



# Newsletter

## November 2024



### Since Last Time ...

Since our last newsletter, there were a couple of big events for WOA. We were represented at a festival in Erwin. We have new members who joined because we were there!



This is the beautiful table display Dick Olson prepared for the Sassafras Moon Herbal Festival in Erwin, Tennessee.

The Fall Plant Swap was fun and well attended! I was happy to rehome many fine and healthy plants, most of which went straight into my meadow planting. Summer phlox, snowberry, hyssop, gamma grass, 2 species of mountain mint, and a perennial native sunflower—all will help to fill in the spaces between the plants I've already established. Many thanks to all who brought plants to share. Congratulations to all who won door prize plants provided by Josh Banks' Paragraph Design nursery and by Christy Shivell's Shy Valley nursery. If you visit either of them, please let them know how much we appreciated their contributions!



This photo and the one below are from the Fall Plant and Seed Swap. (Note the variety of WOA merch!)



### Calendar at-a-Glance

**November 14: WOA Annual Meeting** at The Summit in Bristol

**December 7: Winter Sowing Workshop** at Higher Ed Center

**January 18: Garden Design with Josh Banks** via Zoom

**January 25: Randy Smith Seed Swap** @ the Higher Ed Center

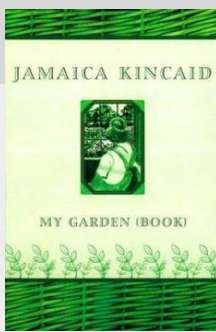
**February 27: Restoration Ecology and River Cane Restoration with Laura Young (VDCR)** in-person @ VHCC and Zoom

### WOAH Merch



Hoodies, ball caps, bucket hats, and tee shirts—they come in many colors and options. They all have the chapter logo in the front. The shirts also have the "Get Wild" design on the back. Visit [www.bonfire.com/get-wild-6/](http://www.bonfire.com/get-wild-6/), or scan the QR code below with your smart phone's camera.

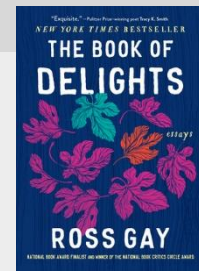




## Bookshelf: Review by Mark Merz

### *My Garden (Book):*

By Jamaica Kincaid



It may seem like cheating this month. I promise to mostly write about only one book, but I'm going to recommend two. I'll start with the one on which I don't plan to write much. It's Ross Gay's *Book of Delights*, from which I learned about Jamaica Kincaid, the author of the one I will review. About the first book, Ross Gay began a year-long project of writing short essays that explore daily experiences of delight. What emerges from this is that Gay finds joy in every way that life engages with him and he with life—language, plants, animals, humans and interactions with them all. Our interest in him might be that he's a gardener, a seed saver, a plant smuggler. In one of his essays, he finds joy and delight in the many ways Jamaica Kincaid engages with, yes, language, plants, animals, ... so, reading Gay led to my reading and wanting to share *My Garden (Book)*: with you.

Kincaid was born and grew up in Antigua, which is important to know. She's descended from slaves on an island formerly colonized by the British, and that's also important to know. Post-colonial Antiguan identity is indelibly influenced by English habits and norms, whether in reaction to them or because they've been so deeply internalized.

That provides just a little context for her perspective as a thinker and writer; you can read more about that in her short book, *A Small Place*. By the time she's writing *My Garden (Book)*, she's married, living and gardening in Vermont, and teaching at Harvard University.

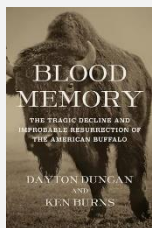
The first thing that impresses me in this book, published 25 years ago, is the way Jamaica Kincaid, like Ross Gay, plunges into living through her immersive enthusiasm for plant life—color, form, seasonality, and the art inherent in organizing a living landscape around those qualities. But the thing I find most fascinating is how she begins to work out her post-colonial identity through gardening. Kincaid clearly understands that colonization exterminated and transplanted peoples throughout the world, but she also is sensitive to the fact the flora in former colonies are just as disrupted. She writes about visiting the botanical garden in St. John as a child with her father, where the plants she loved were collected from similar climates throughout the British Empire but didn't include any from Antigua. Meanwhile the native flora there was disturbed to such an extent that it may not even be possible to determine its original composition. But she loved the garden nonetheless and clearly internalized the aesthetics of English and other European gardening traditions. (In this I am reminded of my own experience at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, which was stunning but dominated by exotic plants and horticultural varieties.) Much of her Vermont gardening recreates the concerns of the famous 19th Century English gardens and gardeners. She writes of Linnaeus and his impact on standardizing plant classification. She acknowledges the tyranny of imposing European botanical names over indigenous names for plants new to colonizers, but she also seems to appreciate the Latin binomials. (She certainly uses them!)

