign up for
[The Teaching Garden](#)
blog to stay-up-to-date,
and get the latest
In Season with MGPW
newsletter!**

“How You Can Save the World in Your Own Yard”

BOOK NOOK: NATURE'S BEST HOPE, YOUNG READERS' EDITION

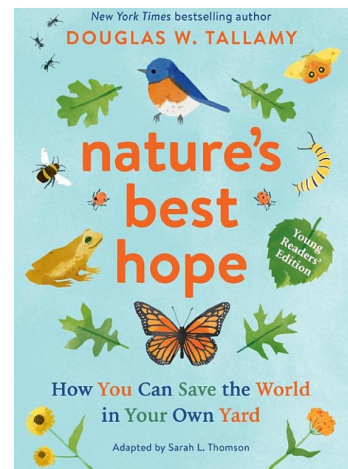
BY DOUGLAS W. TALLAMY, ADAPTED BY SARAH L. THOMSON

by **Maria Stewart, Master Gardener Volunteer**

One of Douglas Tallamy's most important books, *Nature's Best Hope*, has been adapted by Sarah Thomson, for one of our most important audiences—young readers. In this edition of Tallamy's ground-breaking book, children are empowered to combat climate change, and work toward creating a better future for the environment and themselves. And it all starts in their own backyards!

Tallamy breaks down complex concepts into easy to understand terms, and gives real world, relatable examples. He encourages readers to plant an oak tree, one of the most impactful tree species. Oak trees too large? Plant asters—not only a beautiful flower, but also an important source of pollen for bees.

“When we share our land with plants and animals, we make ‘biological corridors’ that help grow habitat for *all* wildlife. Even better? You *can* help, and this book shows you how.” ♦♦♦





[The Royal Alley or Green Carpet, at the Palace of Versailles](#)

INSIGHTS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAWNS

by Abbie & Vincent Panettiere, Master Gardener Volunteers

Now that spring is happily approaching, part of its joy is the sight of a lovely green lawn, free of weeds and brown spots - and I hasten to add, if fertilized, it would have been *just enough* so that excess chemicals didn't run into the waters of the surrounding streams and rivers and carry pollution into our Chesapeake Bay.

But back to the grass that we delight in seeing. The usual non-native varieties of grass used in lawns: fescue (native to Europe and Asia), perennial ryegrass (native to Europe and Asia), and bluegrass (native to practically all of Europe, North Asia and the mountains of Algeria and Morocco), require a great deal of care.

According to a Washington Post article of June 30, 2021:

There are an estimated 40 million to 50 million acres of lawn in the continental United States — that's nearly as much as all of the country's national parks combined. In 2020, Americans spent \$105 billion keeping their lawns verdant and neat. But our grass addiction comes at an environmental cost.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, maintaining those lawns also consumes nearly 3 trillion gallons of water a year as well as 59 million pounds of pesticides, which can seep into our land and waterways.

Department of Transportation data shows that in 2018, Americans used nearly 3 billion gallons of gasoline running lawn and garden equipment. That's the equivalent of 6 million passenger cars running for a year.

I Built a Wildlife Pond—here's what happened

a YouTube short

Learn how wildlife photographer, Stefano Ianiro, transforms a staged photoshoot into a wildlife habitat.



“...I watched just how many species this little pond was benefiting...and I decided I wanted to give them something even better.”

[available on YouTube](#)

Insights: A Brief History of Lawns

Sources & For More Information

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<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/aug/02/turf-it-out-is-it-time-to-say-goodbye-to-artificial-grass>
The Guardian
Turf it out: is it time to say goodbye to artificial grass?

<https://www.yourgreenpal.com/blog/fines-liens-and-foreclosure-for-not-mowing-the-grass>

<https://hub.associaonline.com/blog/hoa-101-what-is-an-hoa>
Associa
HOA 101: What is an HOA?

<https://www.pennington.com/all-products/grass-seed/resources/all-you-need-to-know-about-perennial-ryegrass>

Having heard many thoughts and opinions on the subject, I wondered what a brief history of the lawn might look like. Several sites suggested that grasslands were of great importance to the earliest humans because the grasses were short enough that large animals, either as a danger to life or a source of dinner, could be seen from a safe distance.

