



MONMOUTH COUNTY PARK SYSTEM GREEN HERITAGE

The Newsletter of Monmouth County's Open Space, Parks & Recreation Agency

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Monmouth County's "Best Idea" Turns 50

TODAY, TOMORROW AND THE PARK SYSTEM'S NEXT 50 YEARS

As this golden anniversary year draws to a close, Park System Secretary-Director Jim Truncer discusses park plans for the next 50 years, and a few "friends" have been kind enough to comment on their experiences working with the Park System today.

A Plan For The Future

No one can know for certain what the future holds, Mr. Truncer begins, but having a solid plan is a good place to start. He is emphasizing the importance of the County's Open Space Plan in guiding future projects. "We are all about fulfilling that plan," he says. In addition to the talent and commitment of all our park staff through the years, having a clear sense of direction has been a big part of how the Park System was able to achieve what it has these past 50 years.



When my in-laws, Hans and Catherine Huber died, their heirs were concerned with how to preserve their house and grounds... It is a joy to us to see what a great job the Monmouth County Parks System has done in responding to those concerns—the transformation of the house into a marvelous nature center, the establishment of all kinds of interesting programs for school children, and, last but far from least, the preservation of the woods, the fields, and the barns.

—Carolyn Huber
Former family house is now the Huber Woods Environmental Center and grounds are part of Huber Woods Park



The generous donation of the Huber Woods Environmental Center and portions of surrounding land offers an encompassing view of how the Park System operates. The building has been carefully preserved as a historic structure with architectural features intact. It now houses staff offices and exhibits and hosts iconic nature programs such as Indian Longhouse and Creatures of the Night (see page 10). Located amidst the rolling hills of 366 gorgeous acres complete with stunning views of the Navesink River, Huber Woods is a favored site for area equestrians and features 8 miles of forested multi-use trails to take in the scenery. This site exists for public enjoyment today because the Park System had the resources to accept the Huber Family's generous donations, convert them into a park, and maintain them for continued public use.

"We have always done what we said we were going to do," Mr. Truncer adds. This helps forge confident relationships with people who wish to donate or sell land to us, and with taxpayers who can see with their own eyes that their money is being spent wisely creating the kind of parks and golf courses they can be proud of. This is evident in the support that voters have given to every open space referendum placed before them in the last 20+ years. "Customer confidence" is also apparent in the feedback we receive about our recreational opportunities. Park staff honor their commitment to the public every day with the well-planned and well-run programs and activities they offer.

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Editor/Writer: Lisa Bonelli
Photographer:
Maribeth Gardner
Graphics: Laurie Marswillo
Questions/Subscriptions:
732-842-4000x4336;
lbonelli@monmouthcountyparks.com

Overall, Monmouth County's open spaces, regional parks and recreational facilities improve property values and quality of life—its part of what makes this area such a desirable place to live. This is no accident, according to Mr. Truncer, "we have always believed in and lived by our mission and will continue to do so."



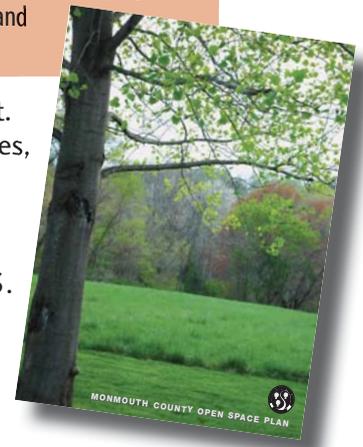
Director since 1966, James J. Truncer just marked an anniversary of his own—45 years working for the Monmouth County Park System. During his tenure as head of this agency, his steadfast vision and leadership helped create one of the most beautiful and well-run county park systems in the country. He is widely credited by staff, administrators, and residents as personally shaping the development of the Park System's 38 sites and dozens of unique recreational facilities.

The Park System offers tremendous support to local municipal recreation departments...our residents benefit from the county programs and facilities that supplement what we can provide at the local level. On behalf of the residents we serve with your help, thank you! Best wishes for another 50 years!

