

MASTER GARDENERS MAKE A HUGE IMPACT AT THE CEC

By Zora Lathan, October 2014



Background on the CEC and the Partnership with Master Gardeners

Beginning in 2002, the Chesapeake Ecology Center (CEC) has installed and maintained 24 Native Plant Demonstration Gardens and Groves at the 10-acre waterfront campus of J. Albert Adams Academy—the alternative middle school for all of Anne Arundel County—where the CEC is based. Situated along the tidal headwaters of College Creek in the heart of Annapolis, it is an ideal location to showcase rain gardens, xeriscapes, tree groves, riparian forest buffers, and other practices that protect and restore the environment. We provide garden tours and on-the-ground environmental education using the gardens as outdoor classrooms. The grounds have traditionally been called Adams Park by the neighborhood and many other visitors, who are respectful of the school grounds and hours.

Throughout the years, the Native Plant Demonstration Gardens and Groves at the CEC at J. Albert Adams Academy (JAAA) middle school have been installed, edited, and maintained by countless volunteers, especially Anne Arundel County Master Gardener (MG) volunteers. MGs have provided assistance when working with county residents, elementary through college-age students, teachers, and behaviorally-challenged students at JAAA. Students fulfill their Service Learning hours by learning about native plants, wildlife habitat, rainscaping, and other conservation landscaping practices, while assisting with planting native trees and shrubs, creating brush piles for wildlife habitat, composting, and adding mulch to gardens. Our primary focus in working with JAAA students has been environmental education through outdoor experiential learning. Through these activities, both students and teachers have provided assistance with conservation landscaping initiatives.

Since 2002, with the help of MGs and other volunteers, and occasional contractor assistance, we have planted approximately 3,000 native trees and shrubs and countless native herbaceous perennials. The results are beautiful native plant gardens and groves that provide wildlife habitat, cleaner air and water, a reduced carbon footprint, and a place for all to enjoy and learn about conservation landscaping via guided and self-guided tours. And on-going volunteer sessions provide opportunities to increase the environmental literacy of young people and adult volunteers.

Highlights of MG Participation in Special Programs and Projects at the CEC

For over a decade, MGs have provided tremendous assistance with educational sessions for students and adults, garden tours, and special programs. And MGs have helped install and restore several gardens and groves at the CEC. The many activities MGs have participated in throughout the years are too numerous to mention, and the following are simply a few highlights of their participation:

- **In 2003, Master Gardener Thistle Cone began working part time with the CEC as its Science Educator. Thistle encouraged MG volunteer participation, which has continued and increased every year since then.** And although Thistle was part-time staff, “staff” is a term we use loosely at the CEC, in that staff members (two part-time most years) have donated much of their time. Since 2006, Thistle has continued to participate as a volunteer and has been a great asset to the CEC. Since 2005, Master Gardener Joyce Donlon—who happens to also be a master organizer—has coordinated MG participation at the CEC. Joyce has been in regular contact with CEC Executive Director Zora Lathan, and with CEC Garden Manager Ricky Meyer, to coordinate MG participation.
- **In the spring of 2005, one of the CEC’s early projects—in partnership with MG volunteers—was the installation the River Birch Rain Garden.** The rain garden was installed by MGs, Anne Arundel Green Party members, youth and leaders from the Juvenile Drug Court program, and JAAA students and teachers. MGs worked one-on-one with students to install the rain garden.
- **Since 2005, restoration of the half-acre Master Gardener Shade Garden has been on-going.** The garden has been restored and dramatically transformed over the years with the help of countless volunteers—especially MGs—and with the help of JAAA students and teachers, Girl Scouts, Naval Academy Midshipmen, international visitors from several countries (organized by the World Trade Center

Institute), Maryland Conservation Corps volunteers, and neighbors. A more detailed description of this garden can be found on the CEC Gardens page at www.ChesapeakeEcologyCenter.org.

- **On October 27, 2006, the CEC partnered with Bay-Wise MGs to hold a Rain Garden Workshop and install the Baywise Rain Garden.** A filled-to-capacity room of 35 individuals, mostly Bay-Wise MGs, participated in the very instructive and successful one-day workshop, which also resulted in the installation of a new rain garden on the grounds.

- **Each September in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013, the CEC received tremendous assistance from MGs with the CEC Garden Open House and Native Plant Sale.** MGs have assisted in preparing for the annual celebrations; and during the events, MGs assisted numerous visitors by providing one-on-one native plant advice and help with purchasing plants. MGs also conducted garden tours and provided conservation landscaping education to visitors.

- **August 24, 2006, the Environmental Grant Award Ceremony with U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes, U.S. Senator Benjamin Cardin, and other dignitaries, was hosted by the CEC at JAAA.** The official announcement of the 2006 Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grant awards included speakers—U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes, U.S. Senator Benjamin Cardin, Rebecca Hanmer (former Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program), CEC Board President Vince Leggett, and Zora Lathan. MG participation helped make this special program for over 100 attendees an outstanding success.

- **The April 22, 2007, Earth Day Tree Planting with Governor Martin O'Malley was a memorable occasion.** MGs helped with preparations and participated in what turned out to be a wonderful Earth Day celebration with youngsters, adults, and several dignitaries. The JAAA principal, teachers and students were grateful and thrilled to have had this event at their school. Governor O'Malley—who visited and helped plant trees for over an hour—worked with over 100 middle school students and teachers from JAAA and Bates to install the Oak Grove covering half an acre.

