



Arbor Vitae

From the Foundation of the State Arboretum of Virginia | Winter 2025

January 2025

A Community Forest Becomes An Actual Forest



5 year old planting. Grass still abundant before the tree canopy can close.



Inside the 10-13 year old Community Forest. Fallen leaves cover the ground. The grass has been shaded out inside the areas of older trees.

By Tai Roulston, Curator & Research Associate Professor

In 2011, a group of bicycling arborists paused at the Arboretum and planted 35 trees in an hour. Each year the group, called Tour des Trees, pedals several hundred miles educating the public about tree care and the importance of trees. They happened to be passing by Blandly on their trip from Virginia Beach to Washington, DC and stopped to plant trees before their lunch break. (It was a time when biking on Route 50 was merely a bad idea, not a death wish.) That planting kicked off our Community Forest, a multi-year tree planting to expand the forest for wildlife near the front entrance. You can see an entertaining 27 second time-lapse video of the planting, complete with pagan blessing of the trees, [here](#).

From 2011 to 2015, civic organizations and school groups planted 401 native trees, wispy twigs at first, barely poking above the autumn grass. Few planters that day likely envisioned a future forest where they stood, where they could return some years later to find shade instead of a searing sun. But that day is now --the trees have thrived, their long limbs interlocking and providing twiggy perches for birds to hang their nests. I hope some of our volunteers have returned to see their handiwork. Even the youngest among them are college-aged now and onto a life they couldn't imagine back then. We have continued planting over the years so you will see trees of all sizes, from clusters of wispy sticks in the grass to 30 foot trees where no grass grows, showing the origins of the large trees and the future of the small ones. You may find a plant tag identifying a particular tree and thanking you for your efforts that day.



Thanks to all of you who got the forest started in those early days, including DG Cooley Elementary, Flint Hill High School, Fresta Valley Christian School, Nysmith School for the Gifted, Front Royal/Warren County Tree Stewards, Saplings Inc., Rappahannock High School, Master Naturalist program volunteers, and all of our faithful weekly volunteers. Next time we need volunteers for a tree planting will probably be late spring 2025 and we'll announce it through our website and social media when we do. Hope to see you here or somewhere else, starting a forest one tree at a time.

Where is the community forest? It is on both sides of the front entrance road, just as you enter the property. There is a very small patch on the right as you enter and it has an interpretive sign describing the project. There is a much larger patch on the left, about 100 yards in from the road and adjacent the older forest that borders U.S. Route 50.

Better Backyard Habitats

By Ariel Firebaugh

More than sixty people participated in Blandy's **Eco-Friendly Landscaping for Your Backyard Series** this fall. This six-part series was aimed at empowering homeowners to take practical steps to expand and improve wildlife habitat in suburban and urban landscapes. Speakers included familiar faces like Blandy Director Dr. Dave Carr and assistant Curator for Native Plants Jack Monsted, as well as and experts in the community such as Jamie Wood (Bartlett Trees), Jennifer Adams (Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation Ambassador), Justin Proctor (Virginia Working Landscapes), and Emilie Carter (Pyto Studio).



Missed these programs? There's still time to catch **Starting a Wildflower Patch from Seed: How to Seed and Maintain Meadows Large and Small** from 6:30-8:00 PM Thursday, January 16th [Register Now!](#)

We've also put together a few of our favorite Backyard Habitat resources that emerged from these programs. [Check them out on our website!](#)

