

Muddy Gloves Quarterly

Autumn 2019 Edition

Brought to you by the Stewards of the Thielke Arboretum

Leave the Leaves

Is there anyone in NJ who doesn't think their property taxes are too high? Not likely! Ours are the highest property tax rates in the US. If you think you don't get enough services for those taxes, here's a simple way to help yourself as well as the ecosystem: stop putting your leaves out for collection.

It may seem obvious, but: leaves are mulch. You remove them from your lawn for exactly that reason. We all know that, if left in a thick layer over the winter, leaves equal no grass next year. Judging by all those piles and bags of leaves at the curb in the fall, though, a lot of people don't take the next step: if I move those leaves, with blower or rake, into my flower beds or under my shrubs, *they'll help suppress weeds*.

Yes. They will! And like all mulch but better, when leaves break down they act as nature's fertilizer. Plus, your town won't have to spend your taxes on DPW employee salaries, trucks, diesel fuel, and either cartage or storage fees (the collected leaves have to go somewhere), so that money can spent on other services. If in the spring you decide you hate the look of last year's leaves, you can always cover them with the commercial mulch (just not the colored versions, please. . . but that's an article for another time) you usually put down anyway.

Lastly, provided you can resist shredding the leaves with your mower and settle for moving them en masse into your beds or under your trees, you preserve the insects (and/or their eggs)--including some butterflies--that overwinter on or in leaves. You also provide habitat for small animals, such as turtles and salamanders. Please leave the leaves!



Luna moth cocoon in native leaf litter
Photo courtesy: A. Bockoven

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Under the Radar Invasion

The Arboretum and all our natural areas (even your yard!) are under attack by invasive plants. This attack usually moves in quickly. It happens under the radar because even most landscapers, let alone

most homeowners, are not trained in local plant identification or plant ecology. At the Arboretum we want to teach you how to identify plants, including and especially the noxious invasives that are destroying local habitat. We'd like you not only to understand what we do for the Arb but also to apply that understanding to your own landscape and to share this vital ecological knowledge with your friends and neighbors. Please join us Tuesday or Saturday mornings at 9:00 this Fall. We'll be spending many hours on plant ID and removing invasive plants. Learning and applying that information will allow you to help our entire community.



Mile-A-Minute, *Polygonum perfoliatum*, invasion at the Arboretum

Volunteer with Us!

Stewardship Volunteer Hours - 9am-12pm - Every Tuesday & Saturday
weather permitting

Summer Field Report

PROJECTS: Planting, propagation, painting, deer protection, construction, weeding (& more weeding).

DATES: June 2019 – Sept 2019

VOLUNTEERS PRESENT INCLUDE:

Stewardship Director: Jean E.

Veterans: Tom B., Peter B., Terry C., Naomi G., Fred L., Charlie M., Pat O., Jennifer O., Barbara P., Noreen P., Lisa S., Doug S., Tom S., Melissa T., Wendy W., Andrea V.

2019 Master Garden Classmates:

Herb A., Liz G., Lillian K., Keith M., Caroline N., Gerry R., Harriet S., Diane V., Jeannie Y., and Lucy J.

Newbies & Students: Eric B., Tarun B. Antonio B., Will B., Will C., Tomas C., Oliver D., Aiden D., Carter D., Donna D., Niko E., Elizabeth F., Steve F., Alan G., Katie G., Thom G., Diego H., Ben L., Kelly L., Mahomed M., Eric M., Michael M., Frank N., Emir O., Eric R., Conan R., Jim R., Luca S., Kristen T., Beatrice W.A., Nick W.

(If we missed you, let us know!)

CONDITIONS: Wet, Humid, Hazy & Hot.

DAYS/TIMES: Tuesdays & Saturdays / 9:00 AM - 12:00PM

Tuesday sessions were led by Master Gardener Barbara P. Saturday sessions were led by the big chief, Jean E. with assistance from Veteran Master Gardener, Pat O.

TREE OF THE SEASON

Black Tupelo, *Nyssa sylvatica*

- Full or Part Sun and Moist Soil
- Fantastic Fall Color
- Flowers provide nectar for many pollinators
- Berries Feed Wildlife



COMPLETED TASKS:

1. This summer the weeds grew like . . . Audrey II from *Little Shop of Horrors*. Every time we turned around there were more weeds. And they were larger. And they were a more virulent green. No, they didn't start songs demanding our blood, but we could hear them sneering! It became downright frightening to watch the flourishing of the invasives. For the first time we didn't only pull and mow weeds; we bought a gas-powered whacker and spent about thirty hours on stilt grass alone, trying to keep it from going to seed and taking over even more of our acreage next year.