In medieval times, castles and towns surrounded by short grasses, which were maintained by farm animals or by townspeople with scythes, made it possible to see if an army was approaching with unfriendly intentions towards those in town or castle. There were also cleared spaces, called “commons” where local farmers could bring their stock to graze in a shared space.

For those with great wealth and much property, it became a sign of wealth to have a large amount of lawn with no other purpose than to show that you could do so without having to make a practical use of it other than allowing your stock to graze, thereby keeping the grass short and tidy. Unfortunately for local farmers, the wealthy gradually fenced in the commons, taking away a shared space for them to use for their stock.

When colonizers came to settle in this country, they brought their grass seed along with them. In early times it was used by the wealthy to show their status. Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were not immune to the idea. They planned their property with the European great estates in mind. For most people, who didn’t have the luxury of a great estate however, their yards would consist of small gardens, wildflowers, weeds or just dirt.

Suburban lawns didn’t really get going until well into the 19th century. What helped was the invention of the lawnmower, lawn sprinkler, and power mower during the latter half of that century. However, since the grasses used were native to Europe, the Middle East and Africa and, even with the sprinklers helping the grasses being used, they found our climates difficult to survive. The US Department of Agriculture and the United States Golf Association formed a collaboration and, beginning in 1915, tried to find which combination of grasses would survive our challenging climate conditions.

But even with the difficulty of maintaining them, lawns really took off after World War Two when soldiers came home with the images that they had long carried in their minds of a tranquil home, somewhere in the suburbs. Although they typically bought smaller houses, the lawns in front were an essential part of fulfilling the dreams that had carried them through very dark days.

An unforeseen complication arose in the 1960s when Home Owners Associations (HOA) , which had been developed during the 19th century, really began to take off as a byproduct of the need for affordable housing. To meet that need, developers began to build more

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poa_pratensis

Poa pratensis
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2021/06/30/climate-friendly-backyard/>

The Washington Post,
June 30, 2021

and smaller houses on less land which could then be sold at a price the average buyer could afford.

Many of us belong to Home Owners Associations, but to those unfamiliar, HOA is a nonprofit organization which is set up to manage a group of homes of any sort such as a residential neighborhood or a building with living spaces for numbers of residents. There are rules and regulations to ensure that the neighborhood of the HOA presents a pleasant and well-managed appearance, thus maintaining and improving the value of each of its members' properties.

According to one source, Accosia, there are three things all HOAs have in common:

1. Mandatory Membership

There are many kinds of associations all around the world, and for most, membership is voluntary. However, a defining characteristic of an HOA is mandatory and automatic membership for all homeowners. This mandate is necessary for an HOA to operate and to share the costs amongst a community equally.

2. Binding Documents

All HOAs have a set of governing documents that include binding legal documents. These documents give an association authority to operate and hold owners responsible for paying any fees, fines, and assessments that accompany membership.

3. Lien-Based Assessments

Lien-based assessments are what give HOAs the power to enforce its rules and governing documents amongst owners. The lien authorizes the HOA to take possession of a home if charges aren't paid or other rules and regulations are repeatedly ignored.

Unfortunately, reporting lapses in such things as mowing the lawn to the height stipulated in your HOA's rules and regulations generally depends on your neighbors reporting any lapses to the authorities. At worst, some local governments jail residents for lapses in the care of their lawns.

An unusual development that has arisen recently is the practice of replacing your lawn with artificial grass thus avoiding all the nuisance of dealing with real grass. There were several sources which mentioned this and, according to an article in the Guardian by Isabella Kaminski, August 2, 2019, British homeowners were digging up their gardens and replacing them at a great rate with plastic grass. The ads I found had given glowing reports on the differences between plastic turf and plastic grass (and there were surprisingly real differences) and the advantages of artificial turf or grass over the real thing. For one small example, rather than use a fossil-fuel dependent lawnmower to keep the lawn at the proper height, if your plastic lawn (which keeps the required height forever), began to look a bit unkempt, you'd just take the vacuum

cleaner out with you and give the lawn a once-over to brush it up.

Ms. Kaminski was not a fan of plastic grass and had several experts who detailed reasons where it was definitely not a good idea.

The latest challenges to growing a green, unblemished lawn have come with the change in climate we're now experiencing and an increased appreciation of plants that are more suited to the climate which can survive with less care. In areas where drought is an increasing problem, such as in California or Nevada, people have been rewarded for replacing their lawns with native plants suitable to local conditions. In places like California, neighbors are apt to bring public attention on social media to those who insist on watering their lawns in drought areas with the intent of shaming them into more drought-conscious behavior.