SAVE THE DATE

Foundation of the State Arboretum's

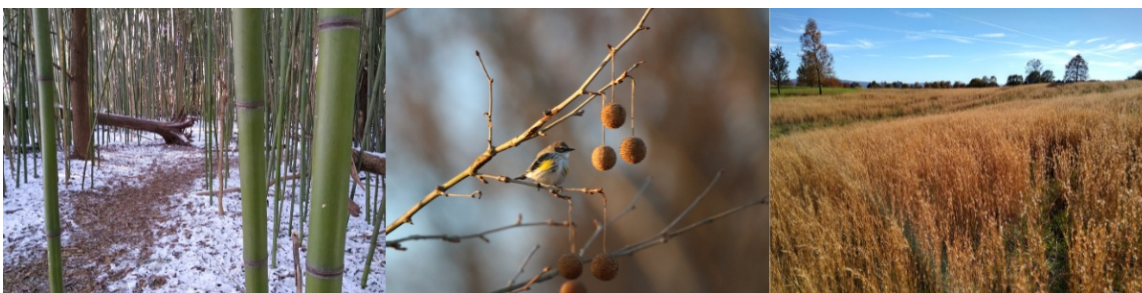


at Blandy Experimental Farm
MAY 10-11, 2025

Save the date for the much anticipated 35th celebration of Garden Fair at Blandy Experimental Farm, the home of the State Arboretum of Virginia. Garden Fair is the biggest fundraising event of the year of the Foundation of the State Arboretum, the nonprofit that provides support for Blandy Experimental Farm and the State Arboretum's varied collections and public education programs. This Mother's Day tradition will feature 60+ vendors offering the best selection of native plants, annuals, perennials, herbs, trees, shrubs, garden tools, nature inspired crafts and more. We'll have food, music, environmental educators and so much fun! **Tickets to a special preview night on May 9th with food, drink and first to shop privileges will be open to FOSA members.**

**TICKETS for GARDEN FAIR AND OUR MEMBER PREVIEW
EVENT GO ON SALE APRIL 1, 2025.**

**BECOME A FOSA MEMBER
TODAY**



More Than Just Conifers - Winter Plants in the Arboretum

By Jack Monsted, Assistant Curator, Native Plant Trail

Winter at Blandy. The holidays have just passed, and the quarters building is still

bedecked with greenery from our winter wreath-making workshops. As the festive afterglow of the holiday season wanes, we begin the long, slow journey towards spring. On the arboretum's landscape, grays, browns and muted greens become nature's palette. The fiery colors of autumn have faded and the vibrant green of summer is a distant memory.

And yet there are still fascinating sights to see in the arboretum. Our extensive conifer collection is an attraction for many this time of year, and understandably so - they're the only trees still covered in green, holding on to their waxy needles despite the cold winds and frequent freezing. While they are certainly worth appreciating now, there are many more amazing plants to admire on your winter walks at Blandy if you know what to look for.

[Learn more about the magic of our Bamboo Grove, appreciate the Sycamore trees with their ivory spires twisting ever skyward, and admire the broomsedge and winter grasses creating fields of gold.](#)

Two Familiar Faces Bid Blandy Farewell This Spring



*Top: Judy Masi (L) in the courtyard of Blandy's historic Quarters Building, 2023.
Bottom: Candace Lutzow-Felling (2nd from left) with her education team in 2017.*

[There's more to read and celebrate about about Judy and Candace on our](#)

By Maggie McCartney, Field Station Manager
As we celebrate the retirements of Judy Masi, our Program Finance and Administration Manager, and Candace Lutzow-Felling, our Director of Education for PreK-12 Programs, we're taking a moment to reflect on the incredible impact they've had at Blandy Experimental Farm. Judy's journey with us started back in 1992 as a temporary part-time employee, and over 32 years, she's been the steady hand guiding Blandy through big changes in technology, leadership, and financial systems. She's been everyone's go-to problem solver and trusted colleague, always ready with solutions, advice, or a listening ear. Judy's love for Blandy shines through her memories of special moments with colleagues and her favorite spots like the cedars of Lebanon and the stunning Blue Ridge view from Peetwood. As she heads into retirement, she's excited to dive into personal projects and new adventures, leaving behind a legacy of resilience and community that we'll always treasure.

Candace joined Blandy in 2006 and completely transformed our educational outreach. Under her leadership, student

[website!](#)

participation in our programs grew from 4,000 to 6,500 annually, and Blandy became a recognized leader in environmental education across the Mid-Atlantic. She built a strong education team, forged valuable school partnerships, and created programs that inspired both students and teachers to connect deeply with nature and science. Candace's favorite memories include seeing students explore Blandy with excitement and finding peace in the beauty of the Iris Garden and the view from Peetwood. As she steps into her next chapter, Candace is looking forward to coordinating a statewide network for outdoor learning and focusing on her passions for writing and botanical illustration. We're so grateful for everything Judy and Candace have done for Blandy and wish them all the best as they begin these exciting new adventures!