2. One reason for weeds flourishing: rain, rain, and more rain. Swales swelled with rain; Diamond Brook flooded with rain. Logs marking the edges of trails repeatedly floated as much as ten feet away from where they had been placed. Our high school men were of great value in returning the logs to their proper position, but there's no fighting with water: in the long term the logs will be removed instead of replaced.

3. Last year our newly planted cardinal flower and many other natives were decimated by deer. This year Herb A. diligently applied deer repellent to new plantings. We also surrounded newly-planted trees and shrubs with hard-wire cages. The sumacs planted on the ridge of the Gilligan Trail thrived with this protection, although the hillside was overrun with Japanese knotweed almost as soon as the cages went up. A hardy high school crew removed the knotweed in July, but then came the tsunami of Japanese hops, which we'll be *hopping* to remove in September so the sumacs get a clean start in spring.

4. Stewards volunteered for a special Friday outing to propagate native holly cuttings at Mount Vernon Farms. The crew assembled early in the morning with the intention of taking approximately 100 cuttings from our native American hollies. Enthusiasm took over and the number of cuttings quickly grew to over 300. The stewards piled into cars and traveled to Vernon, NJ where nursery proprietor Elmer Platz awaited our arrival with 100 sand-filled plastic pots. Elmer scrambled to gather more pots to accommodate the increased quantity of cuttings, which will be ready in a year or two.



Stewards learning how to propagate cuttings from Elmer

5. Tom S. spearheaded the repair of our beloved tool shed. We have a new roof, a new coat of paint, and far fewer four-footed furry friends.

6. Just in time for this issue to announce the Grand Opening, Lisa S. completed construction of Evelyn's Magic Garden! Please see the article on p.4, and join us for the Grand Opening on Oct. 5!



Our "Like New" Tool Shed

Answering the Six Questions of Pruning



Ramapo Tree arborist in a bucket truck pruning beech limbs

To remain healthy and shapely, most trees and shrubs in the home landscape will need regular pruning during their lifetimes. Many homeowners are unaware of this. Or they may be unsure how to answer, about pruning, the questions our language arts teachers told us were so important to every story: what, where, when, why, and how. This can lead a homeowner to do no pruning at all until the only answer to the last question--who--is: "a professional."

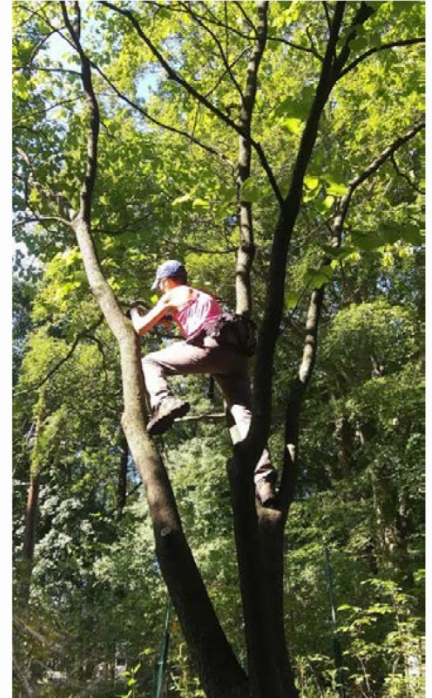
Directed by land manager Jean Epiphan, who is both a tree expert licensed by the state of New Jersey and an arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture, the usual "who" pruning both trees and shrubs in the Arb's "yard" areas is: volunteers.

This summer members of the Rutgers Master Gardener class of 2019 spent three hours in one day pruning near the gazebo. They learned to assess for damaged or crossing limbs and branches. Based on the species of tree or shrub, they also learned carefully to evaluate shape and structure. The "what," "where," and "why"

questions of pruning thus answered, they then--methodically using correct techniques (the "how")--slowly reshaped the trees on which they worked.

As for the answer to the "when" question--well, that depends on the species of tree or shrub. Ms. Epiphan guides the volunteers on this at the Arb. It's not a simple topic. For example, if you prune your azaleas or rhododendrons today, you will have no flowers on those plants next year. What this means for the homeowner is that for best results he or she must determine the species of plant that is to be pruned.

Those who volunteer as stewards at the Arb learn many of the answers to the six questions of the pruning story as they work. If you would like to acquire pruning techniques and some of the information you'll need for the answer to "who will do the pruning" question most often to be "Me!" rather than "a professional," please consider volunteering as a steward. For a briefer introduction to pruning you may wish to consider enrolling in the two-hour pruning class at the Arb on Saturday October 5th at 1:00 (rain date Sat. 12th at 1:00). The cost of the workshop is \$20 and registration is limited. You can register online now at <https://www.thielkearboretum.org/events>.



Experienced climber and volunteer, pruning off dead branches using a pruning saw

Relatively little of the Arboretum's acreage even resembles the home landscape. The areas along Doremus and around the pond are as close as we come to a "yard." Only in those areas is a pruning program constantly under way.

