Permaculture has finally arrived at Viles Arboretum.

Thanks to the support of our donors and the efforts of the Weber family, we are pleased to share that the Food and Forest Collection is nearing completion! Started in 2016, this collection utilizes a concept designed to mimic some elements of a natural ecosystem in order to provide a self-sustaining source of food for people, birds and pollinators, as well as habitat for wildlife.

The Food & Forest Collection is a one acre demonstration plot designed using permaculture principles to integrate trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals into a “food forest” (Eliades, 2016). A food forest is a designed, multi-story food producing landscape which mimics a natural woodland. The approach takes into account the whole ecosystem when designing for food production, by harnessing the assets of a landscape such as aspect, topography and water (Mollison, 1988). The design is based on a philosophy that seeks to grow food in ways that do not require fertilizer or artificial pest control by mimicking patterns and relationships found in nature. Each plant is placed in a spot that meets its light, water and soil requirements thus eliminating the need for irrigation. Each layer of the food forest is planted so as to utilize all available space for food production, from the forest floor to the canopy. It is therefore a viable method of food production for those with small, forest-edge lots, as a great deal of food can be produced in a small space, with careful planning (Fukuoka, 1978). Most of the plants here are perennials which means they will come back year after year, which will allow for natural succession (secondary growth) to take place. Understory plants will be the initial primary sources of food, to be replaced in time by shrubs and then trees, as they mature to bearing age.

Permaculture is based on a number of principles. One is called stacking functions. This means that every element from plant choice and the presence of a pond to structures and pathways have multiple functions in the landscape (Skiera, 2014). A fine example of stacking functions is one of our most popular features, the willow tunnel. The willows in the willow tunnel have many purposes. One is to absorb some of the water that makes this area so damp. The second is to provide visual interest and shade. The third is to produce stem clippings that can be used as mulch or to make fences and sculptures, all while providing habitat for birds, and an early season pollen source for insects.

At maturity, the Food and Forest Collection will provide a great deal of food for humans. Fruit, nuts, berries, and many other plants of medicinal and nutritional value will supply a sustainable, perennial source of sustenance. Certain species of plants will make nitrogen available for other plants. Trees and shrubs will provide cover and nesting habitat for birds, and nectar for insects. Birds, in turn, will keep the insect populations in check. In nature, there is no waste; everything has a use.

Viles Arboretum wants to inspire people with the possibilities of local sustainable food production, educate our community about how it can be done and encourage people to replicate this system in their yards and in public spaces. We aim to show that providing food for ourselves does not have to and should not deprive other living things of food and shelter. The Food and Forest Collection will serve as the site of numerous community collaborations and educational opportunities. Viles Arboretum has a reputation as a destination for learning, respite and connection with the outdoors. This, along with its history as a farm, makes it an ideal location for this project.

Suggested Reading:
Masanobu Fukuoka’s “One-Straw Revolution”


Promoting the knowledge, appreciation and conservation of Maine’s trees and our natural world for people for all ages by offering opportunities for education, recreation, and inspiration.
New Faces
Viles Arboretum Welcomes a New (and Expanded) Team!

If you have visited the Arboretum recently, you may have noticed there’s been a lot of improvements to our Grounds and Visitors Center. With support from the Bettenhouse Fund we were able to hire two Seasonal Land Stewards to join our new Executive Director and Office Manager this past July. In just a few weeks, this team has accomplished so much, including new interpretive signage, a fresh coat of paint for our Visitors Center, clearing of all trails, and understory management in our Heritage Orchard, Green Ash Collection, Hardwood Collections, American Chestnut Collection and many other locations on a more consistent basis. Our goal is simple - an improved experience for our Visitors. We hope you enjoy the fruits of our labor and if you see any of the staff working at the Arboretum, make sure to say hello and let us know what you think!

Landon R. Knittweis
Land Steward
Landon has worked nearly a decade in landscaping, outdoor recreation, and youth environmental education. A former intern with the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Landon has worked as an educator for Camp Mechuwana, Portland Parks and Recreation, and Songo Locks School.