So, no surprise, it's not easy to have a nice lawn. But with lots of care, hard work, and with cooperative weather, you and your fortunate neighbors can display a beautiful, healthy and very grassy lawn, that is proudly your very own. ♦♦♦

*Prince William
Compost Awareness Day*
Saturday, May 6, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Balls Ford Road Compost Facility

For Healthier Soil, Healthier Food..!

COMPOST

Free Event

- Compost Samples, Food Scrap Collection - Freestate Farms
- Compost Bin Sales - PW County
- Composting and Gardening Info - VCE Master Gardener Volunteers
- Community Beautification Opportunities - Keep Prince William Beautiful
- Compost Facility Tours 11 a.m. and 12 noon - Freestate Farms

PWCVA.gov/trashandrecycling

MGPW'S 2023 SPRING PLANT SALE:

MAY 6TH 9 AM – NOON

by Leslie Paulson, Master Gardener Volunteer

Spring is here and that can only mean that our Spring Plant Sale is just around the corner. The location is at our Teaching Garden at the St. Benedict Monastery at 9535 Linton Hall Rd Bristow, VA.

Master Gardeners: Please start looking for perennials etc., that you can donate to the sale. No invasives please. Also, no hostas, crape myrtles, common lilac, or liriopse. If you can, please pot up at least 3 weeks ahead of time. The plants will look better for the sale. Put the plants in a gallon pot, at minimum. Please clean your pots first.

I also need gallon pots. If you have extra, please bring them out to the Garden. Nothing smaller than one gallon.

We hope to make special markers this year. If you are bringing plants out and leaving them, they still need a stick in them saying what they are. Best time to bring the plants is May 2, 4, and 5. We will be out at Teaching Garden on Tuesday morning, and Thursday 6pm – dusk, and Friday 5-7pm. If you can help us on those dates, please come out. Go to My Impact to sign up.

You can get updates on any possible changes by an email to the Horticulture Helpdesk, as well as the flyer for the Spring Plant Sale: mastergardener@pwcgov.org.

Look for information at this link as well: <https://www.pwcva.gov/departments/virginia-cooperative-extension/horticulture-classes>

Personal checks are preferred, made out to MGPW. Cash is also accepted, but not credit cards. Thank you!





Domestic Cat Killing a Ruffed Grouse, Navvrisk

TAKING ACTION: MEMBERS OF WORKGROUP APPOINTED BY VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY RELEASE REPORT ON MANAGING FREE-ROAMING CATS

By Tom Blackburn, Audubon Society of Northern Virginia

This article appeared originally in the February 2023 Potomac Flier, the monthly publication of [Audubon Society of Northern Virginia](#), and is reprinted with permission.

Fourteen members of a Virginia General Assembly workgroup appointed in 2021 to study problems associated with free-roaming cats have just released a comprehensive [report](#) detailing the negative impact of cats on wildlife and public health and recommending legislative solutions.

Among the major findings in a report from fourteen of nineteen workgroup members, including Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (ASNV), is the determination that, by itself, the controversial practice of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) does not work for the reduction of free-roaming cat populations. The practice, in which cats are trapped, neutered, typically given a one-year rabies vaccination, and released back to the outdoors, is also ineffective at mitigating the risks posed by these cats to wildlife and public health. According to a report published in the journal [Nature Communications](#) and referenced in the report, 1.3 to 4 billion birds and 6.3 to 22.3 billion mammals are killed annually by cats in the U.S.

The workgroup was created at the request of then-Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources, Delegate Ken Plum. The nineteen-member work group, composed of experts in wildlife conservation, veterinary medicine, public health and safety, agriculture, animal welfare, and animal law, was tasked



SNAKE ID

Bill Crisp

K2C Wildlife Encounters, LLC

On January 21, 2022, MGPW Education Committee hosted a very informative Virginia snake id lecture given by Bill Crisp of [K2C Wildlife Encounters](#). Even attendees who are afraid of snakes found Bill Crisp's lecture interesting and engaging.

He walked us through some basic snake identification of species found in Virginia, and talked about how to respond when one of them becomes your neighbor. He also explained how to discourage them from getting too close, and busted many commonly held myths.

