



Formerly Audubon Naturalist Society, Est. 1897

Woodend Native Plant Gardens 2025 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 2025 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



While we didn't have volunteers in the gardens, we did get some photos of them in January's significant snow storms! This was a nice infusion of water after a dry year- but it also illustrates that even when total precipitation for a year seems normal, it can be a challenging year for plants and wildlife, if, as with this past year, all the precipitation is concentrated in April and January, for example!

MARCH



MARCH 28

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) blooming right on schedule in the leaf litter in the Blair garden- early spring seems to be the time things happen the most "on-time", according to typical phenology in recent years. The further you get into the year, the more variety we have observed.

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 from spots like the edge of the parking lot/entry path shown to the right.



APRIL

Our Rain Gardens require some care from volunteers that is not only aesthetic or about habitat, but also about function! Removing some woody plants and grasses from the rocks around the inlet allows stormwater to flow in properly, ensuring the facility functions as designed and the water reaches the irises and other basin plantings.



APRIL 4

It's not as showy in the photo as it was in real life, but the Jacob's Ladder (*Polymonium reptans*) in the gazebo garden really appreciates the trimming we did of the big Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*). While it is a shade plant, it seems to prefer a bit more indirect light than it was getting before. And Elderberries always appreciate being pruned as well!

APRIL 11

The Fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*) in the North Entry garden showing off in early spring. It's such a reliable "background" shrub the rest of the year, it's easy to forget that it is a showstopper in its own right in April! And the early pollinators appreciate its easily accessible pollen and nectar.



APRIL-MAY

APRIL 18

Fleabane (*Erigeron philadelphicus*) is a much-maligned native, typically considered a weed. It certainly exhibits “weedy” behavior, that is to say, opportunism- showing up especially at the edges of paths where there is more frequent disturbance and filling in gaps. While it can look off-putting in groups of one or two, as a massing (shown at right) it can both be attractive, and provide a season of interest that is missing in the garden. Many fleabanes will even bloom twice, once in spring after the ephemerals have faded but before late spring flowers, and again in fall.



MAY 29

APRIL 25

It’s easy to think of gardening by season, and forget smaller seasonal moments or gaps! For example, our gardens glory in lots and lots of Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), a well-known white “spring” bloom. But the white flowers to the far left are actually more of our trusty “weedy” Fleabane! The very same garden bed is full of Foxglove Beardtongue as well, but it won’t come into it’s own for a month (left). Thank heavens for Fleabane until it does, for ourselves and pollinators.

MAY 2

We didn’t spot the first Foxglove Beardtongue until May 2 this year! And most individuals did not bloom until later. The Coral Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), however, started profuse blooms very early- long before the hummingbirds have arrived to enjoy them. We cut this one back frequently, due to its position right by the pathway, and it repays us by looking like this from May through November.



MAY

MAY 9

A nice moment to appreciate our Arrowwood Viburnums (*Viburnum dentatum*). While many non-native species are common in gardens, our own is just as showy, with amazing flowers and nice fall color as well once the time comes.



MAY 16

In May we had the opportunity to do some planting! While there are always small areas to plant within the gardens, interested volunteers got to plant at this "eco-tone" forest edge area near our Big Meadow. This is a different style of planting, typically more mixed and dense, with plugs planted around and among small trees planted for reforestation purposes. Aggressive species that can help as a ground cover while slower growing woody plants establish themselves are perfect for these naturalization plantings- we planted White Wood Asters (*Eurybia divaricata*), Golden Ragwort (*Packera aurea*), and Foxglove Beardtongue.

MAY 23

After the first flush of spring, late May can be a bit "green"- lots of so-called spring flowers, from Bluestar (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*) at far right to the Blueflag Iris (*Iris virginica*) at right, had not actually started blooming yet! Every spring is different- sometimes a wetter spring has later blooms as plants are in no hurry to propagate themselves, but a spring that's too dry can have the same effect. This is why it's so hard to pinpoint when exactly plants bloom!