So, I see her struggling with some of the same issues WOA!H members wrestle with as we make decisions about our own home landscapes. We're in this organization because we have a growing understanding of the environmental benefits of native species. But I'm still attracted to showy horticultural creations and exotic specimens. I love the grace and rightness of natural places, but my personal inclinations are still shaped by organizing principles that are anything but natural. She helps me remember that even my aesthetic sense of landscape design is somewhat inherited from an ancestry not my own. I'm reminded by Jamaica Kincaid that engaging with life—seeking and finding delight—isn't always about holding hands with the things you love; sometimes it's more like a wrestling match.

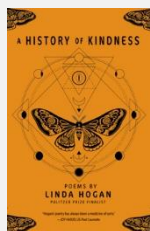
## And More Books!

Many of you already know that WOAHA Vice President Melanie Smith is, in addition to everything else she does as a Virginia Master Naturalist, WOAHA board member, and FrogWatch USA affiliate, is a school librarian in Smyth County. She sends us a few recommendations in honor of Native American/Indigenous Peoples Month by offering these recommendations from the American Library Association. These books on the environment and sustainability are written by or about Indigenous peoples.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest nonprofit library association in the world and its book and audiobook reviews (“Booklist”) are widely respected.



*I am Blood Memory: The Tragic Decline and Improbable Resurrection of the American Buffalo* by Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns. 2023 Knopf. The American Bison, or Buffalo, is obviously the subject of this book about the “kinship” between Indigenous peoples and the buffalo as contrasted with the wholesale slaughter of that same animal by white outsiders.



*A History of Kindness* by Linda Hogan. 2020. Torrey House. Hogan, of Chickasaw heritage, uses the wonders of nature to inspire poetry full of gratitude, sorrow, tenderness and kindness to “this world all one heartbeat.”



And for the children in all of us, or for our children:  
*Sky Wolf's Call: The Gift of Indigenous Knowledge* by Eldon Yellowhorn and Kathy Lowinger. 2022. Annick. Recommended for Grades 6-8. Traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices are emphasized in this book about understanding ecology and using this knowledge to drive Indigenous environmental activism.

## There Are Many Ways to Get Involved!

**Volunteer** Wild Ones does not require formal training classes, volunteer work hours, or continuing education hours for membership. However, the Chapter has events that do require volunteer member help. Tabling events such as the January 25<sup>th</sup> Randy Smith Seed Swap are opportunities for introducing the public to WOAHA. Please send an email to [wildonesappalachianhighlands@gmail.com](mailto:wildonesappalachianhighlands@gmail.com) if you can volunteer even an hour or two. There is a WOAHA Board that meets a little less than once per month, and our chapter also has various committees. Perhaps you'd like to serve on one! Let us know with an email to the above address.

**Newsletter** Send in your own member profile. As you've seen over the last several months, your profile can take many forms. It can be as simple as telling a little about yourself and how you got involved with native plants, or you can include photos and go into more detail.

Write about your garden. What are you hoping to accomplish, what resources did you use, what strategies did you employ? Do you have before and after pictures that show what you've done?

Have you read a good nature book that you'd like to review?

Your fellow WOAHA members would love to hear from you! Send your text and photos to [markmerz243@gmail.com](mailto:markmerz243@gmail.com).

## WOAH Annual Meeting, Officer Election, and Birthday Party on November 14<sup>th</sup>

Prepare to celebrate at WOA's third birthday party on November 14! Food, birthday cake, ice cream, party favors, and door prizes are in store. We'll be awarding our three complimentary memberships for 2024, too, as a way of recognizing individuals who have made or will make special contributions to our chapter.

There's a little business to conduct. One important item will be electing new WOA Board officers for 2025. We have a slate of candidates who have agreed to serve, but other nominations will be welcome prior to voting. Currently, the candidates for next year include:

- President: Paula Reynolds
- Vice President: Melanie Smith
- Treasurer: Anne Tucker
- Recording Secretary: Jani Niner
- E-Corresponding Secretary: Josh Banks
- Events: Dick Olson
- Membership: Gail Olson

YOUNG  
WILD  
AND  
THREE

WOAH will be three years old! The chapter has a solid history of accomplishments, but our toddler year has its own special achievements. We'll take time to reflect on and celebrate them, even as we look ahead to imagine what year four might bring!