After the lecture, we had an opportunity to get up close, and even hold some of the snakes Bill brought along with him.

K2C Wildlife Encounters:
Educating and Intervening to Reduce Wildlife Conflicts. Specializing in

- Removal of Snakes and Other Reptiles
- Educational Programs
- Venomous Snake Safety Training



Jason Alexander, MG Volunteer, making a new friend; photo by Maria Stewart

with making recommendations for the reduction of the population of free-roaming cats in Virginia, and mitigating their impacts on wildlife, natural resources, public health and property. I participated as chair of ASNV's Advocacy Committee. We deliberated for 18 months before fourteen members submitted their report to the General Assembly.

Among the findings in the meticulously-documented 28-page report are:

- There are an estimated 2.1 million free-roaming cats in Virginia, of which 1.2 million are unowned.
- These cats are one of the most serious threats to native wildlife in the Commonwealth.
- Free-roaming cats are vulnerable to many hazards and have high mortality rates, especially for kittens, and often have a very poor quality of life.
- Free-roaming cats present numerous risks to public health, including rabies, toxoplasmosis, and other diseases.
- A comprehensive and multi-faceted population control strategy is

“...by itself, the controversial practice of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) does not work for the reduction of free-roaming cat populations.”

required to produce results.

- The unregulated feeding of outdoor cat colonies may exacerbate the negative impacts of free-roaming cats by concentrating cats and attracting wildlife.

The report relies on scientific findings from peer-reviewed publications in presenting recommendations for addressing risks and damage caused by the growing population of free-roaming cats in Virginia. Among these recommendations are:

- Each locality must develop an outdoor cat management plan implementing state guidelines and regulations to reduce the population of free-roaming cats and mitigate their negative impacts.
- There must be a local option for the removal of free-roaming cats where conflicts exist.
- Public education is critical to eliminating the abandonment and unintended reproduction of cats.
- Public education should emphasize the importance of keeping cats indoors or confined on the owner's property to eliminate the impacts of free-roaming cats and to protect the cats themselves. The public also should be made aware of options for the placement of cats that need to be re-homed through shelters, pet adoption programs, and other alternatives to abandonment.
- A statewide policy is needed concerning animal shelters and releasing

Master Gardener College

About 2023 Master Gardener College

In 2023, Extension Master Gardener College (EMGC) will be held in Blacksburg, Virginia on the Virginia Tech campus in early June. Registration will open in mid April—watch your email for registration information.

EMGC is an opportunity for Extension Master Gardeners to broaden their education by learning from Virginia Tech (and other) experts, and it's an opportunity to network with other EMGs from across the commonwealth.

EMGC is a four-day continuing education conference with an optional fifth day for those participating in Tree Steward training. EMGC features seven keynote speaker sessions and four concurrent sessions with numerous class options, along with an optional day of tours.

Tree Steward Training

EMGC 2023 will feature Tree Steward training. Tree Steward training is open to any EMG interested in pursuing advanced education in the area of tree-care.



[click here for more information](#)

agencies regarding the intake and acceptance of cats. While 56 localities in Virginia currently have ordinances regulating cats, many others have no regulation whatsoever.

- Where TNR is included in the comprehensive strategy for the reduction of the free-roaming cat population, individual and organizational practitioners must be required to receive training in the various aspects of TNR and cat colony management and should be required to create and maintain complete records of their activities, including individual health records for every cat in a managed colony. These records must be available to animal control, public health, or other taxpayer-funded agencies as needed.
- Release of cats and management of cat colonies should be prohibited in certain areas including parks and other protected areas, near schools or daycare centers, and on land where the permission of the private or public landowner or property manager has not been secured.

The report also includes several recommendations regarding research that should be conducted in Virginia to assess the root causes of cat abandonment, as well as the effectiveness of various strategies and techniques for the reduction of free-roaming cat populations.

Members of the workgroup who released the report expect to work with legislators to develop legislation on free-roaming cats to be introduced in the 2024 session of the General Assembly. You can [contact me](#) if you have questions about the report. ♦♦♦



[Request an Audubon at Home Visit!](#)

As a Master Gardener, we would love for you to consider joining our Wildlife Habitat Program. The more yards with native plants to support our native wildlife, the better to protect our native wildlife.