JUNE

MAY 30

The Rosebay Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) and Goat's Beard (*Aruncus dioicus*) put on a lovely show in the "Mountains" of the Blair Garden.



JUNE 6

We enjoyed the visit from an Eastern Box Turtle, who, with 40 acres of Sanctuary to choose from, was hanging out and eating worms in the North Entry Garden!

JUNE 13

Our resident Redtail hawk greeted us while eating a snack, and the Eastern Prickly Pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) had a nice long season of bloom despite being "overshadowed" by a glorious Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) buzzing with wildlife and full of flowers in the Blair Garden.



JUNE-JULY

JUNE 20

Spring and early summer had plenty of rain, which means we get to see plants that don't always manage to bloom together, together! In this case the Blueflag Iris (*Iris virginica*) which sometimes blooms earlier in a dryer spring, together with the Scarlet Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), which bloomed late last summer due to drought.



JUNE 27

Last summer's drought didn't kill the newly planted sensory garden, but the plugs planted in fall of 2023 didn't noticeably size up- above ground at least. Clearly they were doing a lot of rootzone growth because this year the whole thing exploded into a riot of flowers! There were some volunteers, like Frost Aster and Canada Goldenrod, to edit out, but too many plants is better than too few!

JULY 4

It's all about the bees in the Blair Garden- a bumble bee enjoying the tall sprays of Culver's Root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*) to other perennial bee favorite, the nice open flowers of the Shrubby St. Johnswort (*Hypericum prolificum*).



JULY/AUGUST



JULY 11

We planted some Purple Lovegrass (*Eragrostis purpurea*) in the North Entry garden last year, and some Virginia Knotweed (*Persicaria virginica*) planted itself (right)! They combine to make a lovely effect with more mid-summer interest in an extremely short statured full-sun planting, which is what we need right by a crosswalk.



JULY 18

The "meadow" of the Blair Garden is one of the best spots for birdwatching on the property- especially accessible spots! This combination of Narrowleaf Sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*), the second bloom of some Fleaband (*E. philadelphicus*), and a lovely milkweed- even when milkweed hasn't or doesn't bloom, we grow it mostly for its leaves- Monarch butterflies can visit any flowers for nectar, it's the leaf-eating caterpillars that require plants from the *Asclepias* genus.

JULY 25

Within a few weeks this garden will be a seed buffet for birds- but now it's a beautiful floral display, a buffet for pollinators, and yes.... also a buffet for birds who come by to eat the insects!! It's all about providing a strong base for the food chain, and of course beauty and color doesn't hurt.



AUGUST

AUGUST 1

The Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) had a nice long season, and the Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) we transplanted to this spot last fall seems to have settled in nicely. Of course, all of this takes work! Especially to keep the paths open and clear.



AUGUST 8

Also thriving, especially in the are of the North Entry garden that was replanted last fall, is the new-to-us weed, Mulberry Weed (*Fatoua villosa*), shown at left. We've tried to be vigilant with removing it before it sets seed, but I'm sure we'll continue to see it in the gardens. It's unsurprising that it made its first foothold in this area- for one thing, it was recently planted, and most invasive species are opportunists who are good at exploiting disturbance. Additionally, this is a full sun garden that we maintain as short-statured plants- this is functional, as visibility is important near an entrance and crosswalk, but its an unusual condition in "the wild"- we are using native plants, but many of them are typically found in part shade, where shorter stature is more common. They thrive here, but require more help in the competition department!

AUGUST 15

Yet another moment to be grateful that we don't deadhead our flowers! While some might say the seedheads are unsightly, there's nothing unsightly about Goldfinches. Even insectivores often start eating more seeds in late summer and early fall, as they either prepare to migrate, or to overwinter, and as insects start to get less abundant. They are seen here on Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), but they also love the Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) seeds.



AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

AUGUST 22/29

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.