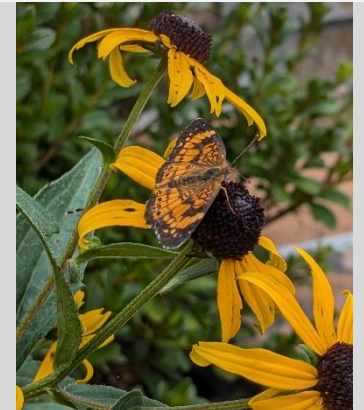
# Why Native Plants?



Why should we plan our home landscapes around native plants instead of the exotic plants that have been conventional for so long? Dr. Robin Feierabend graciously asked WOAHA to answer this question for the *Friends of Steele Creek* newsletter. The answer, in my opinion, relates to Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden (Book)* (see the review above) in that it concerns the long and complex process involved in what it means to be native and at home in a place. Hoping that you agree, I'm including it here, retaining Robin's edits and including photographs that he shared. I reformatted it for our newsletter.

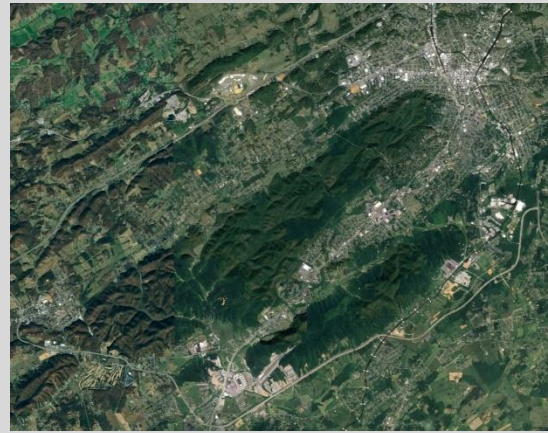
The question "Why plants?" would have been much easier to answer. I'd have thought about my visit to the Smithsonian Conservatory and recalled the wildly variable and endlessly fascinating myriads of colors, shapes, and sizes of leaves, stems, flowers, and forms nurtured in their extensive collection from around the world. Plants are fascinating. We literally can't live without them, but who would want to? They feed our senses -- all of them -- our bodies, our sense of health, and our aesthetic sensibilities. Plants? Of course!

But why native plants? To get at the answer, we must think in terms of evolutionary time. In one sense it's as short as a generation. (If you know anything about fruit flies, you know how short a generation can be!) In another sense, it's as long as the period of time between the beginning of life on Earth and the present moment. Evolution is strictly defined as the change in frequency of a gene in a population over time. If that gene results in a trait that lends an advantage to an individual, the individuals with those genes will be more likely to pass them on to their offspring.



It takes a long, long time for this process to result in the unimaginably complex and distinct plant communities that occur in particular climates and over specific geologic formations. And it's not just the climate and geology impacting plant evolution. One plant species evolves in response to the way another impacts light, moisture, and nutrient availability. Meanwhile, animals evolve to exploit the opportunities for food and shelter available in the plant-altered environment. How long did it take for the distinct native ecosystem we call home to evolve? From the beginning of life on Earth until the present moment, all the uncountable life forms have been like puzzle pieces slowly forming and shaping each other through processes of natural selection and evolution!

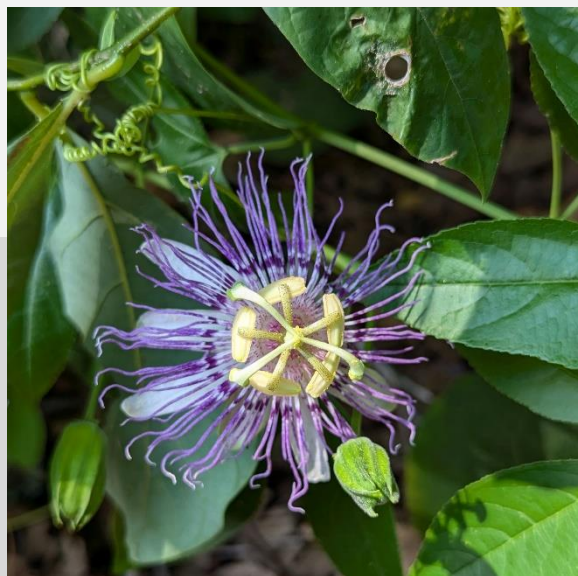
It is truly shocking to see how rapidly heavy machinery can completely disrupt and erase an ecosystem that took millennia to form. It's stunning even to look at a Google Earth map of Bristol with the park's intact native ecosystem in green surrounded by our roads, shopping centers, homes, quarries, and factories – and to realize how diminished our natural heritage has become. We can recognize this condition as a modern trend, understanding that this same disruption and erasure is happening across the state, across the country, across the world. How did we fail to notice in time to slow this unfolding tragedy?



