



Formerly Audubon Naturalist Society, Est. 1897

Woodend Native Plant Gardens 2024 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 2024 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 detritivores 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



JANUARY



It was great to see everyone back at Woodend after a winter away! We had a number of volunteers show up in January for an emergency shrub relocation day- the demolition of our Terrace meant a few garden beds would be displaced- the Carolina Allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*) did a great job closing off a path near the playspace where erosion was forming.

MARCH



MARCH 15

We started the year with some cut-back and clean-up. Is that too early? Depends who you ask!

Many native stem-nesting invertebrates actually require that dead stems be left standing year-round, not just during the winter; we decide areas of our gardens where we can leave them all the time, and cut them back in other areas after birds have enjoyed the seeds and other food sources become available again. For us, this means cutting them back in the early spring.

MARCH 22

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) blooming right on schedule in the leaf litter in the Blair garden- just about the last thing that happened predictably this year!

We did have some nice rain, wetter than last spring.



APRIL

MARCH 29

We didn't know it at the time, but this was probably the last blooms for the Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*) in the Blair Garden- between rust and drought, this year was incredibly hard on the species and several did not survive (despite irrigation).



APRIL 5

A bit later than last year we have buds on our Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) and blooms on the Dutchman's Breeches in the Blair Garden.

APRIL 12

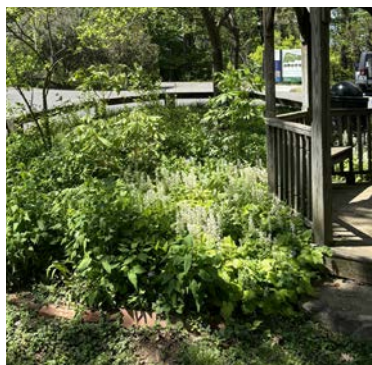
The foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) in the gazebo shade garden looks better than ever.



APRIL-MAY

APRIL 19

The driveway rain garden has massively filled in since last year- and the many seed heads and stalks provided ample food for birds and nesting areas for invertebrates throughout the winter. This is one of the areas we decided to let dead stems stay year round- we may need to revisit as the garden fills in, but for now it looks good.



APRIL 26

The foamflower (*T. cordifolia*) bloomed for over a month this year, helped along by some spring rains. Often it's blooms persist for a much shorter period of time.

MAY 3

Fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*) volunteered along the curb in the north entry garden- it's providing some welcome color and floral resources- and the Eastern Prickly Pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) has stood itself up after a winter of looking a bit deflated.



MAY

MAY 10

Our transplanted and rearranged volunteer Fleabane (*E. philadelphicus*) is still working beautifully in the Blair Garden.



MAY 17

Our willow tunnel in the sensory garden started to green up for the first time since planting- welcome confirmation all the whips survived transplant and are settling in well to their new environment. New growth goes straight up, towards the sun- we'll re-weave it in the fall.

MAY 24

The Blue False Indigo (*Baptisia australis*) and Blue Flag Irises (*Iris versicolor*) are blooming and looking lovely.

The Blue False Indigo can take a few years post planting to size up, but don't lose hope- once it does it looks great and is very hardy.



JUNE

MAY 31

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. It seems to bloom reliably on schedule regardless of the weather.



June 2023



JUNE 7

The scarlet bee balm (*Monarda didyma*) is welcome addition to the North Entry Garden- transplanted in fall of 2023 from divisions from the Learning Garden, it's easy to see that it is happy and blooming more densely.

JUNE 14

The anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) has started blooming- here and there, it continues until November (not the same flowers though). The Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is much denser and bushier- another plant that takes a few years to really come into its own post planting.



JUNE-JULY

JUNE 21

Nice to see two genera at least enjoying the Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)! While purists would point out that this is not a true Maryland native (and in fact, it was planted accidentally in our garden), Maryland native wildlife does seem to love it- perhaps because it is native to Western Virginia, and most of our wildlife intersects with that range.