—Dawn Thompson
Neptune Recreation Director, CPRP
Neptune Municipal Alliance Coordinator

From facilities earmarked for the county by the closing of Ft. Monmouth, to properties available in individual municipalities, the County Open Space Plan is the "blueprint" for future acquisitions. The most recent version, published in 2006 is available online at www.monmouthcountyparks.com. A hard copy may be obtained by calling 732-842-4000, ext. 4263. It is scheduled for review again in 2012.

Adding, Connecting And Protecting Open Spaces



Anyone familiar with Monmouth County can see that much of the coast is already "built out" and any remaining large tracts of land for preservation are mostly in western Monmouth County. It is not surprising then that the most evident park expansion in the last decade has been at Perrineville Lake in Millstone, which started with 50 acres in 1999 and grew to 928 acres by last year. This park now features 5 miles of multi-use trails and a 16-acre lake for fishing/boating.

As far as creating new regional parks, the county already manages nearly 15,000 acres of property across the county. As such, the template of county parks at this point is more or less set, with open space being preserved with the following goals in mind:

• **Add parcels of land to existing parks.** The Park System makes an effort to acquire adjacent properties as they become available. Recent acquisitions of properties on or near the



The forests, fields and lake that make up Perrineville Lake Park. Visitors can be seen hiking, walking their dogs and riding horses on the park's many new trails. A guide to help users enjoy the facilities at this park is now in development.

Navesink River at Huber and Hartshorne Woods Parks are good examples of meeting this goal, as are additions to Shark River Park.

• **Connect existing county parks to each other and to federal, state and municipal properties.** Creating trail corridors and greenways through both acquisition and easements helps create large, uninterrupted recreational spaces for residents to enjoy. The recent attachment of the Bear Swamp Tract at the Manasquan Reservoir to Howell Township's Oak Glen Park is one example; conversion of the Union Transportation Railway into a trail is another.

As a park and recreation professional, I have had the opportunity to work with many of the fine, dedicated staff and volunteers of the MCPS. I have always been impressed by their commitment and understanding of some very complex issues...I am thankful that the vision that started 50 years ago is still in place today. Thanks and continued success!

—Timothy G. Hill,
Director of Parks and Recreation
Highlands, NJ

• **Protect the water supply by expanding stream valleys.** As a source of drinking water and a habitat for wildlife, the conservation of stream valleys is critical. One project in this effort is the acquisition of land along the Manasquan River. Other protected stream valleys include:

- Crosswicks Creek
- Metedeconk River
- Shark River
- Swimming River

• **Partner with local, state federal agencies/other organizations.** Develop cooperative agreements to better serve our citizens.

Taken together, these efforts bring us closer to the ultimate preservation goal of 6.6% or 19,000 acres of the county's open spaces—including all the bodies of water and the plant/animal species contained therein—as well as providing outdoor recreational opportunities



Regular users of the 5 mile perimeter trail at the Manasquan Reservoir may now opt for a change of scenery with a new section of trail to Howell Township's Oak Glen Park.



Newly opened, the first 1.4 miles of the Park System's latest railroad right-of-way conversion—the Union Transportation Trail in Upper Freehold. Eventually this trail will run 9 miles from Route 537 up near the state's 6,000-plus acre Assunpink Wildlife Management Area.

From top to bottom, I have witnessed an amazing sense of selflessness and honest commitment to the service of our county residents by the entire staff. The Park System and its thousands of programs offer so much to so many. You can be on the receiving end of all the opportunities or on the volunteering end and either way feel truly blessed.

—Tracy Boyle,
Current Board Member, Friends of the Parks
Former President, Special People United to Ride (SPUR)

within 20 minutes of every county resident. The larger goal is to provide a clean, healthful environment for families with plenty of opportunities for Monmouth County's children to develop into healthy, productive adults—a key measure to secure the health and happiness for all of us in the future.



Acquiring land along the Manasquan River protects the water supply and wildlife habitat. It also provides area anglers and boaters with access to the river.



Scenic park vistas like this one help reinforce the powerful health impact that nature can provide. The county parks provide this 365 days a year.

