

In Season with MGPW

the quarterly of the
Master Gardeners
Prince William

Fall 2023

Ginkgo Grove at Blandy Experimental Farm
(*Ginkgo biloba*)
photo by Jason Alexander

Fall

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Another busy summer for the Prince William Master Gardeners is winding down. I want to recognize and thank all the Master Gardeners that put in hundreds of hours already this year serving our community, teaching neighbors about environmental sustainability, and promoting healthy ecosystems. Your knowledge about plants, bugs, and nature overall is impressive and invaluable to Prince William County. By imparting your knowledge and fostering a sense of responsibility towards the environment, you are empowering Prince William residents to make informed choices that benefit our entire planet. As our volunteer demands slow down into the fall, please take time to reflect on the remarkable results our organization has been able to achieve this past year. On behalf of the community, I thank you.

Garden On!!

-Janene Cullen, PhD
President, Master Gardeners Prince William

ATTENTION MASTER GARDENERS: TEACHING GARDEN OCTOBER DATES

Saturday, October 21st at 1:30 p.m., Tree ID: 2024 MG Interns will have Tree ID with Julie Flanagan, our County Arborist. If possible, it would be nice to have the bed leaders out to meet the interns as well. We will give more information as the date approaches.

Wednesday, October 25th at 6:30p.m., TGBEES Meeting: Please save the date. All bed leaders need to send me their 2024 budget by October 25th. All are invited, if you wish to attend.

Saturday, October 28th, Last Workday: This will be the last Saturday workday of the season. Interns, please take note, and plan to attend if you need workday hours.

Thank you,
Leslie Paulson, Master Gardener Volunteer ♦♦♦



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TOPICS OF INTEREST

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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.

LAWN: FALL CARE



excerpted from Fall Lawn Care, Virginia Cooperative Extension pub. 430-520, This publication discusses the basics of watering lawn.

- ◇ The first step toward correcting an existing problem lawn or establishing new turf is to test your soil.
- ◇ For Cool Season Grass (tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, fine leaf fescues, and perennial ryegrass)
 - ◇ Late summer to mid-fall is the best time to establish cool-season turfgrass. Warm days and cool nights provide ideal conditions for seed germination and establishment.
 - ◇ When seeding in late summer or fall, the major weed problems consist of annual bluegrass and winter annual broadleaf weeds. By promoting a rapid establishment of seeded turfgrass, you can avoid most weed pitfalls.
- ◇ Diseases and insects are typically of limited importance during the fall. A contributing factor to some fall diseases is an excessive thatch layer, especially on a grass with a lot of stems like Kentucky bluegrass
- ◇ For Warm Season Grass (bermudagrass and zoysiagrass)
 - ◇ Warm-season turfgrasses will go dormant after the first killing frost.
 - ◇ There are more pre-emergence weed-control options for dormant, non-overseeded warm-season turfgrasses than for cool-season turf because warm-season grasses should not be planted in the fall (unless one is installing sod in early to mid-fall).
 - ◇ Fall is too late in the growing season to safely aerify or vertical mow warm-season turfgrasses. .

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

PRIZED PLANTS: DAHLIAS

by Maria Stewart, Master Gardener Volunteer

With so many beautiful varieties and colors, you're sure to find a dahlia to suit your taste. Include some in your fall garden to compliment fall foliage. A spectacular display will reward your efforts!

Dahlias thrive in the sun. Make sure they get plenty—at least a half day of direct sunlight is best. They prefer crumbly, loose soil that holds moisture and provides aeration. Incorporating organic matter can help give them what they like.

Since Dahlias are mostly water, plan to water well during dry periods.

To encourage the best blooms, gather your nerve and pinch off some of the flower and growth buds on each stem. It may help to remember that Dahlias produce more flowers than the plant can sustain. So, "disbudding" will really help the plant.

For more information on dahlias see: [University of Georgia Extension](#). ◇◇



Dahlia (*Dahlia*)
University of Georgia Extension



[photos from Historic Manassas, click for full post](#)

GARDEN TO TABLE: RON TAYLOR, MARKET MASTER, MANASSAS FARMERS MARKET—THE BEST!

by Maria Stewart, Master Gardener Volunteer

If you've ever joined us at the *Ask a Master Gardener Booth* at the Saturday Manassas Farmers Market, you've likely met Ron Taylor, the Market Master. And if he wasn't standing still long enough for you to meet him, you've undoubtedly seen him moving through the crowd of vendors and visitors, helping, organizing, and troubleshooting while never missing an opportunity to share his positive spirit and warm smile.

