



**Virginia
Master
Naturalist**
Southwestern Piedmont Chapter

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Chapter Members are encouraged to submit reports of Chapter or State Virginia Master Naturalist events, articles of special interest and photographs for inclusion in *The Vine* newsletter. The Chapter Board reserves the right to select and approve content of the newsletter. Written submissions must be of original composition, and free of copyright infringement. All photographs submitted must be taken by members or trainees in good standing with the Southwestern Piedmont Master Naturalist

Chapter.

President's Message

The strange things we see from the comfort of our homes, simply looking out our windows.

There is a Phoebe who has been hanging around my house for years. The bird often sits on the deck rail and peers in the window. I always thought this was a bit odd. I was down stairs the other day and spied him sitting on a bucket, peering in the sliding glass door with eagle eye. What is with this crazy bird? Then it happened. I almost did not believe it! Then, it happened again. It seems the glass doors and windows are reflective enough to fool the bugs, but not the bird. Every minute or so, a bug would slam into the glass. The bird hops off the bucket, catches the bug on the rebound, returns to the bucket, enjoys the snack, and waits for the next unsuspecting bug. If he sees too much movement inside, he moves to a safer hunting location. What a clever bird!



Kathy Fell, Chapter President

Who hasn't enjoyed one of Kathy's stories of wildlife seen from her windows? You never know if it will be about bears, deer, birds, or whatever else, but it's always amusing!!!!

A message from Lynn:

'Hello all - I hope summer is treating you well. As you noticed, Kathy Fell has taken over my position as President. Due to family health changes, I did not feel I could do a good job as I need to be very flexible with my time and able to leave the area on very short notice. Be assured that Kathy will do a wonderful job. Thank you all for all you do - keep up the great work.'

Lynn Regan



Congratulations:

*Let's recognize our new members for completing the
Spring Basic Training!!!!!!*

A warm welcome to:

Sydney Brown

Amy Farinelli

Michael Haley

Molly Morrison

Eric Tichay

Richard Thompson: Started in 2009 and finished this Spring!!!!

Anyone that knows someone that had previously started in the past, please let them know that they can still come back and finish.

Also, if you know someone in the surrounding areas that doesn't have classes available, please have them contact the website and we may be able to work things out for them.

Library Garden

If you look behind the Martinsville Branch of the Blue Ridge Regional Library, you will find a new habitat demonstration garden where there used to be a lawn. Martinsville Branch Manager, Jim Woods, is looking forward to using the garden as a teaching tool to "make our patrons and guests aware of the wonder just outside the big bay window in the Family Fun Zone ...and encourage inquiry about the plants and animals seen living in our backyard." This new "Secret Garden" is a collaboration between the local Library, the



Southwestern Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program and the Habitat Partners© Program of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF).

The garden includes about two dozen species of colorful native plants such as milkweeds, bee balm, and asters. Species were selected to provide continuous bloom from spring to fall and include all colors of the rainbow. These types of plants attract and provide food for important pollina-

tors such as butterflies, moths and bees. The insects, in turn, will attract many birds that rely on this source of protein to feed their young.

The idea for the garden dates back to September 2012 at the Virginia Master Naturalist state conference. The Library grounds were used as a possible habitat improvement site for a class taught by Carol Heiser, Education Manager and Habitat Education Coordinator at VDGIF. A Chapter member, Jim Tobin, attended that class. This year, he approached the library with a few others from the Chapter to see if we might implement some of the ideas.

VDGIF provided training and technical assistance to the Master Naturalists in the early stages of the project. The garden, designed by Chapter member Kathy Fell, replaces all the grass with a pollinator garden and discovery trail. Storm water run-off and erosion were issues on the site. The central and lower areas of the garden are graded to mimic the function of a rain garden. A true rain garden is sized according to the volume of rain calculated to run off a site during a storm event and is constructed using a special soil mix that helps to quickly absorb the rainwater within a few days. The space at the library was not large enough to accommodate a fully engineered rain garden. Instead, the design includes smaller water retention areas at both the top and the lower part of the garden, to be planted with wet-loving native plant species.

Once the design was completed, construction began. A group of volunteers pruned overgrown shrubs. The City of Martinsville provided a back hoe to dig the lower storm water retention area, fill it with gravel and top it off with soil. The upper garden was graded and the turf removed. Volunteers finished grading by hand, dug the discovery trail and worked in a truck load of compost to improve the soil.

The Habitat Partners© Program purchased over 130 native plants for the space. "Public projects like these are a great way for people to see how easy it is to garden in harmony with nature," says Carol Heiser. "Anytime we replace lawn with a diversity of native plants and use those plants to intercept runoff, we not only improve water quality, but we also help bring the life back to our landscapes. Birds, butterflies, frogs and many other wildlife species all benefit whenever you use these conservation practices."