More Than "A Little Help From Our Friends"

The Park System simply could not have achieved all it has during these last 50 years without the generosity of land donors and the continued support of our partner organizations. **The Monmouth Conservation Foundation** helps purchase and hold tracts of land on our behalf, until the Park System can put together the resources to purchase them directly. **The Friends of the Parks** raises money and provides financial support for special park projects. More than 900 **Volunteers** give over \$425,000 of their time working in the parks each year. And, the members of **Special People United to Ride (SPUR)** have helped build our award-winning therapeutic horseback riding program from the ground up—along with the beautiful facility that houses it.



The Friends of the Parks sponsored the Park System's 50th Anniversary Celebration and fundraiser last summer. Friends members who attended the event are pictured here with Park System Secretary-Director Jim Truncer (far left). Year after year, the support of dedicated individuals like these have contributed immeasurably to the beautiful Park System we have today.

A Bayshore Landmark, Renewed

The Park System realized its goal of establishing a county park on Sandy Hook Bay when it acquired eight acres in Port Monmouth in 1988. Since then, it has consolidated 90 small lots into what is now the 227-acre Bayshore Waterfront Park.

This site preserves an ecologically valuable coastal landscape and is also home to a local landmark rich in community and maritime history.

This site preserves an ecologically valuable coastal landscape of beach, dunes, maritime shrublands, tidal creeks and salt marsh from intense bayshore development and provides almost a mile of public access along the bay. It is also home to the Seabrook-Wilson House, now the Bayshore Activity Center, a local landmark rich in community and maritime history and one of the oldest surviving houses in the area.



The Bayshore Activity Center Today



This fishing pier, located behind the Bayshore Activity Center, is a major attraction for area anglers.

FROM RESIDENCE TO BOARDING HOUSE TO INN (LATE 1600s-1900s)

Farmers and fishermen settled Shoal Harbor, the old name for the Port Monmouth area, in the late 17th century. In 1696, Daniel Seabrook acquired 202 acres and his son James Seabrook or grandson Daniel Seabrook built a small one and a half story gabled roof cottage there in the early 1700s, which survives today as the smaller west wing. Over the years the house was expanded through a series of additions, reaching its current size and appearance in the 1890s.

Five generations of Seabrooks farmed the “plantation” at Shoal Harbor. In 1855, William V. Wilson – preacher, farmer, and investor in steamboat companies – purchased the old homestead and lived here with his wife Mary Seabrook and their family until the turn of the 20th century.



This photo, taken from a nearby crane during the reconstruction, shows the waterfront views of the bay. The New York skyline is visible from this site on a clear day.

For many years the house stood almost alone, surrounded by an open landscape of farm fields and salt marsh. The development of steamboat service and railroads in the mid-1800s transformed the Bayshore landscape, and the village of Port Monmouth grew around the steamboat pier and commercial fishing. Shortly after the turn of the century, the old farmhouse became a boarding house, known as **The Bayside Manor**, for tourists who came in increasing numbers to enjoy nearby beaches. In later years the place was known as the **White House Tavern**, which drew its clientele from the local baymen and surrounding community of Port Monmouth.

FROM INN TO MUSEUM TO ACTIVITY CENTER (1960-TODAY)

This building's preservation story begins in the late 1960s with local efforts to save a landmark in decline. After 50 years as a boarding house and tavern, the building was vacant and severely dilapidated and a fire had damaged part of the house. At the urging of local residents, Middletown Township purchased this Bayshore landmark to save it from destruction.



The Bayshore Activity Center, circa 1960.

Under agreement with the Township, the Middletown Historical Society and then the **Spy House Museum** Corporation operated it as the Spy House Museum for two decades. The Township invested in the site's preservation by repairing the building and listing it on the National Register of Historic Places, and eventually transferring it to the county in 1998 to become part of Bayshore Waterfront Park.

RESTORING A LANDMARK

The \$1.5 million restoration of the Bayshore Activity Center, which also included utilities and site improvements, was completed in 2009. The entire exterior – roof, windows, and siding—was restored to its 1896 appearance, when the Wilson family was photographed in front of the house.