Lauren Kircheis
Land Steward
Lauren is a recent graduate of Unity College with a degree in Wildlife Biology. She has previous experience as a Wildlife Management Area Intern with Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and for Healthy Harvest, Kennebec County Community College and as a Program Director for the Maine Trust for Education in Conservation and the Town of Islesboro.

Ginger Mesko
Office Manager
Ginger is a graduate of Indiana University of Pennsylvania with a Bachelor’s Degree in Anthropology as well as a Masters Certificate in Wilderness Management from the University of Montana. She has worked for the National Park Service, managing portions of the Green and Yampa Rivers in Colorado and Utah and as a Park Guide curating the collection for the Flight 93 National Memorial.

Ryan P. Martin
Executive Director
Ryan is a graduate of Green Mountain College with a Master’s Degree in Sustainable Food Systems and the University of Maine at Machias with a degree in Environmental Studies. Among other pursuits, Ryan has worked as a Science Teacher with MidCoast School of Technology and Kennebec County Community College and as a Program Director for the Maine Trust for Education in Conservation and the Town of Islesboro.

Botanical Profile: Mycorrhizal Fungi
90% of all plants rely these on microscopic networks

For this edition of our newsletter, our botanical profile takes a closer look at an organism, or a family of organisms, that aren’t necessarily considered plants. If you are even a passive consumer of food/ag/horticulture pop culture, you’ve likely heard reference to ‘Mycorrhizal Fungi.’ To understand the relationship between fungi and plants, a “deep dive” into our planet’s rich natural history is necessary.

“Fungi were some of the first complex life forms on land, mining rocks for mineral nourishment slowly turning them into what would become soil. In the Late Ordovician era (450 million years ago), they formed a symbiotic relationship with liverworts, the earliest plants (CBC, 2012).”

In established and undisturbed soils, these mycorrhizal fungi create vast underground networks that interlock vascular plants (in some cases over many miles) optimizing nutrient uptake and preventing the incursion of disease. How can a horticulturalist take advantage of this symbiotic relationship? “Microbiologist David Douds of the USDA’s Agricultural Research Service has been studying that question for 35 years. His studies show that fungal inoculants can increase the yields of many vegetable and field crops, including leeks, peppers, potatoes, strawberries, sweet potatoes and tomatoes (Mother Earth News, 2014).”

These fungi provided the key macronutrients for aquatic and marine plants and allowed, over millions of years, these plants to slowly begin the transition to the shores of early earth. At this time, most of the planet’s early atmosphere was nitrogen-based, but as the transition to land became widespread a large terrestrial biomass was established. This laid the groundwork (pun intended) for a massive increase in atmospheric oxygen and the further evolution of plants and animals.

In the Late Ordovician era, these symbiotic fungi in layman’s terms created vast mycelium networks. His books have gained a great deal of attention from the fruit tree cultivator community. “Fungal consciousness will help you become a better earth steward. Exploring the science of these symbiotic fungi in layman’s terms sets the stage for practical applications across the landscape. The real impetus behind gardening with mulches, digging with broadforks, shallow cultivation, forest-edge orcharding, no-till farming, low-impact forestry, and “everything permaculture” is to disturb the soil as little as possible. This in turn allows the fungal dynamic to thrive. Virtue lies in doing less so as not to screw things up, a tenet that I suspect most of us can handle (Mycorrhizal Planet, 2012).”

Fast forward forward to today, and the evidence of this transition can be seen in the subsurface interactions between vascular plants and fungi, where approximately 90% of all vascular land plants live in some association with mycorrhizal fungi. “The fungi colonize the root-system of a host plant, providing increased water and nutrient absorption capabilities while the plant provides the fungus with carbohydrates formed from photosynthesis (New York Botanical Garden, 2003).”

To understand the relationship between fungi and plants, a “deep dive” into our planet’s rich natural history is necessary. “Fungi were some of the first complex life forms on land, mining rocks for mineral nourishment slowly turning them into what would become soil. In the Late Ordovician era (450 million years ago), they formed a symbiotic relationship with liverworts, the earliest plants (CBC, 2012).”

