

A VERY BUSY SUMMER AND FALL IN THE DC REGION



MARIE BUTLER LEVEN GETS A RAIN GARDEN

After three years of planning, a rain garden has arrived on the grounds of the Marie Butler Leven Preserve! The Preserve, a 20-acre park along Kirby Road in McLean, Virginia, is owned by the Fairfax County Park Authority. The Sangha is working with the FCPA to transform the Preserve into a “Native Arboretum” that celebrates our native plants, so our rain garden has a double function: it reduces stormwater run-off, and serves as a native-plant display.

A rain garden is like a huge sponge. It’s a hole (photo at top left), filled with very absorbent soil, and planted (top right). The garden captures run-off and water-borne pollution, then releases the water slowly into the surrounding soil. Rain-garden plants absorb some run-off and pollution, and create more wildlife habitat. A rain garden can ease run-off pressure on local streams—in this case, Pimmit Run.

Our garden drains about an acre of mostly asphalt and turf. The garden is slightly sunken so that run-off can pool on the soil surface for a short time before it’s absorbed. Overflow is channeled into a stormdrain a few feet away. The garden was engineered by Willie Woode, a water-quality expert (our term—not his!) for the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District. That’s Willie in the photo at right.

Willie’s design includes a couple of swales (shallow, grass-covered depressions) that reach out into the surrounding landscape, to collect run-off that would otherwise flow directly into the stormdrain. In this photo, Willie is getting ready to set some native grasses into the parts of the garden that receive the flow from these swales.

We planted the garden to mimic a particular native-plant community: the “heath” component of the oak-heath community, a widespread forest type in Virginia. (To learn more, visit www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage.) We chose this community because many of its species can tolerate the difficult growing conditions of a rain garden: drought, low soil fertility, and occasional inundation. Huckleberries, low-bush blueberries, and their relatives figure prominently in our planting. We rescued one species, the upland low blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*), from a patch of local oak-heath that had a date with the bulldozers. We surrounded the garden with a group of handsome, pink granite boulders—native stone, from a local excavation, to complement the native plants.

The garden is a collaborative effort between the FCPA, Soil and Water, the McLean Citizens Foundation, and us. It’s worth a visit, especially during, or after, a heavy rain!



Photos: In the banner, first-year rosettes of cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), at our Wild Plant Nursery. Top left: A Park Authority crew excavates the Marie Butler Leven rain garden in April. Top right: we plant it in October. Above: Willie Woode, rain garden engineer extraordinaire, wonders when the photographer is actually going to do some work.



Visit our page in the Catalogue for Philanthropy: www.catalogueforphilanthropy.org/dc

NURSERY NEWS



Events at our Wild Plant Nursery are chronicled on page 3 and the back cover. Above left: In September, the Fairfax County Park Authority extended the water line that serves our nursery, so that we could extend our container yard. (See the back cover.) At right, that's Lisa and Joe Nilson, Park Operations Manager for the part of the County that includes our nursery.

EARTH SANGHA

BUDDHIST VALUES IN ACTION

The Earth Sangha is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charity dedicated to environmental action as an expression of the Buddhist way of life.

Want to donate or join the Sangha?

You can support our work by becoming a member. Membership starts at \$35 per year. Your donation is tax-deductible.

Our mailing address is:
Earth Sangha
10123 Commonwealth Blvd.
Fairfax, VA 22032-2707.

Comprehensive program information is available on our web site: earthsangha.org.

Want to volunteer or meditate with us?

We work with volunteers at our nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia and DC. We hold regular sittings in Old Town, Alexandria, at 211 King Street, Third Floor, Tuesday and Wednesday Evenings, 7:00-9:00. For more information on either volunteering or sitting, call Lisa Bright at (703) 764-4830.

The Acorn

The *Acorn*, an occasional publication of the Earth Sangha, is created with "print on demand" technology, which consumes far less energy and materials than does conventional printing. This paper is 100% post-consumer waste recycled, process chlorine-free, and manufactured entirely with wind-generated electricity.

Photo credits: Lisa Bright: pp. 2 (bottom), 3 (top, top R, and bottom R), 4 (top R and bottom R), 5 (top, bottom R); Valerie Nye: p. 6 (top L); we're not sure: p. 3 (bottom L); other photos by Chris Bright.