- **During 2007, 2008, and 2009, with the help of MGs, we made great strides in removing invasive species and reforesting the riparian forest buffer along the tidal headwaters of College Creek,** covering approximately 2.5 acres (of the 10-acre campus), as well as enhancing the CEC Native Plant Demonstration Gardens and Groves. During this phase, approximately 1,600 native trees and shrubs were planted with the help of contractor Ashton Manor Environmental, MGs, JAAA, and other volunteers.

- **On April 2, 2009, another special occasion occurred—the CEC Volunteer Day and Videotaping by Maryland Public Television (MPT).** In addition to MPT staff, we were joined by enthusiastic MG volunteers, ensuring that the CEC's first major volunteer day of the season would be a huge success. We got off to a great start with MGs working with small groups of JAAA students. MPT filmed all of the various activities and conducted filmed interviews, including interviews with MGs, about the value of rain gardens and other native plant installations, and the irreplaceable value of volunteer assistance. MPT aired the eight-minute segment during their two-hour Chesapeake Bay Volunteer-A-Thon on April 26th.

- **In 2009 and 2010, MGs provided great assistance to the CEC in coordinating and working with four different groups of international environmental professionals** who toured the grounds and volunteered their time to help native plant trees and shrubs and spread mulch throughout various gardens. Arranged by World Trade Center Institute, three groups of visitors were from countries in Latin America and another group came from countries all over the world. Volunteers also included University of Maryland and Anne Arundel Community College interns.

- **In 2009, 2010, and 2011, MGs assisted the CEC in implementing the RainScaping Campaign (RC).** The RC—an environmental partnership for stormwater runoff solutions (primarily active during 2009-2013)—was organized by the CEC. This social marketing campaign brought together over 50 partners whose common purpose is to improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries by motivating a critical mass of residents to make RainScaping the norm in Anne Arundel County. MGs especially helped with RainScaping Exhibits, e.g., at the Quiet Waters Park Earth Day Celebration and at other special events. Additionally, MG volunteers graciously participated—on camera—in the installation of a

rain garden for use as an instructional video by the RC. With the help of MGs, we held several RainScaping Tours and Presentations at the CEC throughout 2009 to 2011. MGs helped plan and conduct several of the educational tours/presentations on topics including rain gardens, rain barrels, permeable pavers, and forest buffers.

- **In the fall of 2010, MGs and Naval Academy Midshipmen worked with the CEC to install the Glenwood Street Rain Garden, and to spruce up the Catch-All Rain Garden.** Several fall volunteer sessions culminated in a CEC Volunteer Day on October 30. With the volunteer instruction and help provided by MGs, and the help of two dozen Midshipmen, it was a very productive day.

- **On June 6, 2012, MGs assisted in providing a Garden Tour to 32 Master Gardeners for their Landscape Design for Water Management Advanced Training Class.** It was a great day for all. This was just one of many outstanding garden tours MGs have helped conduct.

Highlights of MG Participation in Garden Makeovers and the Extension of the Riparian Forest Buffer

“The only constant is change.” From 2011 to 2014, we've made edits to several gardens to enhance the gardens as well as to reduce maintenance. Editing the CEC Gardens has largely consisted of changing the plant palette in a few gardens and reducing the size of some of the beds. With the tremendous help of MGs, edits and enhancements to a half dozen gardens at the CEC have been largely completed. Some of the high-maintenance herbaceous perennial beds have been converted to more manageable, self-sustaining tree and shrub beds, which are particularly appropriate for school grounds.

- **In 2011, several RainScaping Tours were combined with Volunteer Saturdays.** MG assistance was instrumental in transforming several gardens, including: the Virginia Sweetspire Xeriscape; the Highbush Blueberry Rain Garden; and the Master Gardener Shade Garden.

- **During 2012 and 2013, with the help of MGs, educational sessions and garden tours were provided, and on-going edits/enhancements to gardens were made,** including: the Sweetbay Magnolia Rain Garden; the BayScape; and the Dragonfly Garden.

- **The 2013 and 2014 College Creek Forest Buffer Restoration Initiative** began in September 2013, as part of Governor O'Malley's Stream Restoration Challenge. During 2013 and 2014, several scheduled CEC Volunteer and Garden Tours Days were held with MGs, members of the Fours Rivers Garden Club, JAAA students and teachers, pre-school through college students, Cub Scouts, and other volunteers. The CEC also held two full work days with a contractor, and several more work days with CEC Garden Manager Ricky Meyer, who has removed a great deal of invasive vegetation throughout the grounds. In the fall of 2013, 277 native trees and shrubs were added to the 10-acre campus in both the front and back of JAAA. And in 2014, an additional 123 native trees and shrubs were installed throughout the grounds. The spring volunteer days began with JAAA Celebrating Earth Day and Earth Week with the CEC and MGs. Spring through fall, MGs have worked one-on-one with JAAA students and other volunteers to add native trees and shrubs to several gardens and groves.

- **We ended 2014 on October 18, with a Garden Tour with MGs, and the Dedication and Celebration of the Master Gardener Shade Garden! Over a 10-year period, with the tremendous help of numerous volunteers—and especially Master Gardeners—this half-acre former invasive species site and dumpsite has been completely transformed and restored!**

All of our numerous educational and restoration activities would not have been possible with the expertise, dedication, and invaluable contributions of Master Gardeners! Photographs of our numerous activities can be seen on the CEC Photo Gallery pages at www.ChesapeakeEcologyCenter.org.