[Learn more here: https://www.audubonva.org/audubon-at-home](https://www.audubonva.org/audubon-at-home)

If you would like an Audubon at Home visit to talk about establishing or supporting a Wildlife Habitat, please go to the link above and submit a request. Audubon will then forward your request to me. The link also shares a lot of information which can help you create your at home habitat.

It is a great program and a wonderful way to sustain the native wildlife in your yard. We are willing to help you answer any questions you have.

Thank you!

**– Leslie Paulson, Master Gardener Volunteer and
Audubon at Home Coordinator for Prince William County**

GIFT IDEAS: UNIQUE GIFTS FOR GREEN GARDENERS

by Lindsay Kraus, Master Gardener Volunteer

It's April, which means Mothers and Fathers Day are soon approaching. The gardeners in our lives can probably all agree on one thing when it comes to gift giving: what they want is also what they need. Instead of the standard coupon books and neckties (which, let's be honest, are awesome too), let's dive into some of the gifts all gardeners need—whether they know it yet or not.

Aprons

They're not just for the kitchen! Whether we're repotting, digging on our knees, or transplanting our seedlings, it's easy for our clothes to get damp and dirty. Aprons provide cover for our clothes, but they also provide easy-access pockets for holding tools while we work. Aprons cut down on laundry, which not only decreases our water consumption, but also the footprint left by shipping detergents.

What to look for: Quality canvas can come in lots of fun designs, but make sure it's machine washable. A utility loop is a bonus—they come in handy! And don't forget pockets.

Tool Storage

Running back and forth between different places in your growing spaces takes a lot of the fun out of gardening. Our garages and sheds provide great shelter from the elements, but in growing season having something that is more centrally located makes it easier to focus on the fun parts. When it comes to gifts, a personal touch makes it that much more meaningful. Designing a tool storage bin for your loved one is the icing on that cake! Upcycle an old mailbox by using an old one (or reaching out to freecycle groups) and painting it for them. Or, purchase a bin made specifically for garden tools and add your own spin on it. Not only will it look beautiful in their growing space, but it will remind them of you.

What to look for: quality material that will shield the tools from the elements. No holes or rust. Eco-friendly gardeners should avoid plastic materials and opt for recycled or recyclable materials.

Gift Cards to Native Nurseries

Native plants will bring a host of wildlife to your loved one's garden! The gift of nature is a beautiful thing, and allowing them to add some creativity and new varieties to their landscape is so fun. The veggie gardeners in your life will love the added benefit of more pollinators, while the flower gardeners may bring in textures and colors they can't typically find at a conventional garden center.

What to look for: PlantNovaNatives.org provides a great list of native sellers. Look for nurseries that tend to reuse materials, utilize sustainable growing mediums, and avoid pesticides and fertilizers whenever possible.

Native Bee Habitats

Nature-lovers will appreciate the appeal of native bee habitats. Make your loved one a happy home for our much-overlooked pollinators and help them find the ideal place in their garden. It will be the gift that

Are you a forest landowner?

Virginia Tech, in partnership with numerous state, federal and private partners, offers a wide variety of science-based educational opportunities for new and experienced forest landowners through their [Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program](#).

[sign up for their newsletter](#)

keeps on giving! They can be constructed out of logs or unused, non-pressure-treated lumber, or you can purchase a well-made habitat. Just make sure you are careful about how it's made, as incorrect construction can have a negative impact on its potential tenants. This is a great project to help your young ones craft!

What to look for: An east-facing, well protected area (or a 3" or more overhang). The tunnels should be at least 6" long with holes that are 5mm, 6mm, and 8mm in diameter. These dimensions are very important! The tubes can be drilled into the wood or be made of natural reeds or cardboard that are easily found online. Bamboo is harmful to the bees and should be avoided.

Botanical Gardens

The gift of experience! Take your loved ones to a botanical garden while supporting conservation and biodiversity. Here in Northern Virginia, we have the pleasure of being a short distance from the world renowned [Mt. Cuba Center](#) in Delaware, a non-profit organization. Go for a day trip to take in the gentle rolling hills of the Delaware Piedmont, experiencing their native plant gardens and scenic trails. Their one-hour tours not only reinspire our appreciation for natural beauty, but they allow us to learn more about native planting and conservation at the same time.

What to look for: General admission tickets free for young children, and are between \$8-15 for the rest of us. Add a 1 hour tour for only \$3 extra, or a more in-depth 2 hour tour for \$12-19 each (admission included). Reservations recommended! [Memberships](#) can also be gifted.