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FUNDING UPDATES: SPRING CREEK, FAIRFAX, HSBC

In July, the Spring Creek Foundation awarded the Sangha a \$150,000 Strategic Grant—by far the largest grant that we have ever received in our six years of grant partnerships. Spring Creek has supported our work since 2002, but is now winding down its operations. In its final funding cycle, the Foundation made large, one-time grants to four of its clients, including us. The funds are intended for "capacity-building"—to increase substantially the capabilities of these organizations, which Spring Creek regards as especially valuable local resources. "From our first encounter," said Kelley Ellsworth, Spring Creek's Executive Director, "the Spring Creek Foundation has been deeply impressed by Earth Sangha. The heart and determination of your volunteers and staff, coupled by the results you achieve have garnered our support for years. As the Spring Creek Foundation sunsets, we hope that this Strategic Grant will enable Earth Sangha to grow and

prosper, and to continue its good work for decades to come." The Sangha has also been designated as a recipient for an annual grant, for the next decade, from a fund that Spring Creek has transferred to the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region.

In May, HSBC Finance Corporation continued its partnership with the Sangha by awarding us another \$7,000 grant. Last year's HSBC grant supported our Wild Plant Nursery; this year's helped us begin work on an invasives-free zone at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve. (You can see some of that work on page 4.)

In September, Fairfax County renewed its contract with the Sangha to collaborate with the County's Watershed Planning and Assessment Branch on stream buffer restoration. Thanks to this contract, the Sangha has a budget to do \$120,000 worth of stream-buffer work each year within the county. (See page 5.)

Also in September, the Fairfax County Urban Forest Management Division named the Sangha as a "Contributory Agency" in the county's effort to increase its tree cover from 41 to 45 percent of its land area over the next 20 years. Our designation came with a recommended allocation of \$20,000 per year from the County's Tree Preservation and Planting Fund.

"I am so grateful to all of our partners," said Chris Bright, the Sangha's President. "Thanks to them, we are now able to achieve some efficiencies of scale—and to do things that just weren't possible on our earlier, shoe-string budgets. That's good news for all of our donors. It's increasingly apparent that their investments in us are paying off."

Caroline Gabel, President of the Shared Earth Foundation, visited our nursery last July. Here, she talks with Chris (left) and Tommy Ventre, our new Conservation Director. Shared Earth was the original funder of our nursery, in 2001, and has supported it ever since.





Essential effort: This past growing season, clients of St. John's Community Services, a nonprofit that creates social opportunities for disabled people, volunteered at our nursery to help water our stock. They did a magnificent job, as this July photo of our container yard shows. A St. John's client and staff member are shown at upper right.

Fernishing: At right, Lisa (middle), Susan Abraham (far right), and a colleague discuss some potted sensitive fern. Maybe they're discussing its sensitivities. Susan is a landscape designer who specializes in native plants and uses our stock. Note our new shed in the background! Sort of a fern shed, you could say.

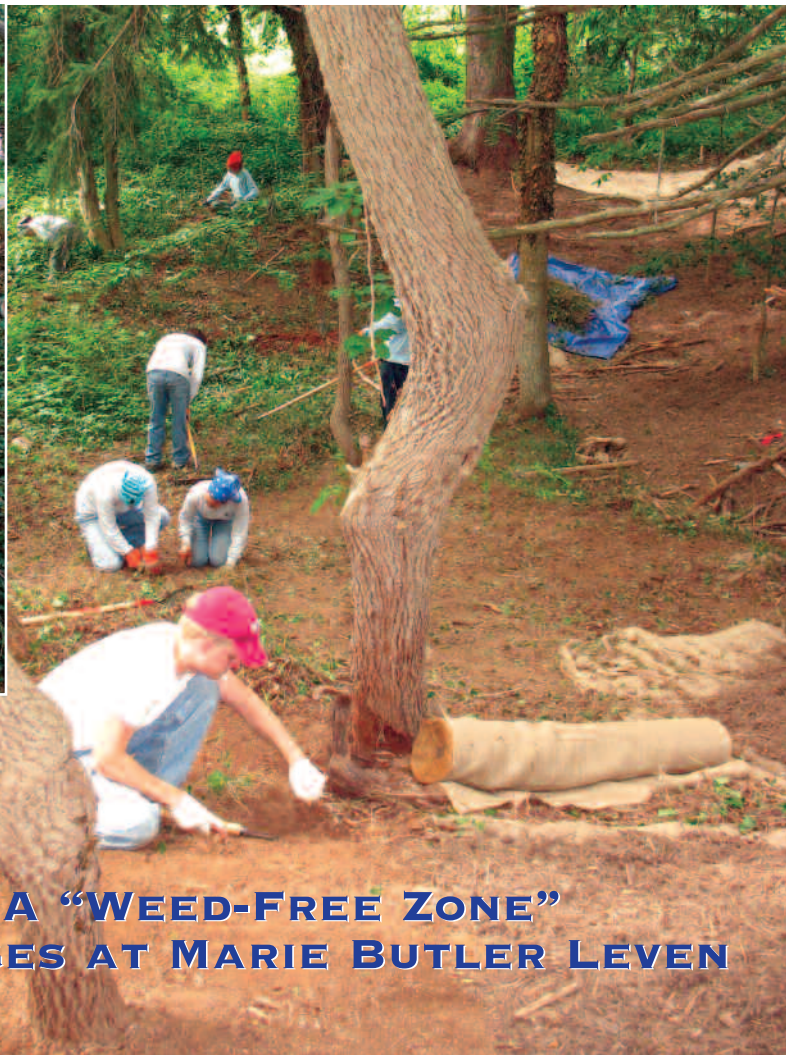
Arlington arrives: In October, we were pleased to host a visit from six Arlington County Park officials. Our Arlington guests are shown at lower left, along with Lisa, Tommy, and Chris. Arlington may collaborate with us to develop a nursery program similar to ours.