The native plant movement began as a way of responding to the loss. When we choose native plants for sidewalk and driveway borders or to replace our lawns, we engage in a form of restoration ecology. We return some of those ecosystem puzzle pieces to their rightful places. Carefully and knowledgeably done, with sustained effort and with an eye to long term results, people can restore some of the complexity lost to development. By installing native plants, you'll get a lot more than just native flora; you'll protect and improve the soil, and you'll feed the insects and other herbivores that feed the birds and small predators. I see these things happening on my own small acre in a Smyth County suburb.

I don't know that I've ever felt more powerful as an agent of change than when considering how my acre of grass has changed into an acre of mostly native trees, shrubs, forbs, ferns, and grasses. I watch voles tunneling in the leaves in the fall, chipmunks feeding on hazelnuts, walnuts, and acorns, and rabbits hiding in my meadow patch. Our bird feeders have never been more interesting. A patch of morels has been springing out of the soil consistently for the past three years, and there are flowers blooming and soft mast ripening throughout the growing season. It wasn't like this 26 years ago!

Why should we plan our home landscapes around native plants instead of the exotic plants that have been conventional for so long? It's because of that word that moves us so deeply and fills us with such longing: home. There it was in the phrase "home landscape". If home is about being in the right place, then let's restore plants and animals to their right places. It is my belief that a restless, rootless, and destructive humankind can find its right place by loving and restoring native ecosystems and making its home in them.



Have you navigated the national Wild Ones website? I hope so, because there's a lot there! Here are a couple of things I'd like to highlight. The first is the national program to certify our gardens as Wild Ones habitats. I started the process for our yard, which isn't onerous; however, you should probably plan to do it in more than one sitting. There's a tool for saving your draft.

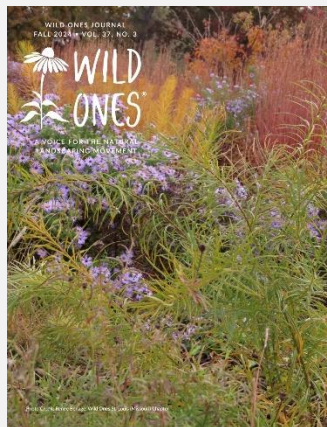


To qualify for a Certified Native Habitat, your habitat should:

- Belong to an active Wild Ones member
- Be working towards a goal of at least 75% native plant species
- Support local wildlife and pollinators
- Follow regenerative gardening practices. These are environmentally conscientious approaches to managing and planting gardens and habitats.

Certify for a fee of \$50. What You Receive: The certification fee covers the cost of the certification process. As a token of our appreciation and to help promote awareness, you will also receive a sign for your garden that signifies your commitment to supporting native habitats. The signs are 7"x10" vinyl-printed, single-sided, aluminum and composite.

Another feature of the national Wild Ones website is that, through it, you have access the Wild Ones Journal. The Fall 2024 issue is out now. Click on the cover picture for a link, or simply visit [wildones.org](http://wildones.org).



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## Event Details

**November 14**

### **WOAH Annual Meeting (3<sup>rd</sup> Birthday Party)**

On November 14th we will celebrate our third anniversary as the Appalachian Highlands Chapter. See above for more details.

The Summit building is set back from Volunteer Parkway with an access road between Eastman Credit Union and Bank of Tennessee. There is a cut-through on the Parkway divide for a left turn if you are coming from the downtown Bristol area.

**Date:** Thursday, November 14th, 2024

**Time:** 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm (Eastern Time)

**Location:** The Summit, Expedition Room, 1227 Volunteer Pkwy, Bristol, TN, 37620

**December 7**

### **Winter Sowing Workshop with Gail Olson**

This event is a collaborative effort between Washington County Master Gardeners and WOA. The Workshop is in-person, open to the public, free, and registration is required due to limited space.

Winter sowing is a method of starting seeds in winter. It involves sowing seeds in an enclosed container to be kept outside during winter, allowing them to germinate in spring.

In this hands-on workshop, Gail Olson will share insights on how and why this method works. She will guide participants in creating their own containers to take home.

All materials, including native seed will be provided.

**Date:** Saturday, December 7th, 2024

**Time:** 10:30 am (Eastern Time)

**Location:** Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, One Partnership Circle, Abingdon, VA, Rooms 103/104

**Registration:** Email [gaidennie@Hotmail.com](mailto:gaidennie@Hotmail.com) by Dec. 1, 2024. Gail will confirm your registration by return email.