Soil Blockers

We all know those people—the ones who pour over the seed catalogs and can be found with a house full of seedling trays and grow lights. Okay, okay... I'm that person. And one of my favorite gifts as a gardener was my soil blocker. Not only does it help me avoid using plastic by eliminating my need for trays, but it allows me to get my hands dirty while the snow is still falling. My plants are robust, and there is never transplant shock because they do not get rootbound. If you know a gardener who loves to experiment, or who has a lot of seeds in their cache, a soil blocker can be the perfect gift! They reduce expense and waste, and the storage is so much more compact than all of those trays.

What to look for: Quality steel. Dibbles for seeds make planting a breeze. A package with multiple sizes allows gardeners to "pot up" their seedlings as they grow before being transplanted outside. And if you really want to be popular, a soil blocking and potting tray makes it much easier.

Moms, dads, and grandparents alike appreciate a thoughtful gift. This list has many options for feeding their gardening habits and their nature-loving souls while avoiding the predictable, cliché rabbit hole we all tend to gravitate towards from time to time. I hope some of these suggestions will allow you and your loved ones to grow together! ♦♦



What is a Master Gardener?

Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners (VCE-MG) are trained volunteer educators who provide the public with environmental information that draws on the horticultural research and experience of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Virginia State University.

Join Us!

[click here to learn more](#)



Master Gardener Volunteer Cynthia Long answering questions about Charlie the snake at the Manassas Farmers Market

photo by Jason Alexander



IN THE COMMUNITY: SATURDAY IN THE GARDEN 2023 SCHEDULE

Classes are held at the Teaching Garden, 9535 Linton Hall Road, Bristow, VA the first Saturday of the Month, unless it's a holiday weekend, April thru October. Classes begin at 9:00 am.

Classes are free, but please [register here](#)

May 6–Turtles and MGPW Spring Plant Sale. Join Animal Education & Rescue Organization (AERO) representatives Olivia LoBalbo and Tanya Finch who will discuss habitat needs of the eastern woodland box turtles and how to support them with plantings & landscaping. May's featured Garden Bed, the Four Season's Bed. **Don't forget to stop by the MGPW Native Plant Sale.**

Jun 3–Women in Agriculture/Horticulture. Stephanie Johnson and Lindsay Kraus, local entrepreneurs of farming/horticulture will discuss their favorite vegetable varieties and provide tips for warm weather gardening. This month's featured Garden Bed is the Herb Bed.

Jul 8–All About Bats in Prince William County. Chandini Montgomery of PW Parks and Recreation will talk about the essential role bats play in pest management and agriculture production. Spend the morning looking for signs of bats in our local landscape, learn about species commonly found in Prince William County, and explore ways to conserve bats. This month's featured Garden Bed is the Drought Tolerant and Rock Bed.

Aug 5–Groundcover Lawn Alternatives. We'll explore groundcovers suitable for shady and sunny areas of your property with Master Gardener Yvonne Reid. This month's featured Garden Bed is three beds: the Red, White & Blue Bed, the Pink & Blue Bed, and Mailbox Bed.

Sept 9–Cover Crops/Installing a Meadow. VCE Extension Agent Thomas Bolles, will discuss how using cover crops can invigorate and improve the health of your soil. Then we'll take a walk to "The Meadow" where Master Gardeners, Linda Gulden and Greg Evans will explain the process of installing a meadow. Before you leave, stop by the **MGPW Fall Native Plant Sale.**

Oct 7–Identifying and Removing Invasives. Natali Walker, Invasive Management Specialist at Blue Ridge Prism will show us how to identify and remove invasive plant species from our landscape. October's featured Garden Bed is the Scented/Native Bed. ♦♦♦



[Plant NOVA Natives](#) is the joint marketing campaign of a grand coalition of non-profit, governmental, and private groups, all working to reverse the decline of native plants and wildlife in Northern Virginia.

Our strategy is to encourage residents as well as public and commercial entities to install native plants as the first step toward creating wildlife habitat and functioning ecosystems on their own properties.

All are welcome to participate in this collective action movement!