Michael Phillips, author of The Apple Grower, The Holistic Orchard, and others, bases a good deal of his approach on the creation, and maintenance, of the mycorrhizal networks. His books have gained a great deal of attention from the fruit tree cultivator community. “Fungal consciousness will help you become a better earth steward. Exploring the science of these symbiotic fungi in layman’s terms sets the stage for practical applications across the landscape. The real impetus behind gardening with mulches, digging with broadforks, shallow cultivation, forest-edge orcharding, no-till farming, low-impact forestry, and “everything permaculture” is to disturb the soil as little as possible. This in turn allows the fungal dynamic to thrive. Virtue lies in doing less so as not to screw things up, a tenet that I suspect most of us can handle (Mycorrhizal Planet, 2012).”

From the Executive Director

Greetings friends and family of Viles Arboretum. My name is Ryan Martin and I was pleased to accept the helm as Executive Director this past July, replacing Mark DesMules as he pursues adventures abroad. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to bring the Arboretum to its next chapter.

Before joining this incredible team, I was the Horticulture teacher at Islesboro Central School; a well-known school farm program at a small K-12 island school in the MidCoast region. As a classroom teacher, I taught a suite of courses which integrated plant, crop, and soil sciences instruction with the ongoing management of a robust school farm operation. Over the years, I’ve had profound experiences with students designing and planting acres of gardens and trails, building greenhouses, producing products like wreaths and maple syrup, engineering aquaponics systems, and catering harvest dinners. As I concluded my graduate work and research in northern Italy, I continued to teach while pursuing other projects; working as an independent consultant, adjunct professor, and as a Camp Director.

My work has shown me that outdoor education and recreation can help meet the needs of our hyper-connected communities by offering experiences that connect us to our local environment in a way that encourages healthy lifestyles, promotes mental health, and fosters awareness of contemporary issues like climate change and biodiversity loss. Perhaps most importantly, I’ve seen first hand how environmental education can ignite a passion within young people to shape the future in ways that can help meet the needs of our hyper-connected communities today.

My work has also shown me that without the support of our members, volunteers, and partners, this work is not possible. More than ever, we need your help to build a bright and sustainable future for the Arboretum. As an organization, Viles Arboretum hasn’t been spared from the impacts of the global pandemic. While the impact of COVID-19 on our ability to operate has been limited, the greatest impact is financial. We rely on conference room rentals and fundraising events for a significant portion of our budget, which enables us to provide the ongoing care and stewardship of these preserved lands.

Our members who support the Arboretum with their annual contributions, and one-time donors who feel inspired to support our mission, have been one of the most important factors to our survival during these difficult times. These small donations (often $30-$50 at a time) add-up, and while we are not out-of-the-water yet, we’ve been able to continue without significant interruption due to their support.

Thank You to Our Partners!

SHELTER IN A STORM

Viles becomes a haven for those looking to gather safely.

In March, we closed our Visitors Center to guests, but kept our grounds and trails open throughout the spring and early summer. After significant renovations, and a re-open the Visitors Center in July. What became apparent during this crisis was how essential the Arboretum was to families and friends looking to gather safely. For those of us living in communities where outdoor access is limited, Viles Arboretum provides no-cost, easily-accessible recreational opportunities - especially during a time when getting out of the house has never been more complicated.

However, like many small Maine non-profit organizations, Viles Arboretum hasn’t been spared from the impacts of the global pandemic. While the impact of COVID-19 on our ability to operate has been limited, the greatest impact is financial. We rely on conference room rentals and fundraising events for a significant portion of our budget, which enables us to provide the ongoing care and stewardship of these preserved lands.

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Thank You to Our Partners!

BEFORE LABOR DAY

- Inspect trees and shrubs for invasive insect species and diseases, and treat properly.
- Remove critical-risk trees.
- Prune dead, diseased or unsafe branches. Riddling your trees of these branches helps them live longer and withstand fall storms and winter snow loads.
- Mulch trees and shrubs. As needed. When applied at a depth of 2 to 4 inches, good mulch helps to keep organic matter in the soil, conserve moisture and provide weed control.
- Fertilize trees and shrubs. Applying a slow-release, organic, fertilizer helps to compensate for the nutrients snapped away by lawns and other plants.