The Bayshore Activity Center, circa 1896

The structural framing, walls, plank floors and woodwork of the interior have been repaired, and all of the outmoded building systems have been replaced to meet building codes and provide adequate facilities for public use. Its primary function is now as a venue for Park System programs and events, along with exhibit areas in selected rooms.



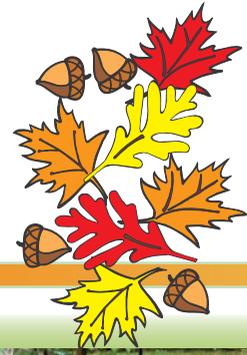
This school group plays on the back lawn of the Bayshore Activity Center, prior to the start of a nature program about the bay.

Historic places are cherished because they embody community memories of days gone by and because of our personal connections with them. The exhibits (to be completed by next year) will explore the natural resources and ecology of the Bayshore and the rich history of this building that was once an ancient rambling farmhouse on the edge of the Bay, built by some of the area's first farming settlers and owned by a one-time steamship captain, that survived storms and fires, and became an inn and a tavern frequented by summer tourists and locals.



Nature programs at the Bayshore Activity Center run at all times and during all seasons. This winter night hike led by Park Naturalist Joe Reynolds for example takes visitors out on the fishing pier and beaches after dark.

As the newly-refurbished Bayshore Waterfront Activity Center gradually develops an identity and appeal of its own, the Park System looks forward to welcoming back the community that was ultimately responsible for the preservation of a revered Bayshore landmark.



Tips For Planting A Rain Garden

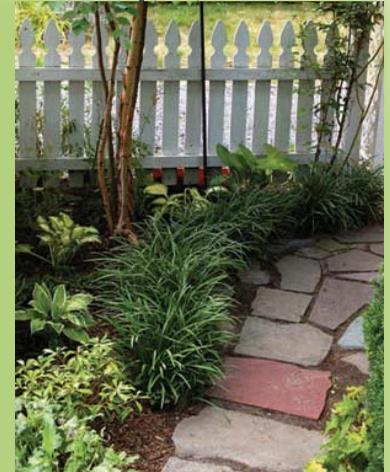
Diane Allen, Staff Horticulturalist

A rain garden is a landscaped, shallow depression designed to capture rain and snowmelt as it drains from an impervious surface. This allows the water to seep into the ground, helping to recharge the groundwater supply.

A rain garden is a landscaped, shallow depression designed to capture rain and snowmelt as it drains from an impervious surface.



This residential rain garden captures rainfall from the gutters. Note the raised berm around the edges. Depending on its size and soil type, a rain garden may be a little as 3" deep.



A small residential rain garden, this one receives runoff from a patio and overflow from rain barrels at the corner of the house.

In the process, the plants and soil help cleanse the water of pollutants. Since the water in the rain garden drains in a matter of hours, it is not a breeding place for mosquitoes.

RAIN GARDENS MANAGE STORMWATER RUNOFF

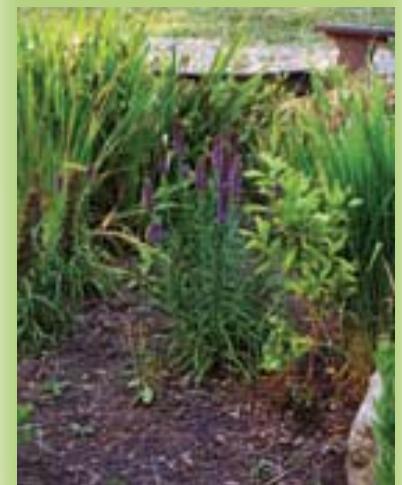
Increased development calls for better stormwater management to handle runoff from roofs, roads, driveways, parking lots, and even compacted lawn areas. This water flows into storm sewers, and then out to streams, estuaries and the ocean. The runoff carries sediment, petroleum products, and lawn chemicals which contribute to the degradation of our waterways and pose a threat to wildlife. Compared to a conventional lawn, a rain garden allows about 30% more water to soak into the ground, helping to offset the impacts of development.



A type of plover called the Killdeer is drawn to this large, professionally designed rain garden in located in an urban setting at the Midtown Community School in Neptune.