Board meeting: In July, Ed Batten (bottom right photo, far left) and Harry Glasgow, both members of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board, and Marcus Wadsworth (avec tie), from former Fairfax County Supervisor Dana Kauffman's office, suffer through Chris's harangue on the subject of wild-plant propagation, while Kerry Lyon, one of our nursery colleagues, looks on from a safe distance.





1. In April, we started clearing nearly half an acre of very dense invasive alien plant infestations at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve, our "Native Arboretum." (See cover.) As with many local parks, Marie Butler Leven is badly infested with invasives, which are displacing native plants and causing other ecological problems. Above, volunteers from HSBC Finance Corporation begin work on an extensive English ivy patch. It was very tough going. (In addition to organizing a volunteer day, HSBC funded much of the clearing work; see page 2.)



A "WEED-FREE ZONE" EMERGES AT MARIE BUTLER LEVEN



3. Finally, in November, we began installing a range of native trees, shrubs, and herbs, all grown from local seed at our Wild Plant Nursery, or, in a few cases, rescued from local sites about to be bulldozed. (That green line is our watering hose.) There's a lot more planting to do, especially in the herb layer, but we're going slow to make sure that we get a good result. In 2008, we'll extend the weed-free zone even deeper into the woods. Meanwhile, Tommy is leading a team of Invasives Control Divas (from left: Jody, Donna, Tommy himself, Sheri, and Angie) at another project near the Preserve's little gorge. If you would like to volunteer at the Preserve, call Lisa, at (703) 764-4830.