I was proud of our two "specimen-quality" Pokeweeds last year- see inset- but this year they were even more spectacular. Always a hit with wildlife, I'm always amused when experienced gardeners recoil, while novice gardeners ask "what is that beautiful plant"?



August 2024



SEPTEMBER 5

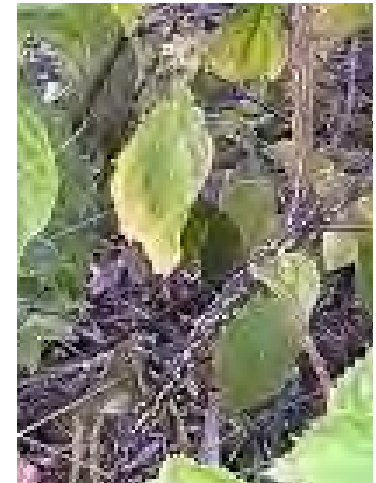
It's time to think about which areas can have standing stems and leaf litter year round- and which shouldn't. The more the better! But we all have areas which, for aesthetic reasons, we don't want tall dead stems. Even where they can't stay year round, leaving them through fall and winter where there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

Thinking about this ahead of time, before leaves have started falling in earnest, allows us to be proactive. In areas we plan to leave standing or with leaf litter, breaking a few stems to give stem-nesting bees access can help, as weather starts to cool- in places where you know you can only leave ecologically productive "mess" until it flops over or interferes with a walkway, you can manage more proactively. This is also a good time to consider any signage that might help visitors or passersby understand what's happening- we sell a few such signs in the shop!

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 12

This year a new pest showed up in the garden- Crepe Myrtle Bark Scale! This invasive insect followed Crepe Myrtle trees here, and while we don't have any at Woodend, their prevalence in home landscapes means it was easy enough for them to find us. Unfortunately, they impact our native American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), and within a week of our first noticing it, the larger of our two beautyberries in the North Entry Garden was looking terrible. While companies offer systemic insecticides to apply topically or in the soil, the topical ones have significant risks to other invertebrates, while the soil applied ones are expensive and need at least annual re-application.



SEPTEMBER 19

Luckily, Beautyberry is a shrub, not a tree! So instead of trying to physically remove the fuzzy little bugs, we simply cut it down to the ground, and bagged and put the affected branches in the dumpster. While we would typically never cut it back so aggressively while it's berries, which are edible by birds and humans like, are in full show, in this case the paramount goal was stopping it from spreading. Luckily, it seems we were successful- the next closest Beautyberry still looked unscathed over month later.

SEPTEMBER 26

Oft maligned by gardeners, so-called "composite" plantings can be considered more challenging to take care of, and more challenging to keep in a "tidy" aesthetic. While that might be the case, eliminating them also sacrifices some moments of true beauty, like this early fall combination of Black-eyed susans (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) and Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*).

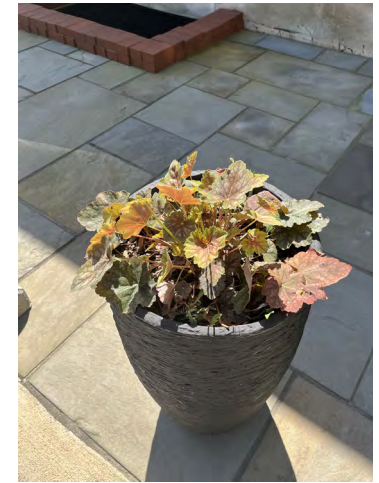


OCTOBER

OCTOBER 3

Lots of perennials have begun to edge into dormancy, especially after our very dry August. A dry August is challenging, but much less so than a dry May or June, as perennials have had more time to photosynthesize and have a decent chance of returning in the spring, even if they do go dormant early- don't give up!

It's also time to take a moment to appreciate how well Alum Root, both Hairy Alumroot (*Heuchera villosa*) and American Heuchera (*Heuchera americana*), perform in pots, both sun and shade!