BEFORE HALLOWEEN

- Prepare your home and garden for winter. Prepare your home and garden for winter.
- Remove leaf piles from beds and turf.
- Cable or brace weak limbs to prepare for winter’s severe weather.
- Water evergreen trees. Watering is especially vital for younger, less established trees.

BEFORE THANKSGIVING

- Prune leaf piles from beds and turf.
- Cable or brace weak limbs to prepare for winter’s severe weather.
- Water evergreen trees. Watering is especially vital for younger, less established trees.

Thank You to Our Partners!

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Thank You to Our Partners!
Rotational Grazing at Viles Arboretum
New Land Management Practices to improve soil quality and control invasives.

If you have visited Viles Arboretum in the summer you might have noticed a group of sheep grazing our grounds or taking an afternoon nap in the shade of their shelters. Grace Chavis is the shepherdess of Two Feathers Sheep and Fiber and has partnered with Viles Arboretum since 2019. The Two Feathers flock are Icelandic sheep, composed of retired ewes living out their golden years along with fiber wethers who love having fun on a daily basis and entertaining visitors at the Arboretum. The philosophy at Two Feathers Sheep and Fiber follows the principle of regenerative agriculture (Regenerative International) which is a win-win situation for the sheep as well as Viles Arboretum. The sheep graze three seasons out of four and they are intensively rotated on pastures at Viles. This helps them get a varied diet as well as being in a healthier pasture environment with fewer parasite issues. This in turns reduces or eliminates the need for chemical dewormers.

For the Arboretum, the introduction of grazers represents an opportunity to leverage more sustainable land management practices. Our fields are typically cleared annually/bi-annually by field mowing, which keeps our open spaces from succumbing to successionary growth, but this practice does not offer any significant environmental benefit. Rotationally grazing an area for a short period of time helps control invasives and helps native plants to develop better root systems by making them more drought resistant. The sheep also fertilize the area—developing better soil quality and biodiversity by increasing both the water holding capacity and sequestering carbon at greater depths, drawing down climate-damaging levels of atmospheric CO2.

You can learn more about Grace and the Two Feathers Sheep at https://two-feathers-fiber.square.site/.


Host a Socially-Distant Event at Viles Arboretum.
Affordable, accessible, and beautiful...inside and out!

The challenges of hosting a gathering or event during these difficult times are immense, but not impossible. As this past spring approached and stay-at-home orders lifted, businesses and individuals alike reached out to host their class, birthday party, or business meeting at Viles… and we were happy to accommodate! We have a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces to meet your needs.

We’re also pleased to host weddings at Viles. Host your wedding ceremony in one of our 20, stunning botanical collections, then gather in one of the four reception spaces for refreshments. Use our great collection of seating and rental options to customize your setting.

For more information, visit our website at vilesarboretum.org/rent-our-facilities.

Partner Spotlight: The Kennebec Beekeepers Association

Visitors may notice that Viles hosts an apiary located near the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Collection. The hives were first introduced in 2016 and have been a tremendous addition to the pollination efforts at the Arboretum. In addition to an increase in pollination and honey production, the teaching hives also help support the educational programming at the Arboretum. The hives are maintained thanks to members of the Kennebec Beekeepers Association (KBA).

KBA is a regional chapter of the Maine State Beekeepers Association for beekeepers in the greater Kennebec Valley area. The mission of the Kennebec Beekeepers Association is to promote successful beekeeping. They offer free monthly meetings where beekeepers share their knowledge, and various public events, hosted by beekeepers, which interest anyone who would like to learn more about beekeeping in Maine.

Most recently they held a socially-distant honey extraction workshop at Viles on September 13th. Participants learned about the entire extraction process from uncapping frames to bottling the honey. Students were also able to take home a sample of honey, which resulted from their hard work.

Meetings are the second Thursday of the month, 6:30 - 8:30, Viles Arboretum, 133 Hospital Street, Augusta, ME. For more information, please visit the Kennebec Beekeepers Association Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1158920097465974/.