[Plant NOVA Trees](#) is a focused drive by the Plant NOVA Natives campaign to increase the native tree canopy in Northern Virginia. The drive launched in September 2021 and continues through the fall of 2026.



shrubby St. John's Wort (*Hypericum prolificum*)

PLANT NOVA NATIVES: WANT BIRDS AND BUTTERFLIES? PLANT NATIVE SHRUBS!

reprinted with encouragement from [PLANTNOVANATIVES, March 15, 2023](#); thanks to Leslie Paulson, Master Gardener Volunteer

When it comes to the curb appeal of our houses and other buildings, the difference between starkly naked and softly clothed is the shrubs. What is a shrub, anyway? According to famous bird expert David Allen Sibley, "If you can walk under it, it's a tree; if you have to walk around it, it's a shrub." Other than being multi-stemmed and relatively short, a shrub is pretty much the same as a tree and therefore provides the same environmental benefits, albeit to a smaller degree. And the difference between a native shrub and a non-native one is that the former will not only beautify a property but will turn it into a living landscape that supports the butterflies and birds.

Many people are looking at their yards and at public land and realizing that a lot of the space is being wasted. Turf grass has its advantages for certain purposes, such as providing a place to walk or play sports, but as a non-native plant, it does nothing for the ecosystem and requires a lot of input to maintain. Chipping away at the lawn with native shrubs can quickly cover the ground at a very low cost. Beyond the initial watering to get them established, they will require little or no maintenance from then on.

For small spaces, there are some native shrubs that naturally stay short, such as Shrubby Saint John's Wort (*Hypericum prolificum*) with its bright yellow flowers. There are also smaller cultivars of larger shrubs, such as Winterberry Holly (*Ilex verticillata*) with its red berries that persist into January until they finally soften up and become a food source for hungry birds. If you use shrubs whose ultimate height fits the space you have in mind, the yearly shearing task will be eliminated. These and many other native shrubs are described on the [Plant NOVA Natives website](#), which also points to places to buy them.

Some native shrubs grow tall enough to provide shade and can be an alternative to a small flowering tree. Common Witch-hazel is an example of that. The twigs have been used for divining rods, and the leaves get cute bumps in the shape of a witch's hat. This native shrub is also magical for the flowers that are revealed in November after the leaves have fallen off. Those bumps, by the way, are caused by the reaction of the plant to a chemical injected by a tiny insect, the Witch-hazel Cone Gall Aphid. The cone-shaped bumps provide food and shelter to the female aphids as they lay their eggs.

Native shrubs can fill in the spaces between trees. From an environmental perspective, this arrangement is ideal, providing shelter and food at multiple heights, something we have lost in many of our woods to excessive browsing by deer. (In fact, although "Nature's first green is gold," if you look into the woods of Northern Virginia right now, there is a suspicious amount of green, much of which is due to invasive species such as Multiflora Rose and Asian Bush Honeysuckle. The leaves of invasive plants often emerge earlier and persist later than those of our native shrubs.) In our own yards, we can take steps to protect plants from deer and to swap out invasive shrubs for native ones and thus help support our local ecosystem.

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) is collecting data on how many trees are planted in Northern Virginia as it works toward the goal of 600,000 by 2025. For this purpose, shrubs count as trees, so VDOF is encouraging everyone to report plantings of both. A reporting form can be found on the [Plant NOVA Trees website](#). ♦♦♦

CONSERVATION AT HOME: HEALTHY SOIL IN THE HOME GARDEN

by Lindsay Kraus, Master Gardener Volunteer

When we hear the babble of our favorite birds and insects in our gardens, when we see the floriferous landscape dancing in the afternoon breeze, and when we smell the earthy richness of the soil as our trowels explore the future homes of our favorite vegetables—that’s our ecosystem telling us that we’re doing something right. But what’s not so obvious is what is happening beneath our garden shoes; that teeming mosaic of complex life below the soil line that makes our gardens possible. It’s our soil that regulates where our water goes and how productive our plants are. It filters and buffers pollutants and cycles nutrients. It provides stability and support for our plants and provides a place for decaying organisms to live on. But if we do not take the steps to conserve our soil and all that lives within it, our ecosystems cannot thrive. That’s something we can do something about right now, in our own homes.

There are so many ways we can start (or continue!) conservation at home by building healthy soil:

“Together we can improve wildlife and pollinator habitats through conservation efforts at home.”

Leave it alone. When we till or disrupt the soil, we break apart soil structure and the networks within it. Excess air is introduced, causing more water to evaporate and killing microbes that provide nutrients.