JUNE 28

Some beautiful direct-seeded biennials are blooming in our gardens this year! On the left, the biennial Black eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) (not to be confused with *R. fulgida*, the perennial), is blooming after being seeded in Fall 2023, and the Spotted Beebalm (*Monarda punctata*) is also blooming from direct seeding in Fall 2023. These are fun to include in any meadow mix, as they give you some reward for your efforts sooner than other species might. If you want them to stick around more than a few years, clear space around them when they go to seed.

JULY 5

Unlike last summer, when we had a dry spring followed by a wetter summer, we have the opposite- a wetter spring and now an extremely hot and dry summer. As a result, rather than fall plants blooming early, we see summer plants blooming early!



JULY/AUGUST

JULY 12

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 19

Despite the extreme, on-going drought, our gardens are looking pretty good. While the Blair garden has irrigation, and the shade gardens are in shade, where water evaporates slower, even the full sun north entry garden is doing well, despite no supplemental watering. This shows the resilience of well-established native plants, and also of using unamended clayey soil, which holds water longer than loams. The Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium dubium*) is putting on a show.

JULY 26

The Black-eyed susans (*R. fulgida*), like their neighbors, are doing wonderfully without irrigation in the extreme drought. While these flowers were flopping over a lot in years past, weeding and pruning shrubs around them so they got less shade has helped them stay upright. Too much shade, or too much soil fertility, are the usual culprits when it comes to floppiness.



AUGUST

AUGUST 2

By this time last year (right), the Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) had not bloomed yet, whereas this year it is in full bloom. This difference could be because we cut it back aggressively in May last year (a "Chelsea Chop")- this year, given the drought, we didn't do that. It's nice to see the complementary colors of orange and blue!



AUGUST 9

The Blair garden "meadow," with the last remaining Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), and Canada Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), always provide some of the best songbird habitat, especially for insect-eaters. This year, the fountain adds a much needed water source for passerines and others, and this area is even more alive than usual.

AUGUST 16

While the Blair Garden Meadow looks the same as year's past, the area by the driveway bend with numerous Royal Ferns (*Osmunda regalis*) is really showing the effects of the drought. Ferns usually thrive here because the driveway sheds water to this area- with no rain for weeks, it's now parched and dry. Upland areas like the North Entry Garden and Meadow area look more like usual.

At right, two months later, Anise Hyssop (*A. foeniculum*) is still blooming!



AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

AUGUST 23/30

The oft-maligned Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*)- while it can certainly pop up in inconvenient places, in the right spot I think it's beautiful, and it's definitely a wildlife hero! Sometimes we think a plant is ugly because we associate it with neglected places- Staghorn Sumac is another example- but they are worth viewing with fresh eyes.

On the right is a Mocking Bird enjoying Pokeweed (see next week), photographed at Woodend by Amy Casiano. Follow **@amyhops** on Instagram to see amazing wildlife photography.



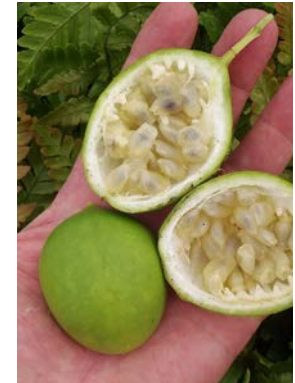
SEPTEMBER 6

We know there is no such thing as "a weed"- just a plant in a place where you don't want it. Many of the species we consider "weedy" are those who opportunistically exploit areas of disturbance- ironically, the act of weeding often encourages these species by introducing disturbance into the garden. Shown at left is an area where folks were walking- it looked like a path- near the water fountain. Realizing this was degrading the garden, I fenced it off last fall. Now that it has been a year of this area "healing" from the disturbance, you can see exactly where the desire trail was because Blue Mist (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) has popped up- this "weedy" disturbance-loving opportunist exists elsewhere in the garden. I appreciate it filling in this gap before longer lived, more delicate species can recover from the foot traffic. Perhaps instead of weeds, we should call them "pioneer species"!