Volunteer Day at the Arboretum
Saturday, September 19th, 11:00am - 3:00pm
Lunch Provided

If you are interested in participating in some great, socially-distant, volunteering please contact us at 207-626-7989 or info@vilesarboretum.org.

Save-the-date! Annual Meeting
Sunday, October 25th at 3:00pm
Featuring Apple Tree Legend, John Bunker
(Expect more information to arrive by mail)
Education Center to open June 2021
Expanded Environmental Education programming to follow.

Viles Arboretum has an incredible legacy of environmental education. For decades, we’ve hosted students from around the State for a rich and immersive outdoor learning experience. Building on that history, we have broken-ground on a new facility that will host the American Chestnut on our preserved lands, we hope to network with others to restore this species to our local landscape. Thanks to a generous local donor, Viles Arboretum was given over 120 hybridized American Chestnut seedlings this summer for individuals to purchase at Viles Arboretum. The seedlings were quickly purchased by local American Chestnut enthusiasts, eager to help contribute to the goal of restoring chestnut plantings back into Maine.

In addition to hosting the American Chestnut on our preserved lands, we hope to network with others to restore this species to our local landscape. Thanks to a generous local donor, Viles Arboretum was given over 120 hybridized American Chestnut seedlings this summer for individuals to purchase at Viles Arboretum. The seedlings were quickly purchased by local American Chestnut enthusiasts, eager to help contribute to the goal of restoring chestnut plantings back into Maine.

Thanks to the donation of the seedlings as well as everyone who purchased them, it was a successful fundraiser for Viles Arboretum. We look forward to returning to our annual Chestnut Celebration in 2021 and continuing to help Mainers restore the American Chestnut.

We encourage you to visit the website for the American Chestnut Foundation to learn more about their mission, history of the American Chestnut tree, which was thought to be lost after a blight from Asia nearly eradicated the population in the early 1900’s. We have been working with the Maine chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation to restore this hardwood to our local landscape and with their support and ongoing efforts we have the largest planting of hybridized (blight-resistant) American Chestnuts in Maine (over 300 plantings).

For the Dough:
2 cups wheat pastry flour
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 teaspoons kosher salt
3/4 teaspoons sugar
6 ounces (12 tablespoons) frozen butter, grated
1/2 cup ice water

For the Filling:
1/2 pounds tart apples (about 5 large), peeled and sliced
2 tablespoons juice and 1 teaspoon zest from 1 lemon
3/4 cups plus 1 tablespoon sugar
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoons Maine Grains Double Crust Pie Dough

Recipe Spotlight
ELDERBERRY APPLE SLAB PIE
Recipe by Christine Burns Rudalveige

Preparation

Assemble the Dough:
Combine all ingredients in food processor and pulse until the dough comes together. Press dough into rectangle blocks.

Assemble the Filling:
In a large bowl, toss apples with lemon juice and zest, 3/4 cups of sugar, flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, and salt, and toss until coated.
Roll 1 block of dough into an 18- by 13-inch rectangle. Transfer dough to a 15- by 10- by 1-inch baking sheet, working it into the corners and edges of pan. Turn apple mixture onto dough and spread it into an even layer. Sprinkle elderberries over the apples. Tuck pieces of butter into the apples.
Roll second block of dough into a 16- by 11-inch rectangle. Transfer dough to drape over filling. Crimp edges. Cut 9 small slits over the surface. Refrigerate at least 30 minutes.
Position rack in the lower half of the oven and preheat to 375°F. Brush beaten egg mixture over top of crust and sprinkle with the remaining sugar.
Place pie in oven. Bake until top crust is golden, 20-25 minutes. Reduce to 375°F, baking until juices bubble, 30-35 minutes.
The End of a Chapter

Executive Director Mark DesMeules steps down

This past March, long time director Mark P. DesMeules notified the Viles Arboretum Board of Directors that he would be leaving his post this summer to pursue service abroad in the PeaceCorps. After a lengthy search process and a large pool of applicants, Ryan P. Martin was selected as Viles Arboretum’s next Executive Director.