Ron is the best. He was instrumental in creating the amazing and well-loved market that we all enjoy. Sadly, he's moving on to pursue other opportunities. We will miss him at the market, but hope to see him around town. Best wishes to Ron Taylor!

Historic Manassas posted a wonderful article praising Ron and all his accomplishments - definitely worth a read: [A Decade of Dedication to the Manassas Farmers Market](#). ♦♦♦



RECIPE

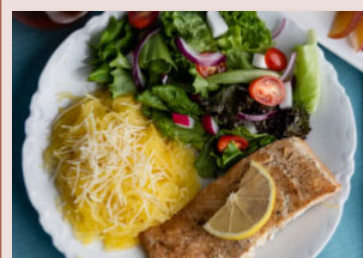
Spaghetti Squash

INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium spaghetti squash (3-4 pounds)
- 1/2 cup water
- Optional: 1 tablespoon butter or oil (canola, olive, or vegetable), 1 teaspoon garlic powder, Parmesan cheese, pasta sauce

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1) Preheat oven to 400°F.
- 2) Wash spaghetti squash and pat dry.
- 3) Pierce the squash several times with a sharp knife. Place on a microwave safe plate or dish.
- 4) Microwave the squash on high for 6-8 minutes. Allow it to cool enough to be touched.
- 5) Cut off the top inch of the squash including the stem.
- 6) Cut the squash in half lengthwise. Scoop out the seeds and throw away.
- 7) Place the squash halves cut side down in a baking dish. Pour in water.
- 8) Bake for 30 minutes. Pierce squash skin with a fork. It is done if the fork easily pierces the squash. If not, bake an additional 10-15 minutes until tender.
- 9) Turn the squash cut side up. Use a fork to pull the squash "noodles" from the skin.
- 10) Toss with butter or oil and garlic powder if desired. Top with Parmesan cheese or pasta sauce.



source: [Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#)



The National Botanic Garden; photo by Jamie Nick and Linda Catir

OUT AND ABOUT: THE NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDEN

by Jamie Nick, Master Gardener Volunteer

Located at 26320 Ticonderoga Road, Chantilly, Virginia, this unique garden is on Peter Knop's private land. Although the Knop's would like to open their garden to the general public, for now, with advanced arrangements, the Knops are able to welcome groups including children and garden lovers.

The Knops have transformed what was once cornfields and cattle pastures into a mountain area with views of the Blue Ridge featuring fig plants, banana trees, and swaths of winter jasmine, to a lowland area with bald cypress trees, and lakes. The garden supports a variety of wildlife including bald eagles, cormorants, and great blue herons.

