



## The Dirt MBGNA Volunteer Newsletter

### True Confessions of an “Environmental Volunteer Steward”

By Aunita Erskine

About eight years ago, while waiting to enter the Master Gardener Program, I volunteered to take care of a native plant garden at the City of Ann Arbor’s Furstenberg Nature Center. It was a sad and sorry mess. I gathered together some volunteers and we did our best to turn it into a nice interpretive garden filled with Michigan native plants. Along the way I learned a ton about native plants at all stages of growth and made many friends. One day Dave Borneman, the director of the City’s Natural area Preservation Department, said to me, “Aunita, do you know what you are?” Fearing the honesty of his response, I replied with the obligatory, “What?” He declared: “You are the City’s first Volunteer Steward”. To me this sounded much more honorable than a lunatic, slacker, procrastinator, or swindler, so I was much relieved.

Around this same time, I became interested in some of the natural areas at Matthaei Botanical Gardens, especially since now I knew which plants were native and the value of increasing their presence in nature. Again with other volunteers, I organized workdays to begin getting rid of buckthorn, honey-

suckle, dame’s rocket, and other invasive plants from the reconstructed prairie and Kirk Woods area. I really enjoyed watching the landscape change and fill up with native wildflowers that were previously covered up with invasive plants. I had gone from weeding a garden to weeding the woods! And I still carried the same label: “Volunteer Steward”. The label seemed so strange to me at first, but as I naturally progressed from learning, then to caring and connecting with the environment, its meaning became clear.

Being a volunteer steward for the land is rewarding in many ways. Protecting and caring for the land leads to an increase in diversity of plants, insects, and mammals among other things. I have enjoyed teaching others about both of these areas. Preserving the  
*(continued on page 3)*



*Ford Motor Co Team volunteers putting in plants near the peony garden at the Arb.*

### Coordinator’s Corner

By Barbara Major

Welcome! Over the summer I spent ten days in Maine visiting the Acadia National Park, Coastal Botanical Garden of Maine, many seaports, and the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, dedicated to the stewardship of coastal watersheds and estuaries. I am always amazed at the beauty and wonder of our natural resources and how important it is to steward them for future generations.

Fall is a great time to explore and attend one of the many groups that meet at the Botanical Gardens to expand your learning and environmental awareness on how to balance the protection of our natural resources with people’s enjoyment and use. Several have national affiliations and an advocacy philosophy. The Washtenaw Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Michigan  
*(continued on page 2)*

## Coordinator's Corner (Cont. from page 1)

Botanical Club, and Wild Ones all meet monthly. For contact information and meeting times, call 734-647-7600.

Another wonderful resource for information is Botanical Gardens Conservation International, which is a worldwide organization dedicated to preserving plant biodiversity and endangered species. Their website is [www.bgci.org](http://www.bgci.org).

### Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:

**Ecological Restoration Workdays:** We have had wonderful support from Ford Motor Co. community service teams and UM student organizations helping us with our restoration efforts at the Arb and Gardens to remove invasive plant material, help stabilize our trails, and create a new interpretive walk around Willow Pond. If you would like to join this effort, we have designated the second Saturday of the month at the Arb and the fourth Saturday at the Gardens. You'll work under the supervision of our natural areas staff for a three hour morning shift helping with various projects.

**Conservatory Ambassador:** Our Docents and Garden Ambassadors do a great job introducing the public to our trails, formal gardens, and Conservatory. The docents lead public tours during the week and our ambassadors extend this service on the weekends in our formal display gardens. I am recruiting volunteers who have an interest in learning our plant collections in the Conservatory to offer general information and guidance to the public during our free open hours on Friday afternoon and a shift of your choosing on the weekend.

