

## New Information Center Opens to Blandly Visitors



When you walk into the newly redesigned and interactive Information Center at Blandly, you'll be greeted by a giant 3D ginkgo tree replication in its full golden glory. Beneath the tree, a few intriguing questions, with answers under movable discs, will whet your appetite for some of the engaging natural features that await you outside the center. On one wall, a huge watercolor-inspired map will help you acclimate to your position at the Arboretum and plan out the rest of your visit. Turn around and find displays that inform you both about the history of Blandly, and some of the many activities and programs that are happening today. The center also boasts an interactive leaf and animal print rubbing activity for kids, two rotating exhibits highlighting artifacts from nature like conifer cones and snake skins, and a large TV monitor displaying captivating images of the many collections, breathtaking views and educational activities happening on the 712-acre property. [Learn more](#) and stop by for a visit soon!



## Putting a Spotlight on Locally Sourced Plants

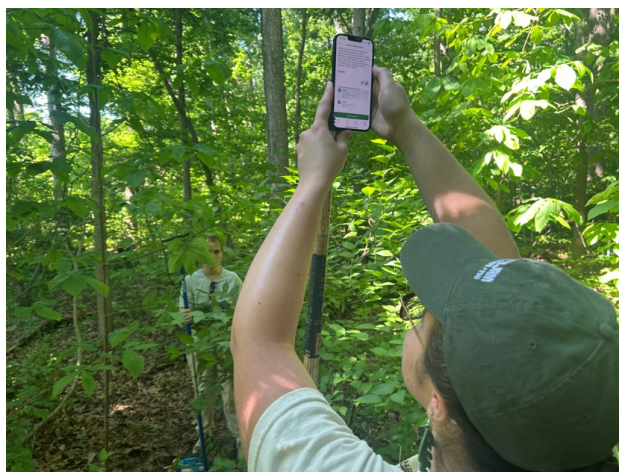
While the native plant trail has always featured plants that are native to Virginia at large, we're looking forward to sharing a new interpretive space that goes one step further: the recently planted Locally Sourced Garden. In addition to their "native" status, all the plants in this new garden are sourced from local wild populations meaning every plant in the new garden was grown from seed collected in the mountain or piedmont areas surrounding Blandy, rather than being purchased from a nursery. We hope you'll take a moment to enjoy this beautiful, sunny space next time you're at Blandy. You may find a new love for some of the local, wild plants you've never noticed before!

[Learn more about locally sourced gardens and the new addition to our Native Plant Trail](#)

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## Undergraduate Research Program Students Kick Off Summer with Mini Projects

The beginning of the summer research program at Blandy Experimental Farm is an exciting time. A community of nearly thirty faculty, graduate, and undergraduate researchers arrive to start their summer as research residents at Blandy. Some of our undergraduate residents are participating in Blandy's Undergraduate Research Program and will spend their summer designing, executing, and reporting on their own novel research projects under the direct mentorship of our summer research faculty. As part of that program, participants began their summer with mini projects including exploring the ecology of the bees occupying our bee wall and testing the acoustic adaptation of bird song across different habitat types. Faculty mentors guide students through a condensed version of the 11-week process that is ahead of them, completing an ecological research project as small groups from start to finish in a single day! [Check out more about the residents and their mini projects.](#)



## Conservation Easements Program Educates Homeowners



*By Don Owen, Public Program Committee Volunteer*

Thirty-two members of the public came to the State Arboretum of Virginia at Blandy Experimental Farm on May 14th for a presentation and discussion about what conservation easements can do for rural property owners. Representatives from the [Clarke County Easement Authority](#), [Piedmont Environmental Council](#), [Virginia Outdoors Foundation](#), and [Land Trust of Virginia](#) provided brief presentations on:

- How to protect their property from residential, commercial, and industrial development;
- State and federal tax benefits for donating a conservation easement;
- The relationship between easements and ownership rights;
- The wide variety of conservation values that can be protected by a conservation easement, including scenic landscapes, water quality, farmland, forest land, wildlife habitat, and historic resources.

The presentations were followed by a question-and-answer session and informal social event. Virginia's conservation easement tax credit program has helped landowners conserve more 100,000 acres of land in the northern Piedmont.

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## Another Busy School Year in the Blandy Outdoor Classroom!

June 2024 marked the end of another school year busy with young minds exploring the natural world through the education programs at the State Arboretum of Virginia.

School buses packed with young, curious minds unloaded students to learn about animal interactions, bird adaptations, plant-insect interactions, water quality and ecology, rock and mineral characteristics, soil science, tree identification, and wetland, meadow, and forest ecosystems. This year nearly **6000 preschool through grade 12**

**students** took part in our environmental science programs. We taught students from **10 school divisions and several private and homeschools** including Frederick, Loudoun, and Clarke counties as well as two West Virginia school divisions: Jefferson and Berkeley counties. “Our goal of our PK-12 program is to stimulate a desire in all students to explore and increase their understanding of natural phenomenon and deepen their concern for the natural world,” said Candace Lutzow-Felling, Director of Education. And the students’ observations can be profound. One kindergarten student reflected, “I think trees are important because they are the umbrellas of the world.” [Read the full story](#)



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## SAVE THE DATE: SEPTEMBER 21st

### *Plein Air in the Arboretum A Festival of Art and Nature*



Plein Air at the Arboretum will return for its second year on September 21st, as 100 Plein Air artists display and sell their work, capturing the many vistas of Blandy painted in the immediate days leading up to the festival. The public "wet paint" art sale, artist awards, music, food and more will take place throughout the day on Saturday, September, 21. Come enjoy, and take home your own one-of-a-kind Plein Air art of your favorite Blandy vista.

