



Formerly Audubon Naturalist Society, Est. 1897

Woodend Native Plant Gardens 2023 Volunteer Diary

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INTRODUCTION

If you received this document, you are one of our intrepid garden volunteers- thank you! Even if you weren't able to make it into the garden this year, or you only just signed up, I hope you enjoy this summary of 2023 in the native plant gardens. To start, I thought I'd share the garden mission statement/introduction I wrote for a guide to Woodend Restoration- I hope it sounds familiar and sets the tone for this record of tasks and observations. Gardening is hard work, and sometimes it can feel sisyphian- weeding, anyone?- but I hope you know that each and every task helped us to our goal of having gardens that support wildlife and educate visitors, all while looking absolutely beautiful.

Garden Mission Statement

Our native plant gardens at Woodend fulfill many functions: we want them to provide **habitat value, education and aesthetic enjoyment, and stormwater management.**

Our gardens are designed and maintained to support these goals. As in our forests and meadows, our top priority is providing habitat for birds, insects, and other wildlife by sustaining a diverse plant population and ensuring that water, shelter, and food is available. In addition to designing with a diverse set of plant species, part of this approach is that we do not "deadhead" flowers once they are done blooming or cut back native grasses in fall, because we want to leave the seed sources for birds to eat and the stems for invertebrates to overwinter. Likewise, we match our plants to the conditions we have to avoid use of fertilizers or significant soil amendments, and we plant with a closed canopy of plants so that our established gardens do not require regular shredded bark mulch applications. In areas near paths, we prune and cut back plants to ensure they do not interfere with circulation, but our focus is on matching plant to place and favoring plants whose natural habit is a good match for the site in terms of visibility needs, access, etc. We leave leaf litter and dead wood wherever possible as habitat for detritovores and those who eat them- it's always fun to watch a woodpecker digging grubs out of the log in our north entry garden, for example.

Along with habitat, we manage our gardens for aesthetics and legibility. For example, we might transplant and re-arrange various plants, even if they are desirable native species, to create simpler compositions that make plant species easier to identify for visitors, from tour groups to field trippers to summer campers. This is part of our "educational" goal for the gardens.

In the Blair Garden, we showcase plant species from different ecoregions of Maryland, and we strive for a level of diversity which would be unlikely to occur in nature in such a small area; to maintain this level of diversity we work to remove or contain certain aggressive native species, so that less aggressive species remain.

We do all of this with a team of dedicated volunteers.

WOODEND'S GARDENS



WINTER BREAK

Our garden volunteer program hibernated from thanksgiving to March- but our Restoration Team was still at work, with some help from volunteers and an Eagle Scout, and upon returning in March our gardeners found a few changes.



In October, we constructed a two-cell rain garden along the entry drive. In addition to looking for new tasks for our intrepid gardeners, this marked the completion of our goal of treating all stormwater that falls on impervious surfaces on-site. This year, our new garden will surely require some weeding and TLC as we bring it online!

The other big change was to the Learning Garden- we removed it's fence, as it was a deer fence that pre-dated the deer fence encircling the sanctuary as a whole, and replaced the raised garden beds. One of our beds was built of re-purposed lumber from the fence posts- how's that for reduce, reuse, recycle?

In addition to new beds, our Learning Garden got a new, temporary greenhouse- a passively heated enclosure where we can start our vegetable seedlings and grow more native plants to use in our gardens and in our meadow and forest restoration.



Learning Garden Before (left) and after (right)

One thing that hasn't changed is our excitement to get started! So our season started off with a bang in March, with some seeding in the new greenhouse, and of course, some pruning of the woody plants in the Blair Garden, North Entry Garden, and Rain Gardens.

MARCH

MARCH 10

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) blooming in sunny spots, and popping up all over; plenty of pruning to be done.

We checked dead stems for seeds; those where all seeds have been eaten were removed, while those still providing food resources to birds can remain for now.



MARCH 17

Bloodroot (*S. canadensis*) still blooming profusely, Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) have buds and just starting!

The blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*) that we planted last year by the fountain in the Blair Garden and along the beds in the North Entry Garden are doing well- we saw the first blooms.

MARCH 24

One new leaf of Round-lobed Hepatica (*Hepatica nobilis*) starting to unfurl among the spent Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) in a sunny spot.

We are seeing plenty of Spring beauty (*Claytonia*) as well, more than last year. It's been unseasonably warm and much drier than 2022.



APRIL

MARCH 31

We were very lucky to be joined by our preschoolers to help us seed the inaugural crop of native perennials in our new greenhouse! Seedbox, Rattlesnake Master, and other natives for our proposed sensory garden (coming this fall!) were seeded, after being cold stratified in my fridge over the winter. `



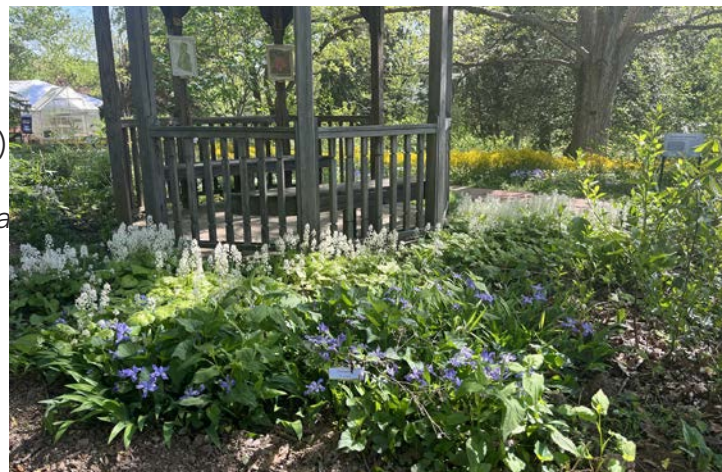
APRIL 7

Enjoyed the blooming Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) near the gazebo.

We got a new sign for the learning garden from the Master Gardener program, recognizing our new name. Here are some of our Master Gardener volunteer with our new greenhouse!

APRIL 14

The shade garden around the gazebo got some much needed TLC- edging and weeding- and it looks beautiful. The foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) and crested iris (*Iris cristata*) looks great. Over in the Blair Garden, the columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) has spread around considerably and is blooming profusely- another drought tolerant species that is more prevalent, if anything, in this dry year!



APRIL-MAY

APRIL 21

The combination of blooming Fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*) and Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) is one of my favorites that I look forward to here every year.

We transplanted the Philadelphia Fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*) into masses in the Blair Garden last year, to help it look less weedy- and I think its worked! It's looking lovely.



APRIL 28

The wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) don't mind the dry year at all, and are blooming throughout the garden, to the delight of the bumble bees.

The pots we planted last October are doing great- all survived the winter. In the shade we have Alumroot (*Heuchera americana*) with Crested Iris (*I. cristata*) and in the sun we have Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) with Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and Moss Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) which is really putting on a show.

MAY 5

The golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*) blooms are over for the year, but the sea of puffy seed heads are an aesthetic all their own!

Irises (*Iris versicolor*) are starting in the North Entry garden- and we're starting to see Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) we attempted to remove last fall coming back. We're digging it up and potting it- still too tall for this garden!



MAY

MAY 12

Something interesting we've noticed this year is extensive chewing from four-lined plant bug larvae- all the black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) and Monkeyflower (*Mimulus regens*) is very affected, with visible damage. As these are late summer/fall blooming flowers, I'm interested to see how their blooms are affected, if at all!
Mature plant bug, a native of Maryland, shown at right.



MAY 19

It was time to give the whole garden a good "Chelsea Chop"- that is, cutting back summer and fall blooming perennials, before buds have formed, to encourage bushier and shorter growth. Especially in places near the path, or where we want to keep a line of sight open. This may delay some of our June blooms, but we hope will bear dividends throughout the season.

We also tackled bindweed (*Convolvulus spp.*) near the log- and found this black rat snake winding its way through the Buttonbush.