OCTOBER 17

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 tends to grow just fine in a variety of conditions, fall color really varies! Here's a comparison of the last three years- the most vibrant was 2023, when we had a wet late summer and a sunny fall. 2024 was heavy drought- this year was in-between. The late summer was very dry, which could have edged things into early dormancy, but the sunny October ensured we ended up with a bit more reddish color than we had in the past. Gardens- and the plants in them- will look a little different each year! Especially in a newly planted area, this is typically an argument for patience and a wait-and-see approach.



OCT 2024



OCT 2023

OCTOBER

OCTOBER 17



Immediately to the left, a moment to appreciate the amazing fall color of our native Arrowwood Viburnum (*V. dentatum*). Often people choose the non-native Viburnum species because they are evergreen- but being deciduous has its benefits too! On the far left, the underappreciated browns and yellows of fall- the Blair Garden's Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) and Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) with still-green Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*) are another type of fall interest.

OCTOBER 24

While the Blair Garden is a spring garden in many ways- the amazing abundance of spring ephemerals that bloom throughout this garden, March through early June, mean parts of it are dominated by spent leaves in summer and fall- the woody plants are lovely in fall. At left, the PawPaws (*Asimina triloba*) are gleaming and gold, while the Winterberries (*Ilex verticillata*) are putting on a show.



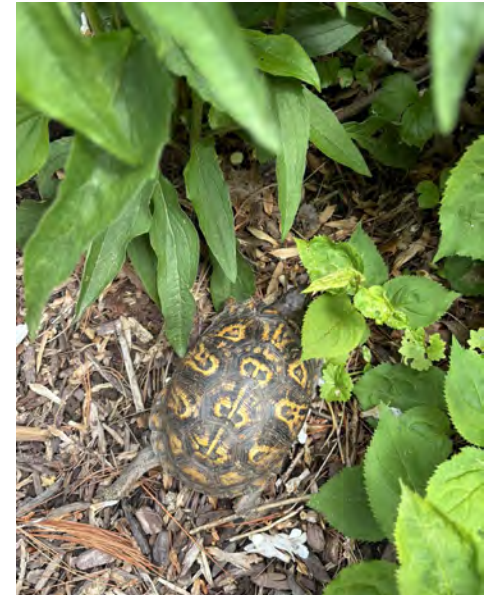
OCTOBER 31

The White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*) is blooming and providing some late season interest in the Blair Garden "mountains." The original planting design features amazing spring and summer interest, from Crested Iris to Rhododendrons to Goat's Beard- but we're grateful for botanical "volunteers" that provide habitat value and visual interest in the fall!

2025 SEASON SUMMARY

41 volunteers worked over 300 hours in the gardens!

And we were joined by many other creatures who call the gardens home. Native plant gardening is all about sustaining a diverse and stable food web in a small space, and it looks like we did it- here are a few of the human and non-human friends we saw during garden sessions this year.



2025 SEASON SUMMARY

We tended new gardens!

We got to experience sleep-creep-
leap on a level never before- the
Sensory garden exploded from a
“plugs in mud” aesthetic all last year
to an embarrassment of riches. For
example, this year it actually needed
weeding!

At right: the Sensory Garden during
planting in September 2023, after
a full season of growth in October
2024, and in August 2025!



We welcomed new team members!

Allie Chamot, previously a garden volunteer, then Nature Forward's Naturalist Ambassador, officially joined the Restoration Team as the new **Garden Programs Manager** and took over leading our Thursday Morning volunteer sessions! We're so happy to have you in the garden with us, Allie!

As always, we love meeting **new volunteers** and hanging out with our Conservation Corps Members in the garden as well- this fall we were joined by Leo, Eso and Bella!

At left: (rear) Allie as English Ivy, Bradley as a Bradford Pear, Alice as a Spotted Lanternfly; (front) Leo as a Hammerhead Worm, and Eso as a Leopard Slug. Invasive species are very spooky!

Thank you!!!

... and see you in the Spring!