Plein Air in the Arboretum is in partnership with the [NOVA Plein Air Artists](#) and 30 percent of the art sales benefit the State Arboretum. [Learn more.](#)

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## Blandy Book Club Nearing 100th Book Milestone!

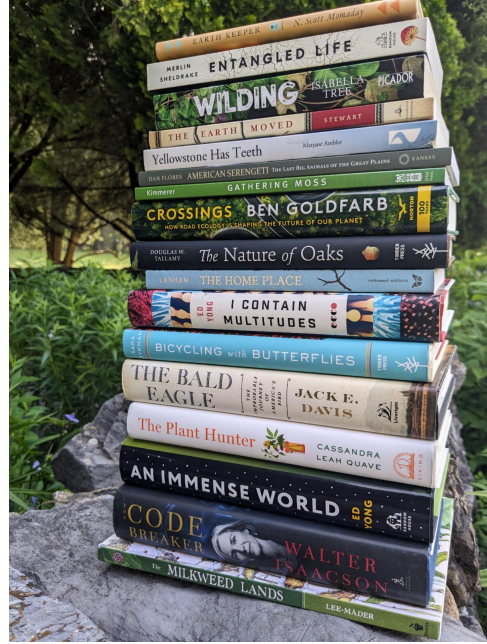
*By Steve Carroll, Blandy Director of Public Programs (Retired)*

Ten years ago, more than a dozen avid readers met in the Blandy Library to discuss Barbara Kingsolver’s, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*—and thus was born the Blandy Book Club. This

October, the group will meet for the **100<sup>th</sup> time**, having read and discussed 100 books related to natural history, ecology, and the environment.

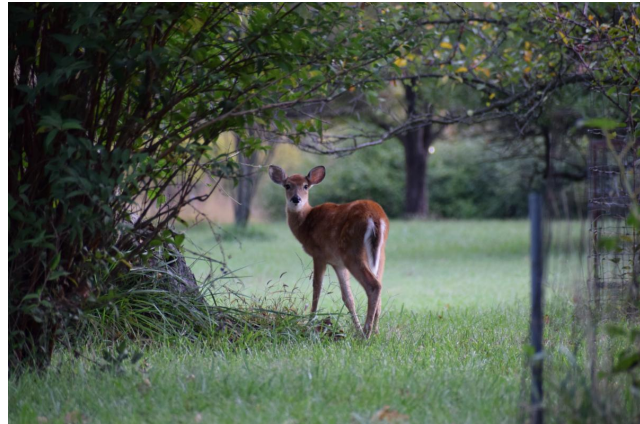
What a joy it’s been to read and share ideas about these many and varied writings. Over the years, we’ve read classics (e.g., *Walden*, *Silent Spring*), descriptive natural history (e.g., *Coyote America*, *Cry of the Kalahari*), philosophy (e.g.,

*Earth Keeper*), books on environmental issues (e.g., *Chesapeake Requiem*, *The End of Night*)—and even a true-crime mystery (*The Feather Thief*). Books are nominated by members and selected by vote, with the person who nominated a “winner” generally leading that discussion. For our 100<sup>th</sup> gathering this October, we selected a book with local relevance: *Wild, Tamed, Lost, Revived: The Surprising Story of Apples in the South*, by Diane Flint. If we can, we will identify a local representative from the apple industry to join us. Interested in participating? Contact [Ariel Firebaugh](#) for details, and prepare to join a lively group of people as we launch into our next 100 selections.



## Being a Great Blandy Steward This Summer

Summer is an awesome time to visit the Arboretum! We invite you to explore our grounds and plant collections, enjoy a picnic with loved ones, stroll our roads and trails with your furry friends, and discover exceptional settings for your family photo sessions. There are endless ways to take advantage of the beautiful landscapes and educational opportunities available at Blandy.



From our designated parking areas at the main entrance or along Wilkins Loop Rd, stroll along the gravel paths and mowed grassy areas to discover a living museum teeming with diverse plant collections and wildlife. Please respect the collection by refraining from climbing trees or stone walls, and by not disturbing plants, tags, or labels. Keep dogs leashed and out of garden beds and research areas, and properly dispose of their waste to ensure the safety of other visitors and wildlife. If you plan to visit with a school group or large party, please contact us in advance to help us accommodate your needs and ensure a wonderful experience for everyone.

**For photographers**, the Arboretum offers a stunning backdrop. We ask you to leave no trace and respect the living collection and historic landscape. Please avoid posing subjects in garden beds, trees, or on stone walls, and do not block paths for other visitors. By following these guidelines, you contribute to the preservation and enjoyment of the Arboretum for all. Also, please email your contact information to [Melanie Mullinax](#) to be added the professional photographers list for future communications.

**Thank you for being a mindful steward of this beautiful space. Enjoy your summer visit!**

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