MAY 26

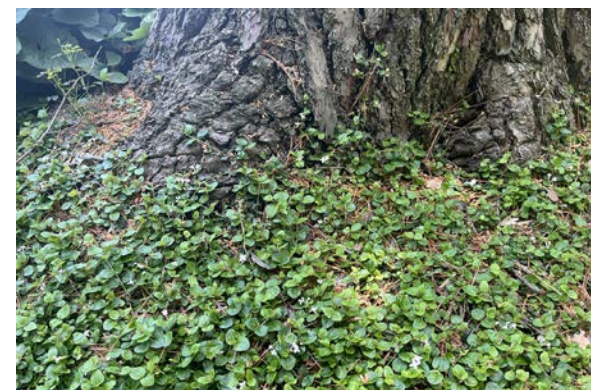
Last year was an amazing year for the Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*). It put on a show this year, but notably less. However, we were saved in the white flower department by the Fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*) which filled a nutrition gap for pollinators between the end of the spring ephemerals and the start of the Foxglove Beardtongue.
The swamp rose (*Rosa caroliniana*) has come into bloom as well.



JUNE

JUNE 2

The eastern prickly pear's (*Opuntia humifusa*) first blooms of the season opened today- right on time, three days exactly before their first bloom last year. The partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*) is also having a great year- it must like it dry- because it's blooming.



JUNE 9

In the North Entry garden and the Learning Garden, the Sundrops (*Oenothera fruticosa*) are much more prevalent than they were last year. They must like it, or at least tolerate it, dry!

The eastern prickly pear's (*Opuntia humifusa*) also tolerates drought well- unsurprising for a cactus! Because it's blooms are extremely lush.

The scarlet beebalm (*Monarda didyma*) is welcome addition to the North Entry Garden- we transplanted it here last fall, from divisions from the Learning Garden.

JUNE 16

Another garden hero that we divided and added last year to the North Entry is the anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*)- deer resistant, and not too tall.

While weeding in the Blair Garden, a volunteer discovered a nest under construction in the shrubby St. Johnswort (*Hypericum hypericoides*). We avoided weeding in that area again until the fledgings hatch!



JUNE-JULY

JUNE 23

The butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) we planted last fall near the log in the North Entry garden is blooming- nice to showcase this species in our entryway once again. This newly planted area keeps us busy with weeds, but we are excited by the combination of Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) with contrasting orange blooms.



JUNE 30

Just like last year at this time, the Tall Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum pubescens*) is the star of the "Coastal Plain" area of the Blair Garden.

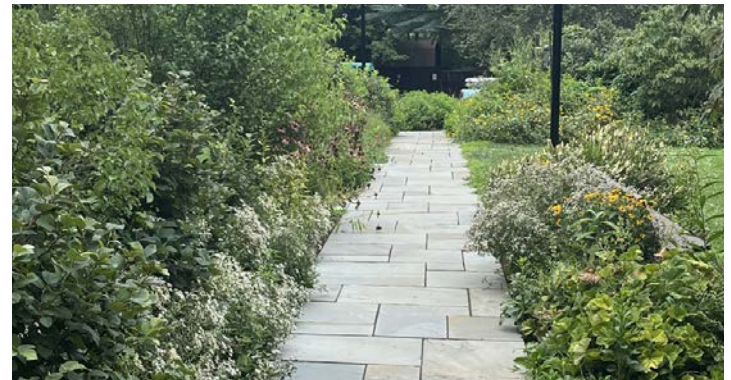
Meanwhile, our nest in the St. Johnswort now has three eggs, and we were able to identify it as a White Throated sparrow nest. It's only 14" off the ground- well hidden, but especially vulnerable to a predator like a house cat or racoon. We avoid walking near it to not make a scent path that would lead a predator to it, and of course, encourage everyone to keep cats inside!

JULY 7

Perhaps a result of the long-awaited rain after a very dry spring, we are seeing lots of early fall blooms. Flowers stressed by drought took advantage of the rain to get started making seeds as a response to stress! We're seeing smooth blue asters (*Aster laevis*), White wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) and Black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) earlier than usual throughout our gardens. At left, a picture of the White Wood Asters in October 2022. Today at right!