The appropriate size and location for a rain garden depends on several factors, but a typical residential rain garden is between 100 and 300 square feet. It can be professionally designed and installed, but is not a difficult project for a homeowner.

Planning is the most important step, so take your time and do it right. Some sources for detailed information on planning and installing a rain garden are listed at the end of this article. If you have limited space available, remember that a rain garden can be up to 30% smaller and still control almost 90% of the annual runoff. Furthermore, the first 20 minutes of a storm is when most pollution is carried off to streams.



A section of rain garden installed by the Monmouth County Master Gardeners at the Agricultural Building on Kozloski Rd., in Freehold.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR SITE SELECTION

- Place the rain garden where it will intercept water running off a roof, driveway, road or other impervious surface.
- A rain garden should be at least 10 feet from the house so infiltrating water doesn't seep into the foundation.
- Do not place the rain garden directly over a septic system.
- Do not put the rain garden in a part of the yard where water already ponds.
- It is better to build the rain garden in full or partial sun, not directly under a big tree.
- Putting the rain garden in a flatter part of the yard will make digging much easier.
- Locate utility lines by calling NJ One Call 1-800-272-1000 at least three days before digging for a free markout of underground utility lines. Stay at least five feet horizontally and one foot vertically from any utilities.

DESIGNING YOUR RAIN GARDEN

Plants selected must be able to tolerate widely fluctuating moisture levels. A variety of such plants are available to suit your needs, whether you prefer a neat and restrained garden or a more natural appearance. Native plants are often chosen for rain gardens because they:

- Require little long-term maintenance if they are properly planted;
- Produce long root systems to hold soil in place;
- Add beauty to the landscape and preserve our natural heritage; and
- Provide food and habitat for native wildlife.

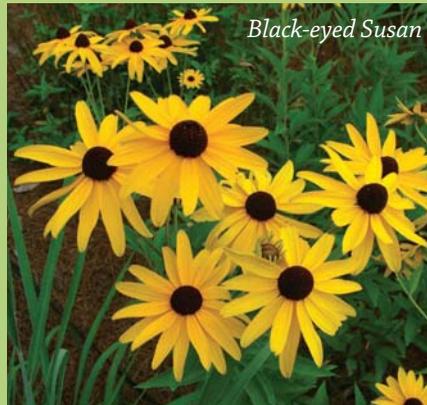
For greater interest, include plants of varied heights, bloom time and color, and overall texture. Planting them in groups of 3, 5 or 7 will give the best appearance. Be sure to also include some plants that will provide winter interest with berries, evergreen foliage or exfoliating or colored bark.

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SPECIES WELL-SUITED TO RAIN GARDEN CONDITIONS (Intermittent wet and dry periods)

PERENNIALS

- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*)
- Columbine (*Aquilegia*)
- Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
- Daylilies (*Hemerocallis*)
- Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*)
- Lilyturf (*Liriope spicata*)
- New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*)
- Plaintain lily (*Hosta*)
- Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)



TREES

- Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)
- River birch (*Betula nigra*)
- Sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*)



FERNS & SEDGES

- Royal fern (*Osumunda regalis*)
- Lady fern (*Athyrium felix-femina*)
- Tussock sedge (*Carex stipata*)



SHRUBS

- Dwarf fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*)
- Inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra*)
- Red twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)
- Winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*)

MAINTAINING A RAIN GARDEN

During the first year plants will require supplemental water during dry periods. Weeding is also crucial during the first few years until the garden has filled in. Once the garden is established, however, maintenance is minimal, requiring only periodic mulching, light pruning and thinning. Fertilizing is usually not needed.

Spring is an excellent time to install a rain garden, as digging will be easier. Early fall, however, will allow the plants time to establish new roots before the soil temperature drops, and your rain garden will be ready to handle winter snowmelt and the abundant spring rains.

