

# The Floating Gardener

A Publication Provided by The Magothy River Association

## **Mother Earth vs. Father Time** – A Letter From The Editor

Earth Day events were happening everywhere last Saturday, reminding me just how far we've come in recognizing the critical part each of us plays in caring for our home planet.

I got the environmental bug as a result of the very first Earth Day in 1970. My school was located in a very rural part of Maryland, but even a community steeped in agriculture was swept up in the wave of Mother Earthiness espoused by the hippie-culture. Young and idealistic, we believed we could make a difference so an Earth Day recycling event was adopted as proof that all the colorful posters proclaiming our commitment to the environment were more than just words. I volunteered to run a glass recycling station, temporarily set up in a parking lot adjoining the school and populated by 3 large bins - one for green, one for brown and one for clear glass. Many folks who brought their glass bottles and jars to be recycled had driven for miles to show their solidarity and although the amount we collected that day was underwhelming, it was a first step that felt disproportionately important.

Fast forward to 2018. No longer do we need to load up the car and drive to a recycling facility, we have curbside recycling! In the nearly 50 years since the 'green' seed was planted, it's firmly taken root and gone mainstream. Like early recycling efforts, launching and maintaining a floating garden requires a real commitment on the part of participants, despite knowing that their efforts won't improve the health of our rivers and the Bay overnight. Floating gardeners already know about the benefits of the emergent plants in their floats – taking up excess nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorous, and returning vital oxygen to their surroundings. Attractive to look at, the floating gardens also make an attractive habitat for animals above and below the surface. The freshly oxygenated water below attracts fish and crabs while the foliage and flowers above provide nectar, seeds and maybe even a comfy place to nest, if you happen to be a duck.

Maybe less obvious, is the change in us. We are now part of the solution instead of the problem, determined to improve conditions on a small scale, but influencing others and creating a broader awareness by example. The concept of floating wetlands as a simple but effective way to improve water quality is gaining momentum, with evidence far and near. In this issue, be sure to read about the latest installation by the National Aquarium in Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

We're fighting a race against time to improve the condition of our waterways before it's too late. Wouldn't it be wonderful if sometime in the not-to-distant future, floating gardens were as ubiquitous as yellow recycling tubs?



## **Upcoming Events**

### **April 29**

Eco-Friendly Garden Workshop  
Severna Park Library 2:00–4:30 PM

### **May 10**

My River Speaks by Marianne Taylor  
Author talk and book signing Severna Park Library 6:30-8:30 PM

### **May 12**

Floating Garden Mother's Day Sale  
Severna Park Farmers Market  
8:00 AM - Noon

### **May 16**

MRA Meeting 7:30 PM  
Berrywood Community Center

### **June 2**

Beachwood Park Tree Planting and Clean-up

### **June 12**

Magothy River Day  
Dedication of Charlie Nolte Bench and Water Access @ Beachwood Park

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## Ready, Set, Launch!

It seemed like the Winter of 2017-2018 was never going to end, but finally Spring is springing all around, signaling that it's time to launch or re-launch your floating garden.

If you left your garden in the river over the winter, you should start to notice some new growth depending on the type of emergent plants you have. Iris versicolor, commonly called blue flags, Panicum virgatum or switchgrass, and Solidago sempervirens, aka goldenrod should be coming back now. Hibiscus and Kosteletzky, two of the most successful emergent plants used in the floating gardens, are slowpokes so if you haven't seen any signs of life yet, don't despair!

If you took your baskets out to overwinter in a protected area on shore, now is the time to assess their viability before putting them back in the water. It's also a good time to check the condition of the floats and perhaps scrape off dead barnacles and maybe freshen the paint before dropping the basket back in and re-launching the whole contraption.

Whether you left your plant baskets in or out of the water, we had some exceptionally cold weather this winter so some of the plants may not have survived and will need to be replaced. **The Providence Center** has assembled and continues to supply the plant baskets for this project. Currently there are 30 baskets in their greenhouse at 370 Shore Acres Road in Arnold that were established last year and are ready to go. Floating gardeners can bring their existing baskets to the Providence Center, recycle their old plants and purchase new plant baskets for \$10. Without the exchange, new plant baskets are \$15 each. To purchase a floating garden contact Nathan at [nullrich@providencecentere.com](mailto:nullrich@providencecentere.com)

The Providence Center is a nonprofit organization that serves adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Anne Arundel County. Floating gardens are produced by growers at the Providence Center, who earn a paycheck for their work. They assemble the frames and grow a number of different plant varieties that are best suited to various locations in the rivers, because of the level of sunlight, salinity, etc. Nathan Ullrich, horticulture manager, was previously quoted in The Severna Park Voice about the project. "This is a wonderful enterprise for our growers and for Providence Center. Not only does it build on our experience with native plants and advance our work to improve the environment, the project will help develop skills and independence for everyone working on the gardens."