Oct. 2022



JULY/AUGUST

JULY 14

The Rose Mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) in the Blair Garden has begun to open up, right on schedule with last year. Many summer blooms, like this one, are blooming right on schedule, while fall blooms are still blooming early.



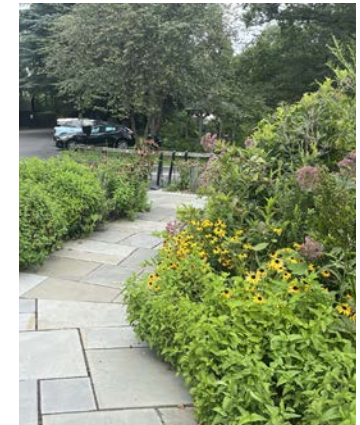
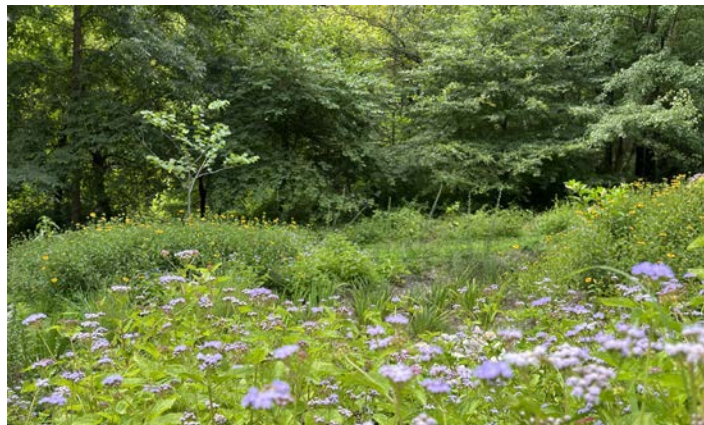
JULY 21

Refer back to May 12- the foliage of the Black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) was twisted and pocked with damage from the larvae of the four-lined plant bug. We grow native plants FOR our native wildlife, so we let them be, but I wondered if it would affect the fall bloom.

The answer is in this photo- a resounding "no"! Even the leaves no longer look affected. Glad we let the larvae feed.

JULY 28

The power of microclimate- at left, the Blue Mist (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) and the Black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) are both blooming to lovely effect in the new two-cell rain garden along the driveway. Shown at right, in the North Entry garden, the comparatively more shaded Blue Mist is not in bloom at all, though you can see its lush chartreuse foliage, while the Black-eyed susans are blooming just as much as their friends to the east.



AUGUST

AUGUST 4

Late summer, especially since we finally got some rain, is typically a very big and bushy time in the garden- this is when I typically assess which plants are simply too large for their location, especially when there are visibility concerns. This section is one we completely re-designed last fall, and here you can see the results- lush and full of habitat, but lower height.



AUGUST 18

On the subject of height, people often complain about the misleading descriptions of plant height. But this is yet another time when microclimate is extremely powerful. On the left, is shown where some of the Rose Mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) grew unusually short due to an area of compacted ground, and on the right is some Great Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*) growing 4' tall, taller than the same plants grew last year, because of competition from tall plants around them.

AUGUST 11

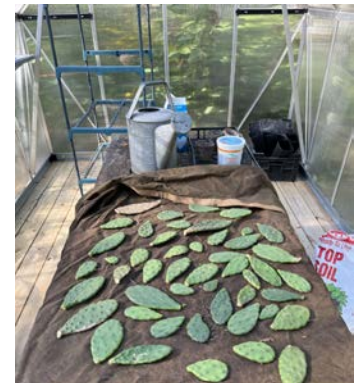
Not everyplace in a garden needs to be low height, however- and birds in particular really need habitat that is dense and bushy in the 4'-7' height range. The shrubs, Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium dubium*), last remaining Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), and Canada Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) are always alive with passerines.



AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

AUGUST 25

One of the good things about having our own greenhouse is the ability to experiment with propagation- when our Eastern Prickly Pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) needed pruning, we hardened off the pruned pieces by letting them dry in the greenhouse for a week, then rooted them in 4" pots. With the hardening off, we didn't lose any cuttings to rot!



SEPTEMBER 1

This was our third time weeding the new Rain Garden. Because we already have lots of areas to work in, we planted the rain garden very densely and used species that readily seed themselves to try to minimize the labor involved with maintenance. This first growing season is when weeding is the most critical, not only of invasives, but of tall, aggressive natives that could shade out the others. Late Boneset (*Eupatorium serotinum*) is lovely, but I only allowed it to remain at the bottom of the hill in the Conservation Landscape, not uphill of the shorter areas.

SEPTEMBER 8

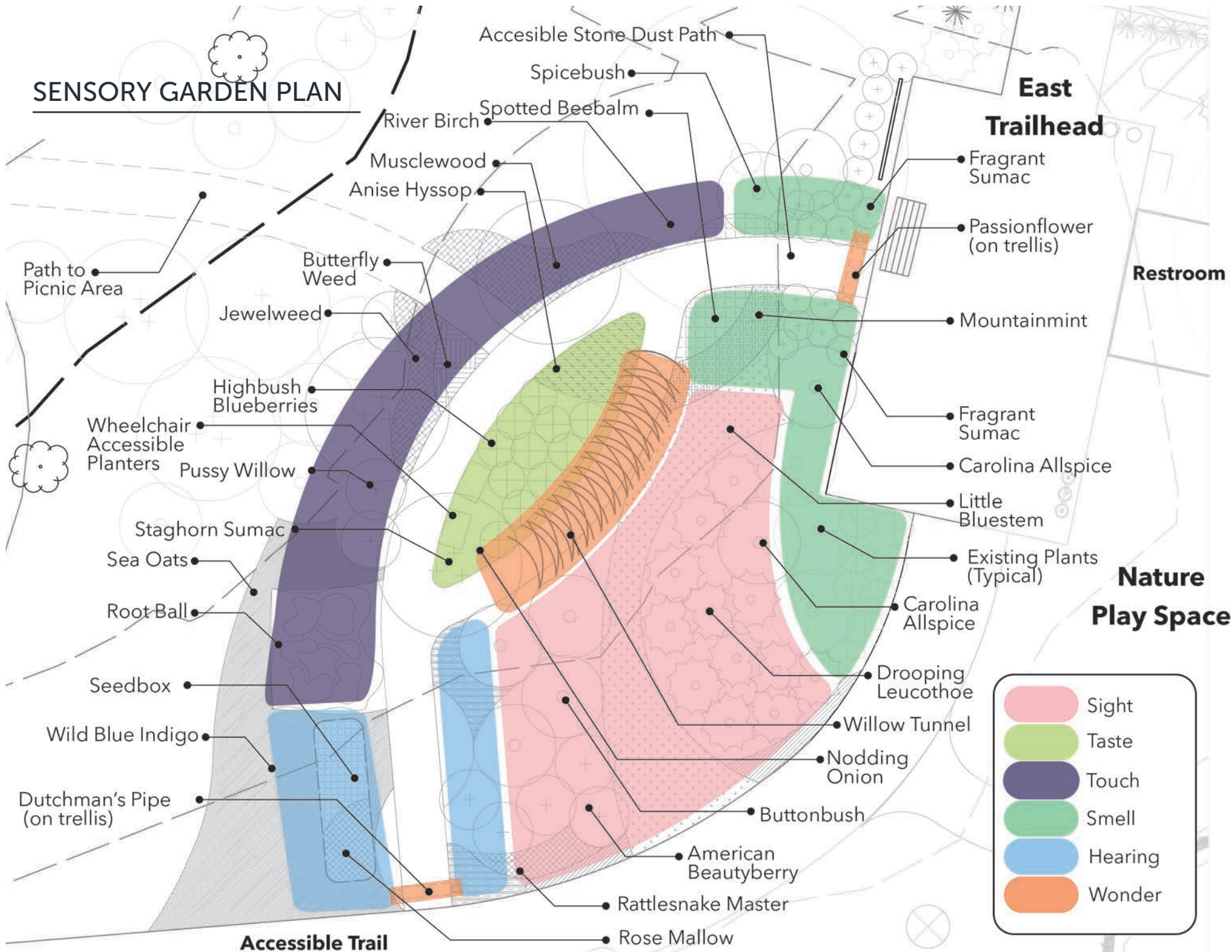
Fall is just starting! September 8 we planted the Sensory Garden- see the next page- but here is a spotlight on some selective editing we also completed in the Blair Garden.