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 13

Passionflower appreciation! Maypop, or Purple Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) is one of our most unearthly native blooms. While we often grow it for the flowers, it also grows many delicious tropical fruits- many seen hanging in the Learning Garden- which are delicious to eat.



SEPTEMBER 20

The heat has yet to break- we are still seeing many fewer volunteers than usual and lots of oppressive conditions in the gardens. However, there are also fewer weeds- like most plants, weeds don't thrive in droughts. While our well-established plants are doing ok, many are definitely showing signs of the extreme heat and drought.

SEPTEMBER 27

The only areas we actively watered during this summer were those that were newly planted- woody plants planted within the last two years, and perennials planted in the last one year. More could have benefited, but with limited time and resources, we prioritized!

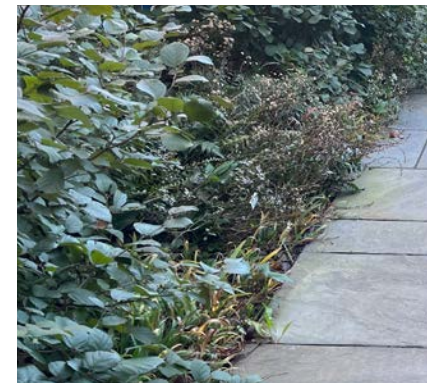
When we installed the Sensory Garden exactly one year ago, we decided not to amend the soil with compost, but instead to maintain the somewhat compacted native clay subsoil. This seemed to pay dividends in both lack of weeds and drought resistance- you can see many plants blooming despite limited watering.



OCTOBER

OCTOBER 4

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. The Dwarf Crested Iris foliage is showing the results of the drought. The little snake is hanging in there!



OCTOBER 11

Frost Asters (*Symphiotrichum pilosum*) in the gazebo garden look great, and our native deciduous holly, Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) has a lovely berry set despite the drought.

OCTOBER 18

Just like in woody plants, fall color in grasses can really vary year to year based on conditions. While the Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is very drought resistant and grew well, it has significantly less vibrant color this year compared to last (shown far right). It could be lack of rain, or more overcast days in October.



OCTOBER-NOVEMBER

OCTOBER 25

It's time to think about which areas can have standing stems and leaf litter year round- and which shouldn't. The more the better! But we all have areas which, for aesthetic reasons, we don't want tall dead stems. Even where they can't stay year round, leaving them through fall and winter where there are seeds for birds can be helpful.



NOVEMBER 1

The White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*) is blooming and providing some late season interest in the Blair Garden "mountains." The path is weedy this year because it was too dry to safely flame weed, our usual method of controlling small weeds in the gravel path, throughout the summer and into the fall.

NOVEMBER 8

The Coral Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) has a very long season of bloom- helped along by the fact that we frequently trim ours to keep it out of the path!

Meanwhile, the Bluestar (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*) has amazing fall color. Because yellow fall color, unlike red, is caused by pigments that are always present in the leaf and simply masked by the green during the growing season, it is more reliable- but still wouldn't show up if leaves shriveled and died in late summer.



NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER 15

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!

Some things change, but some things stay the same—immediate right is this year, far right is last year!



NOVEMBER 22

Our final day and a fond farewell to the 2024 Season of Native Plant Gardening at Woodend! We put away hoses and put the learning garden to bed. And perhaps most importantly, we experienced the winter's first snow together!

Thanks to all who braved the difficult conditions to keep our gardens looking good and supporting wildlife this season. On to the next!

2024 SEASON SUMMARY

33 volunteers worked 300 hours in the gardens!



We worked with climate challenges!

We thought last year's spring drought was challenging- 2025 brought not only a brutal summer drought, but a fall that featured more days in a row without rain than any in our area since the 1970s. 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 tended new gardens!

Both the sensory garden and the new rain garden survived the extremely difficult summer and fall, with the help of some watering. We planted and seeded around the new permeable parking lot.



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. Perennial food crops include elderberries, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, pawpaws, oregano, thyme, fennel, sorrel, savory, asparagus and more! **Passionfruit was new this year!**

Thank you!!!

... and see you in the Spring!