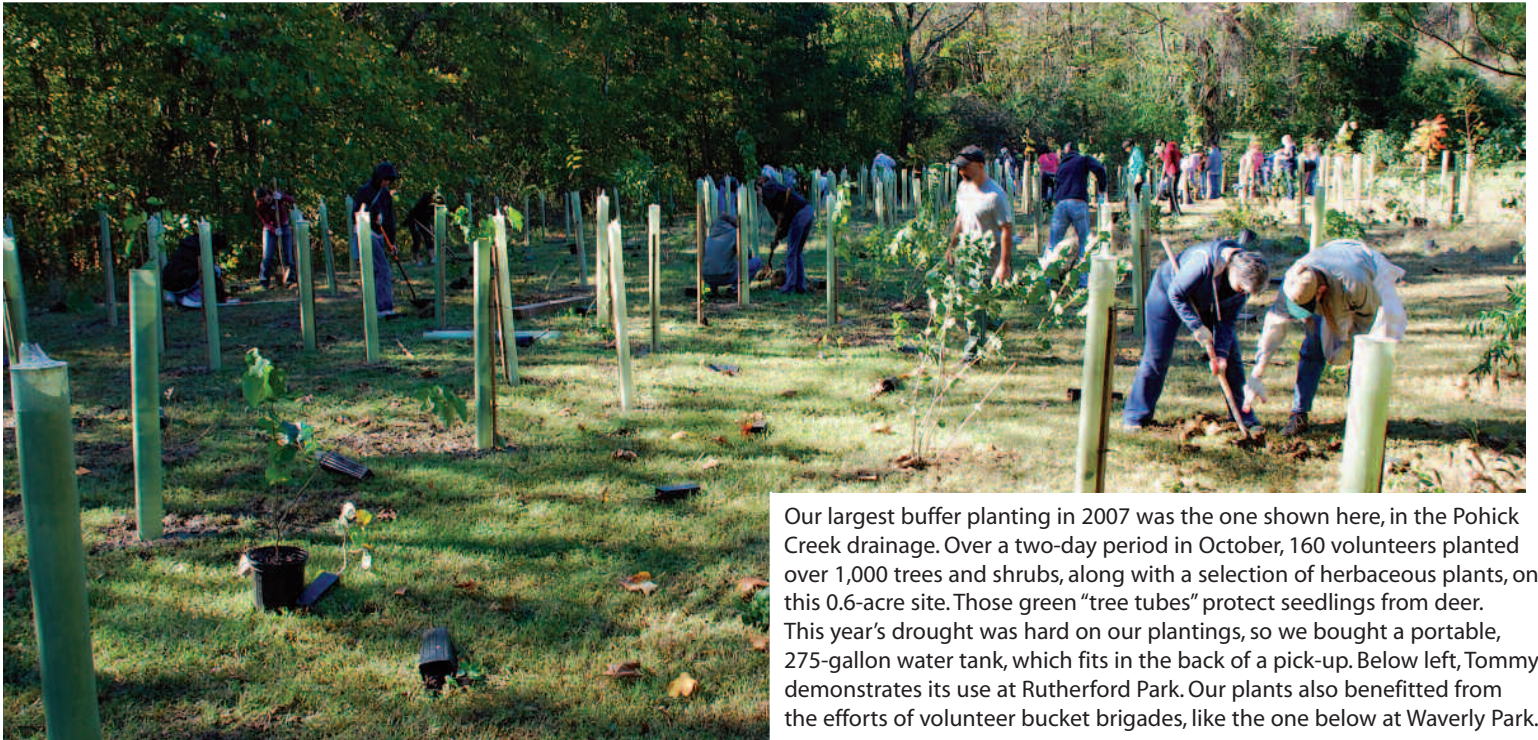
2. By mid-summer, Earth Sangha interns and volunteers had extended the clearing well into the forest (above). We installed burlap to prevent steep slopes from eroding. We topped the burlap with 4 to 6 inches of wood mulch and installed "check logs" to keep the mulch in place. Our project got a big boost from a team of Americorps volunteers, working with the Fairfax County Park Authority's Invasives Management Area program.



RECONNECTING FORESTS AND STREAMS



Our stream-buffer restoration work with Fairfax County continued this year, with another 12 plantings on 10 sites along streams or stormwater holding ponds. Reestablishing native cover in such sites helps stabilize streams, creates wildlife habitat, and eases the pressure on the Chesapeake Bay. This photo shows a planting in Waverly Park, in September.



Our largest buffer planting in 2007 was the one shown here, in the Pohick Creek drainage. Over a two-day period in October, 160 volunteers planted over 1,000 trees and shrubs, along with a selection of herbaceous plants, on this 0.6-acre site. Those green “tree tubes” protect seedlings from deer. This year’s drought was hard on our plantings, so we bought a portable, 275-gallon water tank, which fits in the back of a pick-up. Below left, Tommy demonstrates its use at Rutherford Park. Our plants also benefitted from the efforts of volunteer bucket brigades, like the one below at Waverly Park.





COMMUNITY

Can you spot the lack of a difference? Lisa likes to say that our work—for example, collecting the seed of Indian grass (top left)—does not differ from our formal Buddhist practice—for example, our annual Bodhisattva Vows ceremony, held last June at our nursery. (That's top right, where you can see Andrew giving a reading.) Readers' challenge: Understand Lisa and you'll discover that you're a Bodhisattva.

Loaded up: During fall, assorted truckloads of plants left our nursery, destined for local parks. Above, from left to right: Dan Zell from Dewberry heads out for a planting he organized in Eakin Community Park; Fairfax County Park Authority's Bruce Williams (kneeling on tailgate and doing his best to understand Lisa), organizes a big truckload of plants for a project along the Cross-County Trail; and our own Tommy Ventre (back to camera) picks up plants for the Marie Butler Leven Preserve.

An eagle fledges: That huge shade structure below was assembled in November by Dylan Drake and friends as Dylan's Eagle Scout project. At right, Dylan (with drill) ignores Michael's offer of a hex key. When it goes into production, Dylan's shade frame will extend our container yard by 6,800 square feet. Production below it will depend on how we configure the space, but it could easily come to another five to ten thousand seedlings every other year. That's one hell of an Eagle Scout project.

So there you have it! Practice, planting, growing. All community. No difference!