Picnic Grove Improvements



Can you see Peetwood Pavilion? It's just across the road in the background. The flags mark the path route.



The path surface is a fine grade gravel that is suitable for wheelchairs, walkers and strollers. Everyone can use the path!

By Candace Lutzow-Felling, Director of Education
We invite you, your friends, and your family to visit our Picnic Grove to enjoy the new picnic tables and the new pathway winding through the Grove. Take a look at the photo: Can you spot Peetwood, our education pavilion? It was difficult for some teachers who were guiding their students there for an education program because they couldn't see the building. With the new pathway, we now can simply tell them to follow it to Peetwood. Since its installation, no school groups have gotten lost, a not infrequent occurrence before the path was built.

The pathway was conceived, designed, and funded by FOSA. Brandon Fox, our buildings superintendent, oversaw the construction. According to Brandon, "The stone dust path through the picnic grove provides students with a safer route to take from the Parkfield Learning Center to Peetwood Pavilion. We chose stone dust



New composite picnic tables made from recycled plastic.

because it makes a smooth, level surface accessible for wheelchairs, walkers and strollers. Once compacted, it forms a solid, durable surface that is easy to maintain.”

An additional improvement: we replaced the old wooden picnic tables that were splintering with 16 new composite tables made from recycled plastic, giving the Picnic Grove a fresh, updated look. These tables were purchased using funds from my discretionary education program budget.

Next time you visit the Arboretum, stop by our newly updated Picnic Grove to enjoy fresh picnic tables and a newly installed pathway that makes it easier for all visitors, especially school groups, to find Peetwood Pavilion safely and easily.

50th Annual Christmas Bird Count in the Books!



This yellow-bellied sapsucker, photographed by Dave Carr, was one of the many birds that responded to a screech owl call at Blandy during the Northern Shenandoah Valley Christmas Bird Count on December 14th.



Blandy's Kyle Hartmann, (L) and Dave Carr (R) are two of the 40 volunteers who participated in the 50th annual local Northern Shenandoah Valley Christmas Bird Count.

More than 40 volunteers participated in the 50th annual Northern Shenandoah Valley Christmas Bird Count on December 14th counting 85 species of birds in the full count circle spanning a 15-mile diameter that includes Blandy Experimental Farm.

Launched on Christmas Day in 1900 by Frank Chapman and 26 other conservationists, the Christmas Bird Count was originally introduced to promote counting, rather than hunting, birds on Christmas Day. Now in its 125th year, run by the [Audubon Society, the Christmas Bird Count](#) takes place annually between December 14th and January 5th in more than 20 countries in the western hemisphere. These counts provide a wealth of data on bird populations and their health over long periods of time.

Blandy Experimental Farm has been participating in the Christmas Bird Count since the

1970s. Area-5, the part of the local count circle that includes Blandy, is headed up by Dave Carr. This year, the three volunteers in area-5 began their day in the early morning darkness at Blandy, observing and documenting birds for more than 12 hours on both foot and by car.

"Our Blandy group totaled 58 species for the day, which is a little above average for us," said Carr. "Our most exciting birds included an American Barn Owl, American Pipits, American Tree Sparrows, and a Chipping Sparrow. The Chipping Sparrow was my first on this CBC in my 28 years. It is a species that will likely become more routine as winters become milder."

After dark, the birders from the entire Northern Shenandoah Valley Christmas Bird Count gathered at Blandy for the annual *Compilation or Tally Rally*, an evening of sharing observations from the day, compiling all their data and preparing it to be sent to the Audubon Society.

Of course all this data from the Northern Shenandoah Valley will be added to all the other annual Christmas Bird Count data from around the state, country, continent and western hemisphere to provide important bird population and behavior information for years to come.

The annual Northern Shenandoah Valley Christmas Bird Count traditionally takes place on the very first Saturday of the international count according to Carr. So look for the local birders again on December 20, 2025!

[Read more about the local 50th annual Christmas Bird Count in the Winchester Star article](#)

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