Further information is available in the Horticultural Library at Deep Cut Gardens and through the following organizations:

Rutgers Water Resource Program www.water.rutgers.edu or the Rutgers Master Gardeners of Monmouth County, 732-303-7604

The **Rutgers Fact Sheet FS513 "Rain Gardens"** can be accessed from www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs

The Native Plant Society of New Jersey 102 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8519, www.npsnj.org

Rain Gardens: A How-to Manual for Homeowners. Riger Bannerman and Ellen Considine <http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/pdf/home.rgmanual.pdf>

Preparing Bulbs for Winter Color

Diane Allen, Staff Horticulturalist

With a little planning and effort in October, you can have your favorite spring bulbs blooming to brighten your home in February (or outdoor containers in March). Daffodils (narcissus), tulips, crocus, hyacinth, grape hyacinth, lily-of-the-valley, and scilla are all good candidates.

In order to flower, these potted bulbs will need a cold treatment of 35-48°F degrees for at least 12-13 weeks, but should not be allowed to freeze. Place them in an unheated garage or cellar, cold frame, or in your refrigerator. If you put them in the refrigerator, cover the pots with plastic in which you have made a few "breathing" holes. If placed in a cold frame, place mulch around and over the pots.

After the cold treatment, bring them out to a sunny, cool location (about 40 degrees°F is perfect) for one week or until the leaves begin to expand, then move to the desired location. You can expect bloom in about three weeks. For best results, avoid direct sunlight and move the pot to a cool location each night.



Paperwhite tip: Paperwhite narcissus does not need a cold treatment, but they may get very tall and flop over. Try planting them in gravel in a tall, clear glass container, with colorful twigs – inkberry holly is a striking companion – to keep them upright. Be sure to keep the water level just at the basal plate of the bulb.

1. Loosely fill clean, sterile pots with potting mix, allowing room for the tip of the bulb to sit just below the pot rim. Be sure the pots have a drainage hole.



2. Place the bulbs close together in the pot and cover with more potting mix, leaving the tips just exposed. Water as needed thereafter so the soil does not dry out.



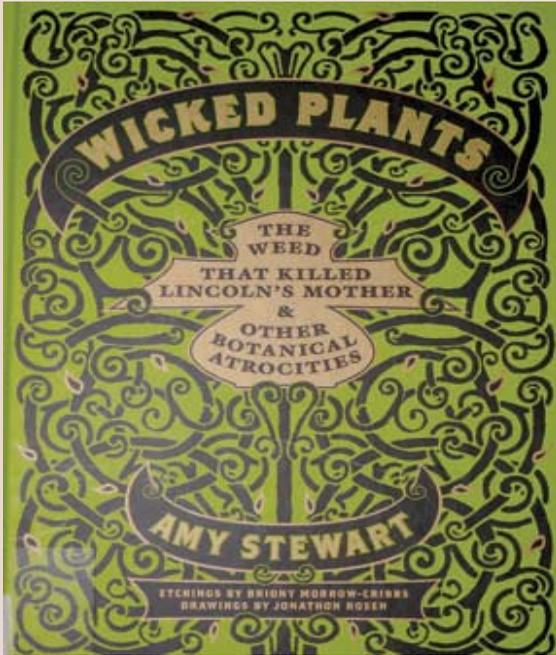
3. Tulip tip: For best effect, place the flat side of the tulip facing towards the rim of the pot.



Hyacinth tip: Hyacinth blossoms sometimes get "stuck." If the flower bud is not emerging from the leaves, place the plants in the dark for a few days, or place a paper bag over the plant in order to prompt the flower stem to elongate.

A Book Review

Susan Henschel, Deep Cut Gardens Librarian



Wicked Plants: the weed that killed Lincoln's mother & other botanical atrocities by Amy Stewart; etchings by Briony Morrow-Cribbs; illus. by Jonathon Rosen; Algonquin Books, 2009.

From your first glance at Amy Stewart's *Wicked Plants* you know that this is not your ordinary gardening book. On the cover, in place of a typical photo of colorful blooms, are black tendrils curling around the title. Inside, the illustrations and etchings, although beautiful, give a somber look at the plants being discussed. And page headings such as "deadly" and "painful" warn you of harmful effects of plant encounters.