After planting, the area was mulched and the discovery trail was constructed using crusher run donated by Boxley, landscape fabric donated by Lester Home Center, and pavers donated by Chapter vice president Jessica Driver. Southern States donated some mulch and chapter member Andy Lash donated gravel for the lower retention area and made multiple trips to fetch gravel, compost and mulch. Food Lion donated lunch to keep the volunteers going on one of the longer days. It took ten work days over 3 months to complete the garden and path.

A pair of nesting blue birds watched the progress from an old bird house outside the library window. To finish off the project, the Master Naturalist Chapter will install a new birdhouse in February and include the Library Secret Garden in one of our blue bird monitoring trails. We have also donated a bug hotel to attract beneficial insects to the garden.

The library garden is now certified by the Habitat Partners© Program because it provides food, water and cover for a diversity of wildlife species. To learn more about native plants and how you can improve habitat on your property, visit www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat

Thanks for the help everyone!!!!

Article by: Kathy Fell



Let's Get Creative!!!



Kathy Fell and Jessica Driver made Bug hotels for the Martinsville Secret Garden and for the Virginia Museum of Natural History Pollinator garden. Bug Hotels provide habitat for beneficial insects and native bees.



The chapter made 31 knit or crochet nests for the South Side Wildlife Center in Danville.

Cold Composting Kitchen Scraps

I found an article online discussing if it is better to send kitchen scraps to the landfill or down the drain via garbage disposal. Sending kitchen scraps to the landfill is the worst. Edible garbage attracts animals to landfills and releases unpleasant odors as it rots. Sending garbage down the drain is not much better. Garbage disposals are generally recommended for septic systems. They add unnecessary solids and require more frequent emptying of the septic tank. Kitchen scraps, ground up by garbage disposals, require extra processing in city water reclamation plants. Composting kitchen scraps is the best.

The primary reason I compost is to recycle kitchen scraps. Once a year, I harvest the compost and use it as soil amendments for my garden. My soil is not the best, but I have planted mostly native plants, which are better adapted to the local soil conditions. Compost, worked into the top 6 to 8 inches of soil, will improve the water retention of sandy soils and improve the aeration and drainage of clay soils. Composted kitchen scraps and yard waste will also provide some (but not all) nutrients need for plant growth.

The process I use for my kitchen scraps is called cold composting, or “Dump and Run”. With this method, there is the least amount of pile maintenance. Consequently, the process takes a long time to produce compost. I use this process because I generate very little kitchen waste. I use a different process for my yard waste. Hot composting requires a larger volume of material that I can generate and also needs frequent turning for efficient composting.

Any scraps from fruits and vegetables, coffee grinds, tea bags, bread, grains and egg shells (crunched up) can go in the pile. I do not recommend putting any meat, fish or grease into a compost pile because these tend to smell bad and attract unwanted visitors in the night. Grass clippings are ok in moderation, as is yard waste (sticks and weeds without seeds) and the confetti from your document shredder. It is important to find a way to deter scavenging by the local wildlife.

There are several approaches:

- Compost bins – These should be closed systems. They can be made from plastic, wood, or wire and should have a lid. Bins can be stationary or rotating. Mine is stationary. Rotating bins where the material does not have ground contact require the addition of some sort of enzymes to speed up the decomposition process. You can put both yard waste and kitchen scraps into a closed compost bin, as long as the volume of grass clippings is not too much for the size of the bin. I use a bin that has ground contact, so worms can make themselves at home. In a bin system, it is important to use alternating layers of green (kitchen scraps, grass) and brown (shredded paper, chopped up leaves and sticks) materials to reduce any possible odors that might attract beasties. No bin system is perfect at keeping out wildlife. I have seen snakes and mice in my bin. A bear came by one day and knocked the entire bin over.

- Underground composting – This system requires more surface area. Kitchen scraps should be buried at least 12 inches deep. I’ve seen trench systems and pit systems. My mother had a pit, ringed with stone and covered with a wire grate. You must do something to deter the local raccoon from just digging up your garbage.
- Windrow composting – This system can be used for yard waste, but I do not recommend it for kitchen scraps. In windrow composting, the yard waste is put into a long pile. Mine is about 4 ft. wide, maybe 2 feet high and easily 20 ft. long. I toss in weeds, sticks and stems, and let the rain do the watering. Some municipalities provide green waste containers and create and manage giant windrow piles. This is awesome and much less of an eyesore if you don’t have acres of woods around your house.