**Gift Shop:** Want a great way to spend an afternoon or morning? Want a volunteer job that is very flexible for weekday or weekend shifts? We will

## Pond Dipping Almost Year Round?

By Teri Williams

Judy Dluzen came up with the idea of documenting pond life at Willow Pond before and after dredging. Judy enlisted MaryBeth, one of our fabulous interns, who just happens to know her entomology and recruited volunteers for a critter hunt over at Willow. We found lots! Beetles, backswimmers, damselflies, mayflies, a water scorpion, along with tons of tadpoles.

train you for this important customer service position. Introduce our visitors to products that reflect our mission, such as varied books, stationary, jewelry, and organic botanicals for the skin. We are also looking for a volunteer to be part of a selection committee to choose books and specimen plants for sale through our Gift Shop. You would need to have a level of expertise and familiarity with plants that would complement our Conservatory and books that would reflect our emphasis on conservation, ecology, stewardship, and horticulture.



*Gift Shop volunteer, Irimi Beister.*

**Fall Clean-Up:** Soon the breezes will cool and bring down colorful leaves and remind our garden flowers that winter is coming and it's time to shed their showy blooms. Our horticulturists will be "breaking down" several gardens in mid-October and can use many helping hands. This is another great way to share your best garden stories with other volunteers while helping to create next season's spring palette of color.

**Volunteer Welcome Center:** As a volunteer you will now have access to a Hospitality Area (Room 126, located off the West Lobby). Though used primarily by docents and ambassadors, the room is available for any volunteer during normal business hours as a break area, a place to relax and read, or to meet and chat with others. Soon a snack cupboard and beverages will be provided for your use. This is one way for staff to show our appreciation for your time, effort, and involvement. We also have several public workstations with computer access if you need to do any research related to your volunteer task.

We then headed to the Steiner Fountains, in the Gateway Garden, and peered into the water just for fun. They're very nicely camouflaged, but once you find one, you suddenly see many of them throughout the water. Dragonfly nymphs! They're quite large, and if you look carefully on the plant life just above the water, you might even find an exoskeleton clinging to a leaf. MaryBeth tells us that critters can be found practically year round. Perhaps school tours will get some chilly fingers this fall!

## Fall Gardening

By Monica Milla

Even though the gardening season is winding down, there's still a lot to do in the garden! Fall is a great time for planting or transplanting, enjoying the color displays, and planning for spring.

Bulbs are what most people think of for fall planting, and fall is indeed a great time to plant spring-flowering bulbs. However, many nurseries are having end-of-season sales and it's a great time to add a few choice perennials, shrubs, and trees to the garden. It's also a great time to move plants to more suitable locations, or divide large or overgrown perennials. You can plant through October - Roots can grow in



soil temperatures as low as 40° F and it takes the soil a while to cool down.

Fall is also a good time to get tools organized and put away, and to survey your garden. Take a walk and really notice things. Enjoy the results of the work you did during the season (and harvest late vegetables if applicable!). Bask in the warm colors of fall-blooming plants, and make notes for next season (what worked where and what didn't, things to add or move, etc.). If you like crafts, you can use fall flowers or gourds to make wreaths, cornucopias, table decorations, and other delights.

*(See page 4 for Fall Gardening tips)*

## True Confessions of an “Environmental Volunteer Steward” (Cont. from page 1)

natural historical landscape seems to me just as important as preserving a historical building or priceless antique. Yet can we really put a price on the beauty of nature? Maybe someday a snippet of big bluestem grass will appear on the Antiques Roadshow and it will finally stump the experts on its value. Finally, the physical act of getting “back to nature” is in sharp but healthful contrast to my otherwise urban lifestyle. The City of Ann Arbor now has thirty Environmental Volunteer Stewards working in various City Parks which have had a huge impact on the natural areas and their surrounding communities. I am proud to think I have had a part in this effort by just starting to pull weeds in an overgrown public garden. I am also encouraged at the number of people who are now starting to notice



*Volunteers doing trail stabilization work at MBG.*

Marilyn Bland Prairie and Kirk Woods area at Matthaei.