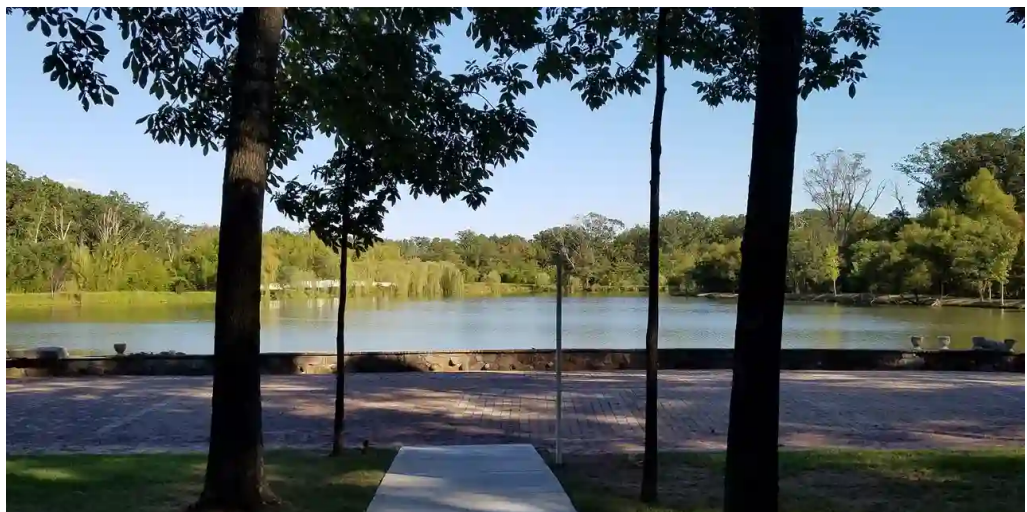
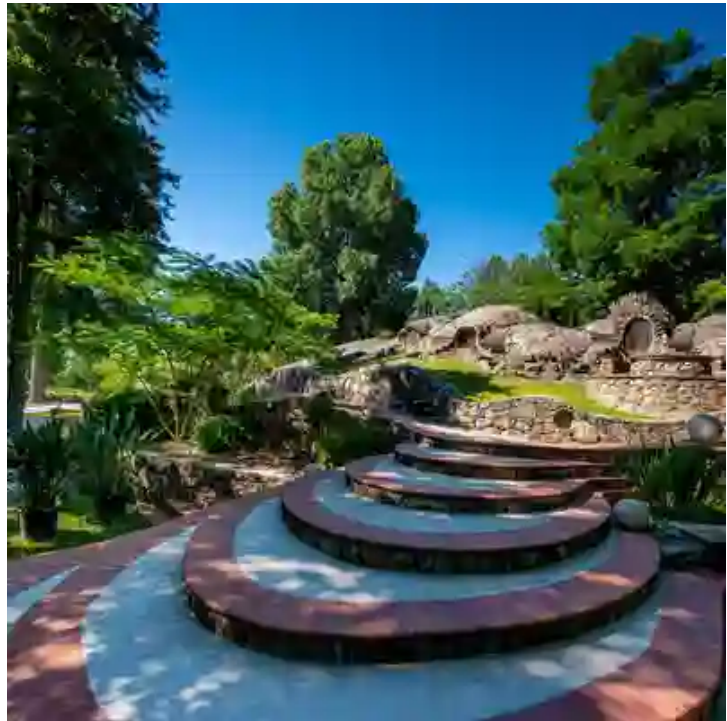
Del. Suhas Subramanyam, who represents Virginia's 87th House of Delegates District, sponsored a resolution this past spring that commended the Knops' "desire to develop a great American garden that could be used for the education and enjoyment of Americans and to demonstrate unique and modern agricultural practices to other countries." ♦♦♦

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!





quaking aspens (*Populus tremuloides*), Leadville, CO; photo by Jason Alexander, Master Gardener Volunteer

INSIGHTS: FOREST FIRES, HOW PLANTS DEAL WITH THEM

by Abbie & Vincent Panetti, Master Gardener Volunteers

We are seeing, more and more, the effects of a warming climate: droughts or flooding and wildfires in forests, particularly in the western United States but also, this year, in eastern Canada where we've seen in our darkened sky a ghostly haze from the intense firestorms raging out of control and expected to continue their destruction throughout the rest of the summer.

When firestorms are this intense and uncontrolled, they cause great damage to the areas affected. Local wildlife are killed, including birds or insects already facing the prospect of becoming extinct. Sometimes populations of animals are wiped out. The ground under the trees is laid bare and, when rain comes, the ground is eroded and plant populations, sometimes rare forms, are destroyed. Gullies form since the ground is not held by the roots of the trees, bushes and grasses that had lived there. Creeks and wetlands may be overcome with sediment. When forest areas are unprotected and destroyed, non-native animals and plants may invade and take over, and out-compete native species.

When the flames die out and the damage has been done, there follows a progression of plants that grow on such disturbed ground starting with weeds, wildflowers and other ephemerals which are quick to take root, grow and produce crops of seeds. When they encounter drought conditions, their only hope of surviving is in the seeds they produce which will replenish the areas only when rains come again.

Grasses are able to move in next because they can handle the dry spells of summer. When there are extended droughts, the root systems of grasses go dormant and the wildflowers can't compete. Gradually, with each succeeding dry spell, the grasses take over more and more territory from the ephemerals.

