

## Merikay Smith

Merikay Smith learned about native plants and their ecological value through the Master Gardener (MG) Program. She led the MG Speakers' Bureau and created a talk titled "Less Lawn: More Life" which, ten years on, she still gives frequently to garden clubs and other groups. While speaking to an interfaith group, Merikay was introduced to the Muddy Branch Alliance (MBA) and the Seneca Creek Watershed Partners (SCWP), two local watershed groups. She joined the boards of both organizations and eventually served as President of the SCWP. Working with these groups since 2013, Merikay personally distributed as many as 450 native tree seedlings per year and provided advice on planting. Handing out seedlings and chatting plants is one of her favorite annual activities. Spring 2024 will be the 10th year Merikay has led this project. This relatively simple endeavor has resulted in many new native tree advocates and thousands more native trees growing in our watershed.

In addition to handing out free seedlings, Merikay helped launch the MBA's annual native plant sale, providing local ecotype natives in the Gaithersburg area. Next, Merikay and I (Lauren Hubbard, MNPS President) worked together on a Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) supported project to install a native meadow at the Izaak Walton League of America, to serve as a demonstration site. And finally, through another successful CBT proposal written by Merikay, additional native plantings were



Photo by Jeff Smith.

installed at Historic Pleasant View (PV) to manage stormwater at the source. Led by Merikay, the PV garden was installed and has been maintained by more than 400 volunteers..

Merikay says, "This has given me the chance to teach all who help at least a bit about the benefits of native plants. For many this is new information and changes the way they plant in their home gardens. People who help at PV often go on to plant native trees, shrubs and perennials at home. One couple even completely redesigned their backyard (adjacent to the Muddy Branch) to remove lawn and create a conservation landscape funded with Rainscapes. Surprising what learning about native plants has done! Much of it planting one native tree or shrub at a time. I still don't feel particularly knowledgeable about native plants—especially compared with some in the MNPS— but even amateurs can learn to plant the seeds of growth in others!"

## Chuck Woolery

Chuck's bio provides a framework for his many interests and talents: "Linking vital US national security interests to achieving global humanitarian needs and generating media attention that frames national security needs within the context of both conservative and liberal values. Mobilizing and effectively organizing bipartisan grassroots efforts to generate media attention and political will to achieve progressive legislative goals." His interest in caring for people and the planet is evident in the work he has done to promote public health policy and tackle environmental issues.

When I asked Chuck if it would be ok to share about him in this column, he replied that he had just finished a tree survey of his ½ acre residential property in Rockville. He has 43 trees, only 3 of which are not native. Not surprisingly, not a hint of lawn can be found, the place is filled with natives which he regularly shares with anyone who is interested.

Chuck's influence goes well beyond his own yard. As a certified Montgomery County Weed Warrior Supervisor, he



Photo by Laura Woolery

"loves to identify and attack invasive species in our parks." Recently, Chuck was recognized as the Montgomery County weed warrior with the most volunteer hours! As if his MoCo hours weren't enough, he also leads the Weed Warrior volunteer initiative within the City of Rockville, filling the gap in weed warrior coverage that occurs due to jurisdictional boundaries. If you are interested in joining Chuck on one of his fun weed warrior outings check out the Weed Warrior opportunities in Rockville (<https://www.rockvillemd.gov/639/Weed-Warriors>).

Chuck was also honored for Outstanding Leadership in Environmental Practices for his work on the Twinbrook Park Forest Restoration Project. In 2019, certified Weed Warriors and volunteers, led by Anne Goodman, Sarah Salazar and Chuck Woolery, in coordination with City of Rockville staff, spent 118 hours removing hundreds of non-native invasive plants throughout nearly two acres of parkland in the Twinbrook neighborhood. In 2020, volunteers partnered with Pope Farm Nursery and the city to plant 649 locally grown native plants to revegetate the areas.