The Natural Areas Steward Volunteer program at UM MBGNA is seeking people to protect and care for the land. Each site has targeted areas which need a person, group, or family to adopt, care for it and reap all the wonderful rewards I have described. Each area is as individual as the person who may wish to adopt it, to whatever degree of effort may be possible. If you are interested in becoming intimately acquainted with a part of nature, please contact Barbara Major at 734-647-8528 or via email: [bamajor@umich.edu](mailto:bamajor@umich.edu). Or better yet, consider signing up for an Ecological Restoration workday which may be found on the website calendar at [www.mbgna.umich.edu](http://www.mbgna.umich.edu). These are regularly held sessions that assist staff and Volunteer Stewards in various restoration efforts at both properties. There seem to be so many words bantered about these days: “natural”, “organic,” “green,” “eco-friendly,” “biosphere,” and yes even “stewardship.” But being an Natural Areas Steward Volunteer, protecting and caring for the land, is a win-win situation. This I know from first hand experience no matter how you choose to label it.

## Fall Gardening Tips

- Water your new or relocated plants until the ground freezes.
- Do **not** fertilize evergreens after early August. Fertilizer encourages new growth. Not only is this growth delicate and susceptible to frost damage, but plants need to slow down their functions to prepare for dormancy, including moving energy into the roots, not into new growth.
- If you can't plant your bulbs soon after purchasing them, store them at temperatures lower than 60° F and open the lid if they're in a box.
- Bring in any houseplants you had outside back inside in early September or when temperatures are about equal inside and outside. They should never be outside in temperatures lower than 50° F.
- Catch up on weeding before these pesky plants set seed.
- In September, stop fertilizing and deadheading roses. This gives the plant time to form hips and prepare for winter. In mid-late October, you may leave your roses un-pruned, or cut them back no shorter than 12 inches. After the ground freezes, use leaves as mulch, tucking them all around the stems. Do not use rose cones! They lack ventilation.
- Add amendments, like compost or shredded leaves, to the soil. Use leaves, shredded or whole, as mulch on beds.

## Plants for Fall Color

Asters	Little bluestem grass
Beautyberry bush	Mums
Bible leaf (or costmary)	Nannyberry bush
Burning bush	Ornamental kale and cabbages
Fragrant sumac	Pansies
Gaillardia	Sedum
Goldenrod	White snakeroot
Helenium	Witch hazel
Japanese anemone	Yarrow
Joe Pye weed	

### Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:

Contact Barbara Major at 734-647-8528 or via email: [bamajor@umich.edu](mailto:bamajor@umich.edu).

## Learn From the Experts

Discover the exciting educational opportunities at MBGNA. All MBGNA members now receive a 20% discount on all course offerings. For information regarding adult education classes, visit us online at [www.umich.edu.mbgna](http://www.umich.edu.mbgna).

### Forest and Landscape Ecology

Thur., Oct 12 (7-9 pm)

Sun., Oct 15, 22, 29 (1-4 pm)

### Catch a Falling Leaf!

#### Fall Color Walk and Tree ID at MGB

Sat., Oct 14 (10 am-noon)

### Michigan Ash Trees:

#### Past, Present, and Future?

Thur., Oct 26 (7-9 pm)

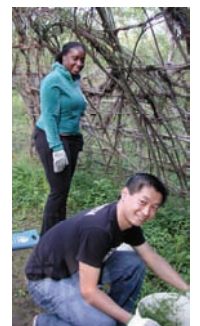
Sat., Oct 28 (9 am-noon)

### Winter Solstice Walk

Sat., Dec 9 (1-4 pm)



UM Law School volunteers weeding the daylily collection.



UM Law School student volunteers doing trail work at MBG.



Volunteer, Nan Esker, weeding the Gateway Garden at MBG.

## THANK YOU!

Many thanks to those who contributed to making this newsletter possible: Aunita Erskine, Carole Buttrum, Barbara Major, Monica Milla, Amy Rundquist, Teri Williams and our generous writers and photographers.

### UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN BOARD OF REGENTS

David A. Brandon  
Laurence B. Deitch  
Olivia P. Maynard  
Rebecca McGowan  
Andrea Fischer  
Andrew C. Richner  
S. Martin Taylor  
Katherine E. White  
Mary Sue Coleman (*ex-officio*)