Occasionally this program causes consternation for Arb users who frequent these areas. When concerns arise it's usually because the Arb has made use of Ramapo Tree & Shrub Care for pruning too dangerous or involved for the volunteers who usually handle it.

Recently, for example, Ramapo Tree removed several large limbs from beech trees near the Educational Center and the gazebo. These limbs had become too large and heavy to support their own weight. Indeed, a limb almost twenty inches thick at the base had already snapped off one of the trees. We were very fortunate that this happened overnight when no one was on the path or bench beneath the tree! Such hugely overgrown limbs pose dangers both to the health of the tree and to the safety of Arb visitors, and must be pruned away by professionals.

Most pruning at the Arb, however, need not be done by professionals, because it's within the reach of volunteers.

Evelyn's Magic Garden

Recalling childhood hours playing in the forest, veteran Arboretum volunteer Lisa Summers listed acorn caps, tiny twigs, bark, leaf blades, and pebbles as essential building materials for creating fairy houses. With an awareness that children now have fewer and fewer of the opportunities for the unstructured play in nature that she enjoyed, and to honor her mother Evelyn, Lisa has designed and built a children's garden near the Arboretum's gazebo.



Entrance & Teepee in the Magic Garden

This magical place was designed to entice children young enough to go through the four-foot-high stick-built arch that artfully frames its main entrance, a gap in the surrounding short wattle fence. The fence keeps children in so that adults can stay at a distance, an essential for imaginative play. Proceeding along stepping stones, a child arrives at a teepee too short for an adult to enter (again: no parents allowed!). Near the teepee are a round wooden round table, tiny benches, and a cabinet. It's like an outdoor kitchen for playing house. Also available for unstructured play are natural building blocks, a supply of woven

baskets--perhaps for collecting those building materials--and a game painted onto a wooden activity table. The final flourish of magic is a secret entrance that leads under a canopy of tall shrubs to a little meeting spot.

The Arb's safe and lovely new space for small children to enjoy nature will have its official Grand Opening on Saturday October 5th at 11:00 a.m. You are invited to join us to celebrate Lisa's work and to honor Evelyn. If the weather is good the event will be held at the gazebo; if not, at the Educational Center.

"Dear Tom"

Dear Tom,
My neighbors have gorgeous ornamental grasses. I'm jealous! What are the best grasses?

- Gorgeous Grass Admirer



Hairy-awned muhly grass

Dear Gorgeous Grass Admirer,
You have excellent taste. Many people fail to appreciate the grace and delicate beauty of grasses. I'm happy to help, but--BEWARE! The grasses you admire in your neighbors' yards are most likely species that are invasive in NJ, such as the commonly-planted Chinese silvergrass (*Miscanthus sinensis*) and fountain grass--aka bunny grass (*Pennisetum spp.*). These known invasives are unfortunately sold everywhere. We can help prevent their further spread and the harm they cause to our environment by choosing other grasses. And besides: you don't want to just copy your neighbors, right? Fortunately, we have many gorgeous native grasses to choose from, some of which also support endangered butterflies. Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) and the very showy little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) support the endangered argos skipper. For a punch of purple late season, the low-statured purple love grass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*) and the taller hairy-awn muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) exhibit an ethereal flower plume. Some great options for tall background spots or areas where there is room to spread are Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*).



Little bluestem inflorescence

UPCOMING EVENTS

M. 9/23	New Docent Info Session	7pm
Su. 9/29	Sketching Plants	2pm
Tu. 10/1	Best Gardening Advice	6:30 pm
Fri. 10/4	Nature Nerd Night	5-7pm
Sa. 10/5	Evelyn's Magic Garden Grand Opening	11am
Sa. 10/5	Pruning Basics, Trees & Shrubs (rain date 10/12)	1-3pm
Su. 10/6	ARTboretum, Tic Toc Program (rain date 10/13)	2-4pm
Su. 10/20	Science & Art in Nature: Why Leaves Change Color	3-5pm
Th. 10/31	Halloween for Tots	1-2:30pm
Fri. 11/1	Nature Nerd Night	4-6pm
Su. 11/3	Native Fall Color Tour	1-3pm
Su. 11/3	Science & Art in Nature: Documenting Trees w/ Color Resist	3-5pm
Tu. 11/5	Best Gardening Advice	7pm
Su. 11/17	Learn to Make Cordage	1-3pm
Tu. 12/3	Best Gardening Advice	7pm
W. 12/4	Community Forestry	7pm
Fri. 12/6	Nature Nerd Night	4-6pm
Sa. 12/14	Science & Art in Nature: Soil Science	3-5pm

For complete information or to
REGISTER visit:
www.thielkearboretum.org