Outgoing Executive Director Mark P. DesMeules commented, “We are all very excited to be able to pass the baton to Ryan for the next decade of exciting and new efforts at this outstanding arboretum resource for Maine and beyond. It’s clear that Ryan is the next generation of exciting work at this outstanding arboretum.”

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PeaceCorps.

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“Our membership for this year!

Check the membership category you prefer below:

☐ Balsam Fir - Individual $35
☐ Serviceberry - Family $45
☐ Paper Birch $75
☐ Sugar Maple $100
☐ Red Oak $500
☐ King’s Pine $1000

☐ Please direct my gift to the new education center

☐ Please direct my gift to the new education center

☐ My check payable to VILES ARBORETUM is enclosed. Please charge my: ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard

Card Number: Exp. Date: CVV

Name of Card Holder:

Signature:

Mail to: Viles Arboretum, 153 Hospital Street, Augusta, Maine 04330

Your membership contribution is tax deductible.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Member Contribution:

Birding at Viles Arboretum

By: David Tarbet

Derek Lovitch is right. Viles Arboretum is “one of the best birding areas in Kennebec County.” As the author of Birdwatching in Maine, Derek speaks from authority. My thirteen-year-old granddaughter, Anna Siegel, and I speak from experience.

Early on a mid-June morning, Anna and I arrived at Viles Arboretum. Other birders might well have timed their trips to the Arboretum to look for migratory birds, but the Spring migratory season had largely passed. There were a few latecomers like the Yellow-throated Vireo, the Black-throated Green Warbler, and, but, for the most part, June is nesting season when birds are actively tending nests and gathering food for their young.

That activity was immediately evident. We passed the Trail Head and turned left to follow the Outer Loop trail through the Community Forestry Collection. There were birds everywhere. House Wrens were nesting in the boxes provided by the Arboretum, Goldfinches and Grey Catbirds flew across open spaces while Song Sparrows, Chickadees, Northern Cardinals and an Alder Flycatcher flew closer to the trees.

Walking towards the Oak Collection, there is a large open field to the right. That field was crisscrossed by sweeping Tree Swallows and alive with the calls and flights of Red-winged Blackbirds. But the show-stopping sight was outside the Arboretum across Piggery Road. A large, ragged Osprey nest sits on top of a lamppost and sitting on the nest was an attendant Osprey. Just as we turned toward the Wetlands Boardwalk, we were greeted by the drumming of a Hairy Woodpecker and the unexpected sight of a young Tree Swallow pecking out of its nestbox. It looked at us curiously with no apparent fear of our presence.

The Wetlands area provides a new birding environment. Birds here are likely to be quite different from those you see elsewhere in the Arboretum. We moved quietly and carefully hoping to see a Virginia Rail or a Sora and, while we didn’t manage that, we did see a Bobolink and an Eastern Kingbird that we had not seen elsewhere.

Around the top of the Outer Loop and into the forested area there, we birded more by sound than sight. Anna heard and identified both the Red-eyed and the Blue-headed Vireos as well as a chorus of Cedar Waxwings. Once out of the woods on route to the Visitor Center, Anna spotted an Eastern Bluebird in the trees while we both heard and saw repeat performances from birds encountered earlier.

After we completed the Outer Loop, we made a quicker trip around the Viles Pond Loop and saw Wood Ducks on the Pond. But the day was getting on and the birds seemed to be taking a midday break. We decided that this was a good idea for an early lunch at Dave’s Diner.
BBQ & FAMILY FUN FESTIVAL

With Children’s Fairies & Gnomes Activities and live music from The Fremont Street String Band

SEPTEMBER 26, 2020 | 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM
VILES ARBORETUM | 153 HOSPITAL STREET, AUGUSTA, MAINE

FREE GENERAL ADMISSION (MUST RSVP)
FOOD TICKETS: ADULTS- $25.00, CHILDREN $10.00
KIDS UNDER 12 EAT FREE WITH PURCHASE OF ADULT MEAL

Tickets can be purchased through EVENTBRIGHT via our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/vilesarboretum