As discussed above, Late Boneset can be aggressive; however, it thrives in poor soil and small volume areas, so as a screen between the "Piedmont" and the driveway it does excellently.

Shown at right, this heath aster looks messy in late summer. However, knowing this area can be lacking in fall, this was a volunteer that gets to stay.



SENSORY GARDEN PLAN



	Sight
	Taste
	Touch
	Smell
	Hearing
	Wonder

INSTALL HIGHLIGHTS

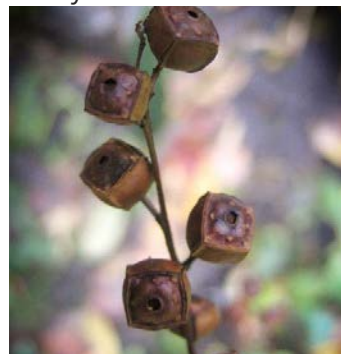
A few of the plants we planted in the Sensory Garden that were not previously featured at Woodend.



Rattlesnake Master
Eryngium yuccifolium
Bristly, spherical flowers make a statement in summer.



Drooping Leucothoe
Leucothoe fontanesiana
Deer resistant streambank native.



Seedbox
Ludwigia alternifolia
An unusual, water loving plant with square seed pods that rattle once they are ripe.



Pussy Willow
Salix discolor
The catkins are soft and provide amazing tactile experience in the winter.



Passionflower Vine
Passiflora incarnata
Interesting blooms spring through early fall, edible fruit in fall.



Garden volunteers planted the other 1000+ plants added to the sensory garden- including some we seeded ourselves last spring in our new greenhouse!



In addition to plants, our sensory garden features this rootball donated by Glenstone.

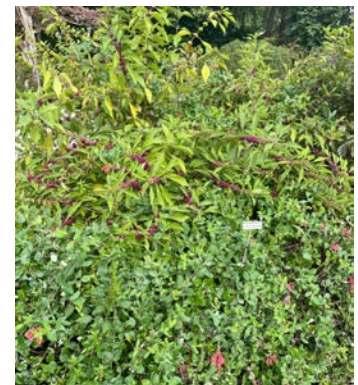


For the wet-loving plants, we dug a depression in the clay-filled soil to create a moist microclimate.

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 15

Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) in the north entry garden gets a prize for longest season of bloom in our gardens this year- it began in early July, and is still going strong in September. The Coral Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) is also having a long season of bloom, but it got some help from us in the form of multiple cutbacks.



SEPTEMBER 22

Cultivars- selected clones of a given species- are controversial in the native plant world. We typically don't use them, but sometimes its unavoidable. Last year we planted Blue-eyed Grass straight species (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*) in the Blair Garden, and a cultivar (*S. angustifolium* 'Lucerne'), known for its larger flowers, in the North Entry Garden. A year in, unintended consequences of cultivars are very visible; while 'Lucerne' does have larger flowers, it also sizes up as a clump (right), and does not spread freely, as shown at left.

SEPTEMBER 29

A little more "volunteer" appreciation. Last year I wrote in my notes which areas were a little lackluster in fall. I keep many native plant volunteers, but make decisions based on aesthetics, habitat value, and the overall plant community. Because of seasonality, the clump of calico asters (*Symphotrichum lateriflorum*) clustered around the bench in the Blair garden stayed even as we aggressively thinned out the overall area. I also kept the tall, arching stems of the Pokeberry (*Phytolacca americana*)- an underappreciated native- framed by the evergreens behind.