Ms. Stewart does not wish to frighten people but she does want to emphasize that even the most innocent interaction with a garden plant could have dangerous results if precautions aren't taken. Her stated purpose is to share her fascination with plants while entertaining, enlightening AND alarming her audience with facts gleaned from science, history and folklore. She achieves this through stories illustrating the dangerous properties of the plant world much of which we have growing in our own environment.

***Wicked Plants* can be found lurking on the shelves of the Elvin McDonald Horticultural Library at Deep Cut Gardens, Middletown.**

It's Time To...

October ✓



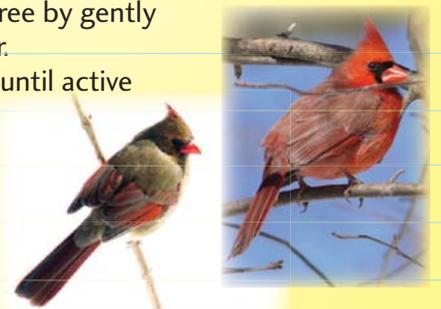
- Plant grass seed the first two weeks of this month. Apply low-nitrogen lawn fertilizer if not done this fall.
- Plant new trees and shrubs now so they can develop some new roots before soil temperatures drop; mulch and water well.
- Plant garlic about 4-6" apart in a rich sandy loam.
- Prepare new beds for spring planting: have soil tested for fertility/pH and work in amendments.
- Clean houseplants and begin acclimating to indoor conditions.
- Lift corms and bulbs of begonia, caladium, calla and gladiola; lift dahlia and canna after blackened by frost.
- Clean up gardens and discard foliage of any disease-prone perennials, but leave those that provide winter interest and seeds for the birds.
- Plant pansies/ornamental cabbages for fall color, and bulbs for next spring.
- A sheet will protect the last fruits in the garden from a light frost.
- Water lawns, beds, shrubs and trees only if needed to ensure they go into winter well hydrated.
- Apply compost or composted manure over beds to improve the soil and plant vigor next growing season.

November ✓

- Apply mulch or leaf mold to gardens after the first hard frost.
- Turn your compost pile after frost hits to deter overwintering rodents.
- Plant any remaining bulbs.
- Clean and store tools until spring. Store fertilizers and other materials where granulars will stay dry and liquids frost-free.
- Pot amaryllis bulbs every few weeks beginning mid-month for blooms through the winter.

December ✓

- Apply a winter mulch of shredded oak leaves around azaleas, rhododendrons, pieris and other acid-loving plants.
- Ventilate cold frames when the weather is mild.
- Keep houseplants dust-free by gently spraying with tepid water.
- Fertilize at half-strength until active growth resumes.
- Feed the birds, especially when the ground is snow-covered.



Female (left) and male cardinals will be around through fall and into winter.