Pioneer trees take over next and may consist of such trees as red cedar, alder, black locust, most pines and larches, yellow poplar and aspen. They are described as "scrubby" (covered with or consisting of scrub or underbrush), and are notable for being able to survive at reduced sizes

J Schwanke's Life In Bloom

*learn how to bring the
beauty of flowers into
your surroundings*



J. Schwanke not only creates imaginative arrangements, he shares flower crafts, recipes, and cocktails featuring blooms.

[available on PBS](#)

Insights: Forest Fires, How Plants Deal With Them

Sources & For More Information

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Plants that benefit from fire

<https://www.britannica.com/list/5-amazing-adaptations-of-pyrophytic-plants>

Britannica, Playing with Wildfire: 5 Amazing Adaptations of Pyrophytic Plants

Written by Melissa Petruzzello, Associate Editor of Plant and Environmental Science

<https://news.mongabay.com/2020/09/when-the-amazon-burns-what-happens-to-its-biodiversity/>

Mongabay is a conservation news web portal that reports on environmental science, energy, and green design, and features extensive information on tropical rainforests, including pictures and deforestation statistics for countries of the Amazon; As the Amazon burns, what happens to its biodiversity?
by Liz Kimbrough on 24 September 2020

<https://www.britannica.com/science/rainforest>

Britannica, rainforest
This article was most recently revised and updated by Adam Augustyn.

and to mature under harsh conditions in arid soil and with little nutrient.

As the pioneer trees become dominant, they gradually provide a thick canopy with enough shade to crowd out the grasses that were dominant before.

This pioneer forest will survive for many years, laying down a thick layer of needles or leaf mulch which, after many years will become soil. After perhaps forty years of this, there should be a layer of topsoil under the mulch layer. The topsoil, protected from the sun, will be shaded and cool and humidity will return to the environment.

When this forest has attained a steady state which is hospitable to the growth of taller trees and vines, the area is becoming a mature forest, or "climax" forest. The taller trees thrive in the better soil, greater humidity and cooler conditions the scrub trees made possible and eventually they shade out the scrub trees.

Since the early 1900s, people have been suppressing uncontrolled wildfires because of the harm they have done to their surroundings. However, ecologists and land managers have begun to realize that fire is important in helping various trees and bushes to release their seeds to germinate and produce future generations of plants.

Various animals benefit from small fires as well. Surprisingly, some trees or bushes need fire for their seeds to germinate. The chemical signals from smoke and burnt plants also help other plants, including shrubs and annual plants, to break dormancy. Plants thus adjusted to the conditions of low-intensity fires may ripen and then stay buried in the area until a wildfire gives the signal for them to germinate.

"Pyrophytes" is a term for plants which have adapted to tolerate fire, or in some cases to actually directly benefit from it. Fire acts favorably for some species. "Passive pyrophytes" resist the effects of fire, particularly when it passes over quickly, and hence can out-compete less resistant plants, which are damaged. "Active pyrophytes" have a similar competing advantage to passive pyrophytes, but they also contain volatile oils and hence encourage the incidence of fires which are beneficial to them. "Pyrophile" plants are plants which require fire in order to complete their cycle of reproduction. (Wikipedia)

Prescribed burns have become an important tool in suppressing large fires. When smaller fires occurred in forests, firefighters used to suppress them if at all possible. This allowed flammable materials to accumulate, insects infested in greater numbers, the forest became more crowded with trees and underbrush and invasive plant species were able to move in.

When smaller fires occur, they heat the soil and melt the resin off seeds in certain pine cones, allowing the seeds to be released to germinate. A thick understory can be cleared by a passing fire which reduces the competition for seedlings. Various plants sustain new growth after a fire event which provides food for many animals. When trees or logs are hollowed out by fire, animals can use those cavities for nesting and shelter.

The pattern of renewal may be different for different ecosystems and is called a "fire regime." Fire regimes consider fire frequency, fire intensity and patterns of fuel consumption among other things. Plants and animals adapt to adjust to their regions and many come to depend on fire to survive. Trees with thick bark can survive low-intensity fires because a thick bark does not catch fire or burn easily and the bark protects the inner layer of the tree that transports water up to the

[https://
www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/fire/plants-animals-fire](https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/fire/plants-animals-fire)

How fire affects plants and animals

[https://
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Issue: Summer/Fall 2017
Luba Mullen

[https://
www.frontlinewildfire.com/wildfire-news-and-resources/how-forest-recovers-wildfire/](https://www.frontlinewildfire.com/wildfire-news-and-resources/how-forest-recovers-wildfire/)

Frontline Fire Defense
Forest After Fire: The Forest's Restoration & Regrowth After Wildfire
By Frontline Wildfire Defense

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/fire/after-fire>

USDA Forest Service U.S. Department of Agriculture
After the Fire

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/prescribed-fire>

USDA Forest Service US Department of Agriculture
The Prescribed Fire Strategy

branches and food down to the roots.