OCTOBER

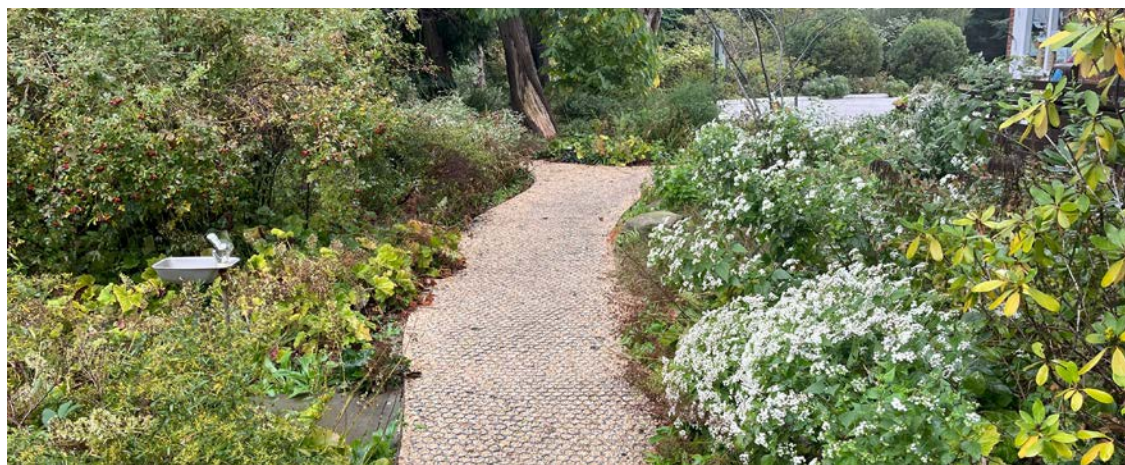
OCTOBER 6

Because the White Wood Asters (*Eurybia divaricata*) bloomed two months early, we cut them back in September to try to force a re-bloom, to ensure the garden still looked nice and provided floral resources in fall. It ended up working! We cut back only half of each clump, so you can see the combination of spent seeds and fresh blooms.



OCTOBER 13

Volunteer White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*) in the Mountains of the Blair Garden were transplanted into a tighter group at the bend of the path, so that they look more ornamental and intentional last year- this year that is bearing fruit, they are really holding things together. Elsewhere we are starting to see some fall color.



OCTOBER 20

Last year, this is when white wood asters (*E. divaricata*) are peaking. This year they are just cresting to a second peak, but the Calico Asters (*S. lateriflorum*) are really carrying us into the fall. The little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) has amazing fall color this year, from the sunny weather in October.



OCTOBER-NOVEMBER

OCTOBER 27

This is a better year for the purple fall blooming asters than last year- maybe the weather, or maybe just the fact that we planted more of them. The False Sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*) around the birdfeeder is still going strong late into the year.

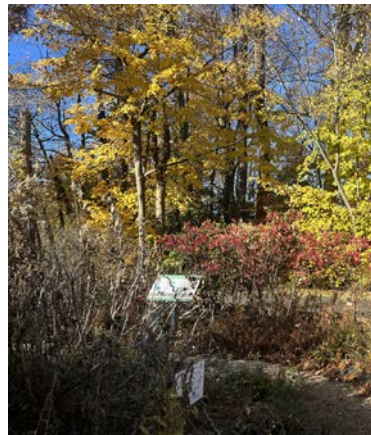


NOVEMBER 3

A late first frost left the beautyberries untouched but drooped the leaves of the American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) but did not affect the Coral Honeysuckle (*L. sempervirens*) which is still in bloom! A testament to frequent cut-backs.

NOVEMBER 10

Fall color combined with showy seedheads and berries makes the Blair Garden an excellent stop for migrating birds, or overwintering birds. The Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) has an amazing fall display this year- more on fall color next.