Add organic matter. Amending your soil with things that were once living, like compost, leaf mold (composted leaves), aged manure, grass clippings, etc. will feed the Soil Food Web. It also helps with drainage.

Ditch the plastic. Plastic mulch and landscape fabric reduces air flow and limits water intake in the soil. Organic mulches like shredded hardwood, pine bark, grass clippings, fallen leaves, cover crops, or even previous crops make an excellent replacement—and they’ll feed your soil!

Avoid bare soil. Plant roots are an essential component of life in the Soil Food Web. Keep an area planted whenever possible. Use cover crops, or even leave the roots of a plant you’ve cut down. Not only does it support life, but those roots will provide channels for water to flow through, reducing runoff and helping with drainage. Mulch what you can’t leave planted.

Stop spoon-feeding. Your plants and the soil are in a symbiotic relationship; when we feed them with instantly available nutrients, your plants will not attract the microbes that produce the nutrients they need. The soil in that area will eventually die, and you’ll be left to be dependent on external fertilizers. Keep feeding your soil with organic material, and

(continued in column at right)

(continued from Conservation at Home: Healthy Soil in the Home Garden)

the soil will feed your plants for you.

Celebrate diversity. Planting a variety of plants in a single area helps build vibrant ecosystems above and below the soil. Different plants bring different nutrients down into the soil for exchange with microbes.

Test your soil. Doctors don’t treat patients without a

diagnosis. If we experience a problem with our plants, we should determine the cause before applying fertilizers and pesticides that end up in our runoff. A [soil test](#) can let you know if the problem is a nutrient deficiency first, and how to address it safely.

Replace your lawn. Not all of it. Just the parts you don’t use! Replacing our monocultures of grass with a diversity of native plants helps increase biodiversity and soil health while reducing erosion and runoff. Plus, it’s very beautiful.

A healthy ecosystem stems from healthy soil. As home gardeners, we can minimize soil disturbance and synthetic amendments while maximizing biodiversity, soil coverage, and living roots on our properties. Together we can improve wildlife and pollinator habitats through conservation efforts at home. It all starts with us! ♦♦♦



Prince William has a core group of trained Master Gardeners in the [Audubon at Home program](#) who have certified over 100 homes. To make more land in Prince William County wildlife-friendly, start to certify your property today! If you are ready to make your backyard or community space more environmentally friendly, give us a call at 703-792-7747 or email master_gardener@pwcgov.org.

CRITTER NEIGHBORS:
ASSASSIN BUG (*PSELLIOPUS CINCTUS*)

by Jason Alexander, Master Gardener Volunteer

Pseliopus cinctus, a beneficial “true bug” in the order hemiptera, is found throughout most of the United States and Mexico and is common in Virginia. With its distinctive black and white striped legs adults only grow to about half an inch in length and feed on a variety of pest insects. Any gardener should be happy to find them in the garden. ♦♦♦



photos by Jason Alexander

Source:
[Insect Identification for the casual observer](#)

Master Gardeners Prince William

Master Gardeners of Prince William (MGPW) is the supportive organization for active Master Gardener Volunteers in Prince William County, Manassas City and Manassas Park. There are approximately 200 active volunteer environmental educators serving in various capacities.

Volunteers and volunteerism are central to the MGPW mission as we strive to make our community a more sustainable, healthy and beautiful place to live and to educate residents about the many benefits of gardening, including the opportunity to grow nutritious, healthy food, environmentally friendly landscapes, all with the ultimate goal of protecting water quality in local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

FREE CLASSES / HELPDESK

CLASSES Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) hosts classes via zoom Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. to Noon, and in person at the Teaching Garden.

For a schedule of classes, and to register, click: [Prince William County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Classes](#).

If you would like to receive alert notifications about our programs and classes go to: www.pwcgov.org/pwcan

- Select “Stay Informed” PWC Alerts icon
- Sign up for **PWC Alerts**.
- Create your profile
- To receive notifications on our classes select “**Community Information**”

QUESTIONS? VCE Staff and Master Gardener Volunteers are working to answer your lawn and garden questions. Please contact the Horticulture Helpdesk by emailing mastergardener@pwcgov.org or call 703-792-7747.

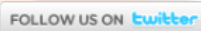
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(click to learn more)*



Master Gardeners Prince William

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-Send submissions, questions, or comments to

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