In the event you are completely new to floating gardening or have one of the 3-hole floats that's getting on in years and needs replacement, the Providence Center also supplies those. That triple basket unit can be purchased fully assembled for \$150 or as a kit for \$100. All the units are currently unassembled, so please allow some lead time if you'd like to obtain one that's fully assembled.

If you've never visited the Providence Center's nurseries, you might be interested to know that in addition to the floating gardens, they have a very large selection of native plants that are always for sale. It's really a terrific place to shop!



The MRA still has several of the single basket floats that were built for us by the Environmental Literacy students at Broadneck High School. Once again, the MRA will be offering those for sale at the Severna Park Farmers Market on the Saturday before Mother's Day, May 12. The baskets are available for \$40.00 each and are an interesting alternative to the traditional hanging flower basket for Mom or a special someone with access to the water. The market is open from 8AM – Noon at the intersection of Rt. 2 and Jones Station Road.

## National Aquarium Waterblog – How Our Floating Wetlands Work

Last September, the National Aquarium installed a new floating wetland prototype as part of their Waterfront Campus. This blog entry from last September tells how these wetlands are transforming Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

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Floating wetlands are artificial islands that host meticulously planned ecosystems and are designed to attract native species while helping to improve water quality.



Each island consists of a porous base that offers growing surfaces for beneficial microbes. In August, National Aquarium staff and volunteers planted native grasses into the floating wetland prototype, allowing the pollutant-absorbing roots of native aquatic plants to reach the water below. These grasses, which are planted at tiered heights, mimic a natural wetland's microhabitats and support many different species.

The Inner Harbor was once home to various native plants and grasses that supported marine life—including oysters, blue crabs and rockfish. They also hosted aquatic birds and reptiles, such as Maryland's diamondback terrapins. The floating wetlands in our Waterfront Campus will create a home for oysters, grass shrimp, American eels, blue crabs, turtles, night herons, mummichogs, rockfish and other species to thrive. The floating wetlands will work to improve urban water quality, restore the harbor's complex food web and support abundant life above and below the water's surface.

Another important function of our floating wetlands is the opportunity for our community to get up close and personal with these ecosystems. These wetlands will provide a space for Baltimore-area students and citizens to get hands-on experience exploring and learning about the many plants and animals that will thrive because of our floating wetlands.

This new green space, just steps away from the Aquarium, will offer a chance to learn more about the Inner Harbor's environmental health and better understand Chesapeake Bay waterways. To learn more about our plans to restore Baltimore's Inner Harbor and how you can help, visit [aqua.org/waterfront-campus](http://aqua.org/waterfront-campus). Stay tuned for more updates about our new floating wetlands!



## Are You Bay-Wise?

While many floating gardeners either live on the water or have access to the water via a community pier, public space, etc., almost every Maryland resident lives within a half-mile of a storm drain, stream or river and most of those waterways eventually drain into the Chesapeake Bay. What we do to maintain our own landscapes can affect the health of our local waterways (drainage ditches, streams, and rivers), the Chesapeake Bay and our environment. We all need to do our part to take care of our waterways and the environment. By changing a few simple landscape practices, you and your family can help keep Maryland communities healthy.

The University of Maryland Extension Bay-Wise Program focuses on water quality and relies on trained Master Gardeners to teach simple, bay-friendly lawn and gardening practices so homeowners can help preserve the land and waterways within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Bay-Wise trained Master Gardeners conduct:

- free yard visits to discuss sustainable methods for a specific landscape
- free visits to Bay-Wise Certify yards by using the Bay-Wise Yardstick
- classes and lectures to community groups
- teaching youth in schools and community projects
- information booths at community fairs

The Bay-Wise Program teaches residents to:

- Control Stormwater Runoff
- Encourage Wildlife
- Protect the Waterfront
- Mow Properly
- Water Efficiently
- Manage Yard Pests with Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- Mulch Appropriately
- Recycle Yard Wastes
- Fertilize Wisely
- Plant Wisely



### How Do I Get My Home Landscape Certified as Bay-Wise?

Interested in making your landscape more environmentally sound? Open the link, view the video and follow the steps described therein.

<http://baywise.weebly.com/>

## Resources

More information on floating gardens plus back issues of ***The Floating Gardener*** can be found on the MRA's website at: <http://www.magothyriver.org/projects/floating-gardens/>

To view photos or to access additional information about any of the plants used in the floating gardens, see the ***Emergent Plant Guide*** found in the April/ May 2016 issue of The Floating Gardener.

[http://www.magothyriver.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Floating-Gardener-May-2016.pdf.](http://www.magothyriver.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Floating-Gardener-May-2016.pdf)

For a more comprehensive list of native emergent plants in Maryland, please refer to the DNR's website information at: <https://www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/nativesmd/lists.htm>

**Anything you'd like to share about your floating garden? Send questions, comments and photos to:**  
[mrafloatinggardener@gmail.com](mailto:mrafloatinggardener@gmail.com)