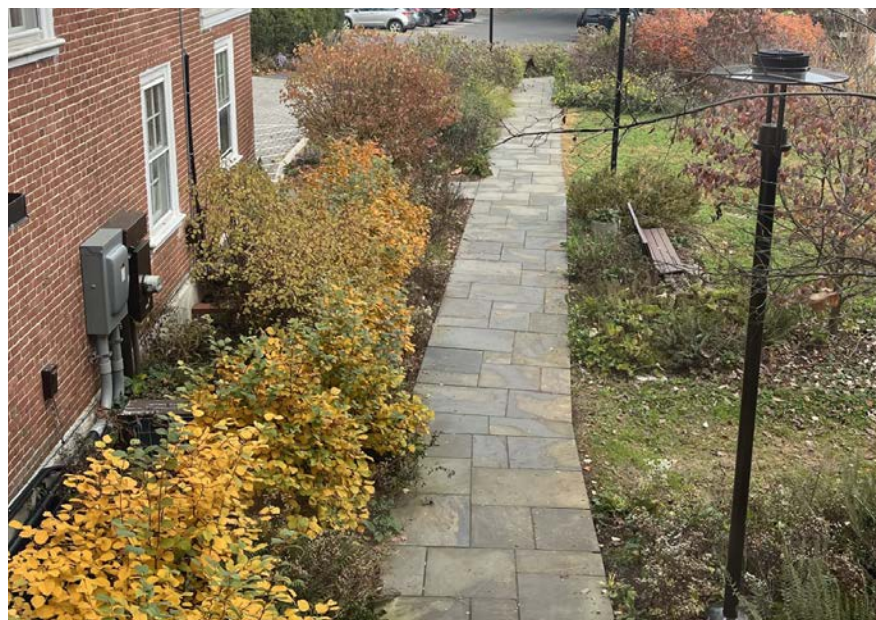


NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER 17

Our final day and a fond farewell to the 2023 Season of Native Plant Gardening at Woodend! We put away hoses and grabbed some weeds. Our foundation planting provided a good opportunity to look at the power of microclimate on fall color!

While yellows and orange pigments are always present in leaves, but are masked during the growing season by stronger greens, reds are produced by the plants during fall, and require the presence of sunlight. In looking at the gradient of *Fothergilla* (*F. gardenii*) along our foundation, from shadiest to sunniest, this difference is apparent, with leaves ranging from still green, to yellow, to red and almost purple in full sun!



The photos on the left were all taken of the same species of shrub, on the same day, within thirty feet of each other! The difference is the level of sun exposure, with the shadiest location on the left and the sunniest on the right.

2023 SEASON SUMMARY

47 volunteers worked 540 hours in the gardens!



We worked with climate challenges!

I can't count how many times I've been told our gardens looked beautiful this year- and it's all thanks to you! It was a challenging year to garden- plenty of sessions were cancelled due to poor air quality from forest fires, the hottest July in 100,000 years, and of course that prolonged spring drought. While this was challenging for us as gardeners, **it's even more challenging for our native wildlife.** By experimenting with new cut-back times and techniques we helped provide a full season of habitat for birds and pollinators- even when our fall blooming flowers tried to peak and fade early.

We expanded our gardens!

This year we added the east rain garden and the sensory garden/nature play space planting to our portfolio of places to keep weeded! Nonetheless, things keep looking pretty good, so we must be getting more efficient!



We grew food!

Watermelon, pumpkins, thai chili peppers, red cherry tomatoes, yellow pear tomatoes, sweet potatoes, two varieties of popcorn, scarlet runner beans, spinach, ground cherries, and mini sour cucumbers are among the annuals we grew in the garden this year.

Perennial food crops include elderberries, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, pawpaws, oregano, thyme, fennel, sorrel, savory, asparagus and more!

We grew native plants from seed!

This was the first year for our new greenhouse. In addition to starting our own vegetables this year, we were able to grow many of the native perennials for the new sensory garden, along with oak saplings from our acorns, and to propagate our native prickly pear. We were excited to have volunteer tasks available to do in the rain- not that it rained very often!- and extend our volunteer season. Looking forward to growing more of our own plants on-site in the future- next step, gathering our own seeds!



Thank you!!!

... and see you in the Spring!