Some plants, with extensive root systems, are able to re-sprout after being burned. The roots have a supply of nutrient to support the dormant buds held underground and such trees and bushes are able to come back quickly after a fire.

In some trees, the crown is held high above the ground and there are few lower branches. In most low-intensity fires, the leaves and growth tissues of these trees are held high enough that the tree may live through a low intensity fire with only minor charring to its trunk.

In areas with hot and frequent fires, the seeds of some pines are literally "glued" together with a glutinous resin. They may ripen and sit waiting in their pine cones until a fire melts the resin and the seeds are released. Some plants need fire to open their seeds for development.

These fire regimes have developed to serve the biota in a certain area and, should the conditions not be present, local trees and plants of various kinds can't reproduce and the health of the forest is badly affected. Unnaturally severe fires can destroy forests, however, even those adapted to fire.

Thankfully, land managers have begun to recognize the value of controlled fires in areas where, in nature, they had provided the means for small fires to develop to help trees and bushes that need fires to make the release of their seeds possible.

Controlled burns seek to accomplish the benefits that regular fires historically provided to an environment while also preventing the fires from burning out of control and threatening life and property. Burns are planned for times – often in winter – when the fire will not endanger the public or the fire crews doing the burn. Forest and weather conditions are carefully considered before the plan is accepted. Thick undergrowth which includes dead grass, fallen tree branches and dead trees are the usual ingredients in such a burn.

The use of controlled, or prescribed, burning has become a very important part of fire management strategy along with mechanical hazard reduction and bush fire suppression operations and, most importantly, the preservation of life and property. The possible effects on surrounding territory, on native vegetation and wildlife, and environmental impact are carefully considered before doing such a burn.

Having said all that, it must be remembered that things don't always go as planned. A headline in USA Today for May 29, 2022 announced that a "Planned burn by US Forest Service caused largest wildfire in New Mexico history."

The fire was caused by two "controlled" burns that got out of control. According to the USA Today report,

The two fires east of Santa Fe joined in April to form the massive blaze at the southern tip of the Rocky Mountains, in the Sangre de Cristo range. One of the fires was previously traced to April 6, when a planned burn, set by firefighters to clear out small trees and brush, was declared out of control.

On Friday, investigators said they had tracked the source of the second fire to the remnants of a planned winter fire that lay dormant through several snowstorms only to flare up again last month.

This fire is an exception to the usual result which is a planned burn that achieves its results. Programmed fires have been very successful in

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/05/29/us-forest-service-new-mexico-wildfire-planned-burn/9990084002/>

USA Today
Planned burn by US Forest Service caused largest wildfire in New Mexico history
Morgan Lee and Cedar Attanasio
Associated Press / Report For America, 5/29/2022

<https://www.southtahoenow.com/story/06/20/2023/500-acre-prescribed-burn-planned-tahoe-national-forest>

SouthTakoe NOW.com
500 acre prescribed burn planned in Tahoe National Forest
Submitted by paula on Wed, 06/21/2023 – 6:01am

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/after-the-fire-how-a-sustainable-ranch-survived-a-natural-wildfire/>

The Cornell Lab. All about Birds
After the Fire: How A Sustainable Ranch Survived a Natural Wildfire

helping to prevent destructive wildfires. They burn dead leaves, tree limbs and other debris and in so doing, they return nutrients to the soil in the ashes of vegetation where it might take years for these elements to decompose. A prescribed fire opens up spaces in the forest to sunlight helping the new, young trees and other plants to grow.

There is one type of forest where fire does not aid the growth of existing plant and animal inhabitants and that is rain forest, usually found in tropical areas around the equator. The inhabitants of rain forests are unprepared for fire because a rain forest is just that: rainy. They are generally located where the annual amount of precipitation will likely be more than 70 inches per year and the climate is hot and steamy. The plant and animal inhabitants are acclimated to living in these conditions and have not needed to develop coping measures to survive the effects of fire or for it to be essential to the release of seeds.