Composting science:

The science of composting is quite interesting. Micro-organisms (bacteria, fungi and actinomycetes) and macro-organisms will inhabit the pile. Micro-organisms take in Carbon and Nitrogen, water and oxygen and output CO₂ and compost. If the pile is too wet or too dry, too hot or too cold, or does not have the proper balance of carbon to nitrogen, the process will not be optimal. Without enough oxygen, the pile will ferment and stink.

To achieve the proper balance of Carbon to Nitrogen, a rule of thumb is to use 1 part brown for every two parts green you add to the mix. Food scraps and grass clippings are green. Dried leaves, saw dust and shredded paper are brown. If you have a gallon of food scraps or grass to compost, you should layer it with about half a gallon of chopped up leaves or shredded paper as you add it to the compost bin. There is a nice explanation on the “Composting made easy” site: <http://www.homecompostingmadeeasy.com/carbonnitrogenratio.html>

By layering the green and brown materials, you create air pockets in the system that allow for the required oxygen. I occasionally dump in some water with my coffee grinds. This seems to be sufficient for my annual harvesting of compost.

This is a good site on cold composting:

<http://www.homecompostingmadeeasy.com/addasyougopile.html>

This site has some nice plans to build your own system:

<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/designscompostingsystems.pdf>

References and additional reading:

<http://www.homecompostingmadeeasy.com/index.html>

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/soils/composting-and-mulching-guide/use-of-compost-as-a-soil-amendment/>

http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/452/452-055/452-055_pdf.pdf

Article by: Kathy Fell



VMN Southwest Region Conference and Training

Hello Southwest Region, Phase 2 Restricted Registration is now open for the VMN Southwest Region Conference and Training to be held on September 26, 2015 at Hungry Mother State Park in Marion, Virginia.

Phase 2 Restricted Registration means that registration for the conference is open to any VMN in the Southwest Region. However, registration during this phase will be restricted to 14 people per chapter. The Southwest Region chapters include: Beagle Ridge, Blue Ridge Foothills and Lakes, High Knob, Holston Rivers, New River Valley, Roanoke Valley and Southwestern Piedmont.

The remaining registration timeline is as follows:

August 24 - Phase 3 Regional Registration, if space allows registration will be opened to any VMN in the Southwest Region.

September 7 - Phase 4 Statewide Registration, if space allows registration will be opened to any VMN in the state.

If you would like to register for the conference, please follow the link below to the conference website. It is helpful if you read through each tab before registering for the conference. If you have any questions,



Tiffany Brown

Let's Get Out there and Get Some Folks Signed UP!!!!

As many of you know, we have fall 2015 basic training beginning 18 August and ends 01 December. Training is held from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville. We need everyone to get out and spread the word!!!! Many of us know someone that may be interested in helping out but know little about the Virginia Master Naturalist. Many of us encounter folks that are members of other organizations that have similar interest but know little of the Virginia Master Naturalist. Many of us have the ability to go out and recruit but don't really think about it. Once we start explaining the projects we do and the type of work we do, essentially getting the work out there, the sooner we can get our classes full. And yes, the possibility of maintaining two FULL classes a year, thus catering to those that have more time on their hands certain times of the year. When was the last time you spoke to someone about the Master Naturalist?

VOLUNTEER HOURS

Volunteer hours reported as of

April 9, 2015:

Categories -

- Administration - 240
- Advanced Training - 160
- Citizen Science - 304
- Education - 1137
- Stewardship - 31.75
- Total hours traveled - 2032



Reported Total- 1884 hours.

Thank you, volunteers!

Andy Lash, Chair of Membership Committee

Upcoming Events:

8-8-15 Saturday: Smith River Fest: We will have a booth set up in efforts to raise awareness and recruit Master Naturalist. 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

9-12-15 Saturday: International Coastal Cleanup 2015 in conjunction with God's Work. Our hands event will take place in J. Frank Wilson Park and will be co-sponsored by the Southwestern Piedmont Master Naturalist, First Presbyterian Church, Martinsville, VA and the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. Please park in the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church parking lot across from the park. Coffee/Drinks and donuts/rolls will be provided in the social hall where you will pick up your score card, gloves, trash grabbers, bags and instructions. All age groups are welcome to volunteer as well as anyone from the surrounding communities.

9-26-15 Saturday: SW Regional Conference: Hungry Mother's State Park

*Southwestern Piedmont Chapter
up August 18!*

training is coming



Do you enjoy teaching, public speaking, or working with youth?

Do you enjoy studying nature and science?

Do you like being out in nature?

Then come join our Basic Training Course to start becoming a Master Naturalist!

Virginia Master Naturalists: Denny Casey
[Address]

Phone: [phone] • Email: denny.casey@vmnh.virginia.gov

ik40 hour
Every Tues-
starting at 6
Registration
July 25



course •
day
PM •
due by