Liz Kimbrough, writing for Mongabay.com, a conservation news web portal that features, among other issues, extensive information on tropical rain forests, wrote on September 24, 2020: *More than 40% of fires in the Brazilian Amazon this year are burning in standing forests, with more than 4.6 million acres already impacted this year.*

Since these plants are unprepared to deal with fire and haven't developed any way to resist its effects, a fire burning through a rain forest for the first time, "kills most small trees and seedlings and can kill 50% of large trees. Animal life, such as *Dung beetles, butterflies, specialist forest ant species, other invertebrates, some birds, small mammals, and snakes*, also unprepared for fire, suffer.

The Amazon harbors 10% of the world's diversity. Continuing burning of rain forests reduces biodiversity and, when burned, these forests will take hundreds of years to recover.

Centuries of evolution have caused the development of plants and animals who have developed the ability to survive in the areas where they live but now may be changing in a way that they were not prepared for. Because of this, all of us, in every way we can, need to nurture the land around us and to support others, particularly the Forest Service and the fire managers who work to keep our forests safe and well. ♦♦♦

Too many veggies?

Find a local food party that would love to share your gardening success with those who would otherwise go without healthy, fresh produce



[AmpleHarvest.org](https://www.ampleharvest.org)



Janene Cullen, President, MGPW, presents grant to St. Nicholas Director Maria Murray, teacher Bonnie McKernan, and students; photo courtesy of Bonnie McKernan

PRINCE WILLIAM MASTER GARDENERS COMMUNITY GARDEN GRANT: ST. NICHOLAS ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

As part of the Master Gardener’s commitment to provide environmental educational programs for Prince William County residents – the Master Gardeners award an annual Community Garden Grant. This grant provides matching funds for a non-profit organization to help them establish a native or vegetable garden in their community.

The winner of the 2023 Community Garden Grant is the St. Nicholas Academic Community in Manassas. St. Nicholas will be establishing a garden so their students can learn about nature, science, native plants, and bugs. Janene Cullen, President of Master Gardeners Prince William, and Elesha Young, VCE Outreach Specialist, presented St. Nicholas Director Maria Murray, and teacher Bonnie McKernan with the Community Garden Grant award check on September 7th.

Master Gardener Volunteer Krissy Aussems will be working with St. Nicholas Academy for the next year to answer any questions the teachers have and to ensure their community garden is a success. Bonnie McKernan said “Our students are excited to get back to school and begin planning some gardens and grounds projects. We’re hopeful to plan a field trip sometime this year to visit the teaching garden for ideas!” ♦♦♦



*Inspiring Personal
Responsibility for our
Environment and Natural
Resources.*

The Prince William Soil and Water Conservation District (PWSWCD or District) is focused on protecting and enhancing our water and soil resources by providing leadership in the conservation of soil, water, and related resources to all Prince William County citizens through technical assistance, information, and education.

Services focus on:

- Agriculture**
- Youth Education**
- Water Quality**
- Home Owners**

[Learn more](#)

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



look for the red **Northern Virginia Native** tag when shopping for plants

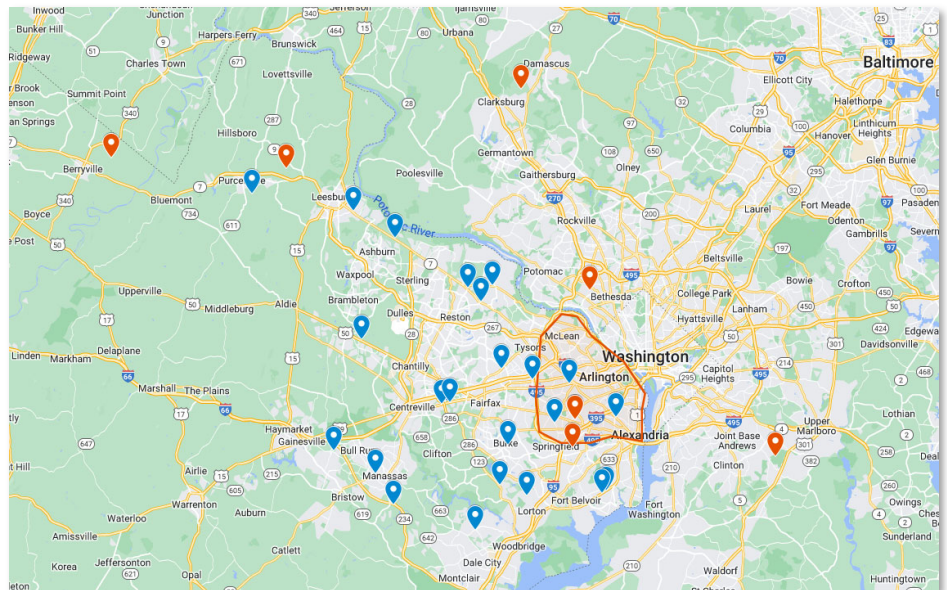
IN THE COMMUNITY: NORTHERN VIRGINIA NATIVE

by Maria Stewart, Master Gardener Volunteer

Volunteers with Plant NOVA Natives, including many Master Gardeners, have been hard at work, quietly making it easier for everyone to make the best plant choices when shopping for plants. Not sure what to get to help your landscape and our ecosystem? Just look for the red **Northern Virginia Native** sticker, and you can't go wrong. What could be easier than that?



There's a long list of participating garden centers and nurseries including Merrifield, Meadows Farms, Southern States - and so many others, as highlighted on the map below. See the full list with details at [Plant NOVA Natives](#). ♦♦♦





MASTER GARDENER COLLEGE 2024: A ZOOM EVENT

courtesy of Leslie Paulson, Master Gardener Volunteer

The State EMG Program Office and Master Gardener College Advisory Team have started planning for 2024's conference. While we look forward to future in-person EMGC (pictured is 2023 in Blacksburg), the upcoming virtual format will allow more volunteers across the state to participate in this educational event. If this is what you've asked for, now is the time to seize the opportunity to join us! With continued access to recorded sessions even after the conference ends, you can listen again to great speakers or enjoy other breakouts you couldn't attend live.

The dates are June 5th through 9th, 2024, and will be here before we know it, and we need your help! **What speakers would you love to hear? What topics interest you most? Have you heard a great speaker that others would enjoy?** With Zoom, speakers can join us from any part of the country. Share your ideas with us at this survey link provided by the State EMG Program Office: <https://forms.gle/H1cK3UJdgDkbbBNSq>

Thank you for responding. With your help, we can create a schedule that has something for everyone. In addition to speakers and topics that interest you, we're planning networking and social sessions, including some possible regional events and tours (pictured is 2019's Norfolk Botanical Garden tour), to give you a chance to meet new volunteers and old friends online and to even meet up in person if you choose. We hope you'll join us! More information coming this fall.

Be advised, if the link doesn't work, please send your suggestions to [Devon Johnson](#) by clicking here.◇◇◇

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](#)





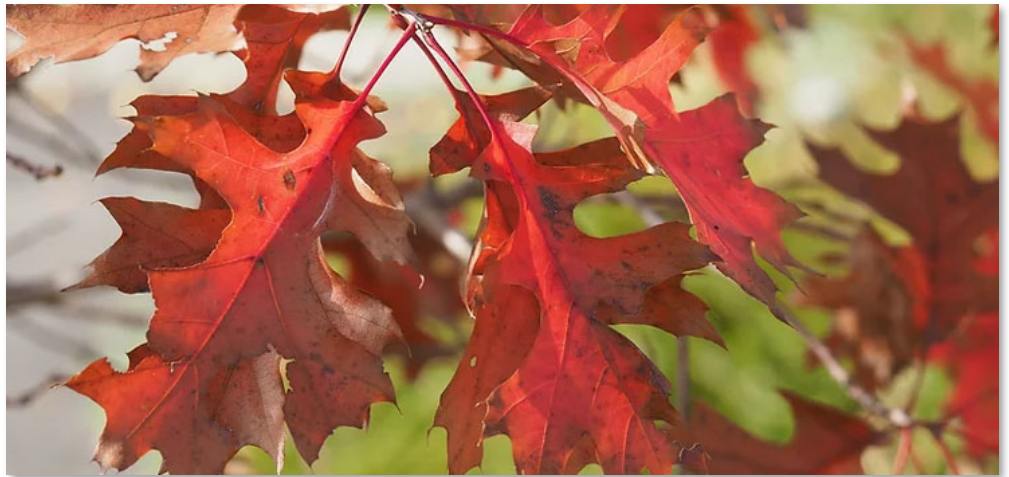
Plant NOVA Natives is the joint marketing campaign of a grand coalition of non-profit, governmental, and private groups, all working to reverse the decline of native plants and wildlife in Northern Virginia.

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.



PLANT NOVA NATIVES: FALL CLEANUP IN TWO EASY STEPS

reprinted with encouragement from [PLANTNOVANATIVES, October 11, 2023](#); thanks to Leslie Paulson, Master Gardener Volunteer

Here is an executive summary of eco-friendly yard maintenance recommendations for fall.

1. Watch the pretty leaves flutter down from above.
2. Do as little as possible to disturb those leaves or the flower stalks.

In the days when gardening meant growing food for the table, cleaning out plant debris before winter was a routine practice to reduce the spread of diseases that affect vegetables. That routine carried over when suburbanites switched their yards to ornamental plants and turf grass, with the unfortunate consequence that we deprived our non-human neighbors of the shelter and food they need to survive. The tide is turning, though, as people are realizing that attractive gardens that support the ecosystem do better when their caretakers go easy on the autumn chores.

Some birds and nocturnal mammals are able to dig for grubs in a lawn, but you may have noticed that most friendly critters such as box turtles, frogs, and katydids do not spend a lot of time frolicking on your turf grass. It would leave them much too exposed, not to mention starving. Layers of leaves from native trees and shrubs, by contrast, provide a smorgasbord for them. Some of their meals consist of the caterpillars and other insects that feed on the leaves of native trees in spring and summer until they float down to the ground in the fall. Those that escape predation turn into adults the next spring and start the cycle over. Other insects such as fireflies spend their entire lives in the leaf litter, coming out briefly to find mates. All this assumes that their homes are not chopped up or raked up to be sent off to mulch factories.

Similarly, dead stalks provide shelter for many little critters, including certain species of native bees that burrow into the ends of broken stalks to lay their eggs. Plants left intact enliven our yards all winter with their interesting seed heads and waving stems, made even more lively as the songbirds perch on the stalks and scabble in the leaves for the seeds of flowers and grasses.

As the plants emerge again in the spring, they have no trouble pushing past the dead leaves, which act as a natural mulch until they gradually decompose and feed the soil. Many of the dead flower stalks will have fallen down by spring, and those remaining are quickly hidden from sight by the growing plants. If those plants are native to our ecosystem, they continue to provide benefits the rest of the year by nourishing the caterpillars and providing nectar and pollen for the pollinators. Some of the thicker leaves such as oaks may smother turf grass under the trees, but that is just as well, since mowing around trees risks injuries to their bark, and walking under them compacts the soil and stresses the roots. Trees do best when their leaves are left in place out to the drip line. Mulching fallen leaves with the mower blade is better than sending them off in a truck or dumping smothering piles in the woods, but it may chop up the insect larvae and eggs.

Simple adjustments such as these to our landscaping practices will greatly improve the prospects of our local ecosystem. Other important steps to take include adding native plants, removing invasive non-native plants, minimizing the use of outdoor lighting, and eliminating mosquito spraying with its lethal consequences to the living world. Learn more on the [Plant NOVA Natives website](#). ♦♦♦

CRITTER NEIGHBORS: THE BIG BROWN BAT (*EPTESICUS FUCUS*)

by Jason Alexander, Master Gardener Volunteer

Despite its name, the Big Brown Bat is very small. Weighing only 1/2 to 3/4 of an ounce, its wings can stretch open 13 to 16 inches. They can be found from northern Canada to the southern tip of Mexico. With a preference for beetles, they consume a wide variety of crop pests and other night flying insects. Pups are born in May and June and are reared by their mother for the first 6-8 weeks of life before they can care for themselves. Big Brown Bats can be found in hibernation through the coldest months, and can live as long as 20 years. ◇◇◇

Sources:

[National Park Service](#)

[State University of New York,
College of Environmental Science
and Forestry](#)

photo by Jason Alexander



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

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

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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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