CORNER

NATURE



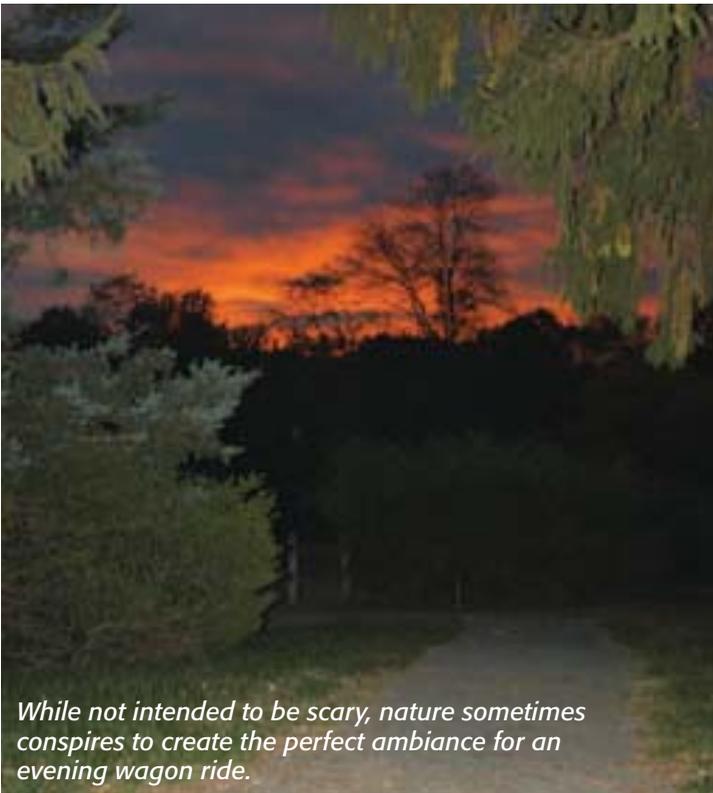
Creature of the Night Wagon Ride

Fall's Must-Do, Magical Event! Creatures of the Night

Park Naturalist, Karen Jarmusz

The goal of this unique and popular program is to provide families with a traditional fall hayride--- without scaring anyone. Creatures of the Night does not have spooky ghosts or skeletons that pop out and startle as you ride along. Instead, the program offers a series of "tongue in cheek" environmental performances featuring nocturnal animals of Monmouth County.

Park naturalists have been hosting this annual program at Huber Woods Park in Middletown since 1997. It's a considerable production requiring staff from several Park System divisions, and a large complement of volunteers. Each autumn, almost 1,000 park visitors enjoy the hayrides and shows.



While not intended to be scary, nature sometimes conspires to create the perfect ambiance for an evening wagon ride.

The Creative "Spark"— How It All Began

In 1995, park naturalists happened to have a staff meeting scheduled on Halloween, usually a quiet day since school groups rarely book nature programs on this day. Staff began wondering if the holiday could inspire some type of nature program and ideas were pitched. The banter continued, but no definitive plans took shape...until the next year.

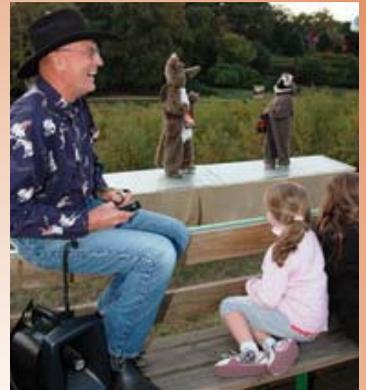


Who's up for a story about owls?

In April 1996, the Park System held its first annual Earth Day Celebration at Huber Woods, and a hay wagon was used to transport people to and from the parking area. The last ride of the day took staff back to their cars, and since it was a beautiful day, they took a detour through one of the fields. The rest is history....

What is "Creatures of the Night"?

It's a 40 minute, evening hayride through the rolling hills of Huber Woods Park in Middletown. Along the way, guests encounter a series of skits featuring live characters from nature (usually animals, sometimes "other things") that use humor to teach about the night's theme--- which changes from year to year. A creative and entertaining way to learn about nature, 6 wagon rides are offered each weekend evening in



Park Naturalist Sam Skinner (left)—dressed appropriately to lead a hayride—narrates the action at one of the "skits."

October. The program is geared toward school-aged children, but as the photos show, people of all ages enjoy the event. After the ride, families are invited inside the cozy Program Building to warm up and enjoy cider and donuts.

This program has a daytime counterpart for pre-schoolers called *Critters and Jitters* which features a live animal presentation (but no live characters) and pumpkin picking.

Visit www.monmouthcountyparks.com to reserve a spot.

Keeping it Real: Theme Changes Year to Year

To keep the production fresh, staffers think up a new environmental theme every year. The program has covered many topics through the years—migration, recycling, pirates of Monmouth County. For the Creatures of the Night 10th Anniversary, animals from around the world came for a visit.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1999, Creatures of the Night was nationally recognized with an award for “Best Program” from the National Association of County Parks and Recreation.

This year’s event should be especially lively. The theme is “Creatures of the Night: The Musical.” It’s a behind the scenes look at putting on a performance, run by animals of course. True to their nature, the beavers will be building the sets, the raccoons collecting things for the sets; the fireflies will be in charge of lighting, etc.



One of our locals, the raccoon, is a regular at Creatures of the Night. He is able to offer some insights about our human habits that he learned by scavenging through our garbage for food.

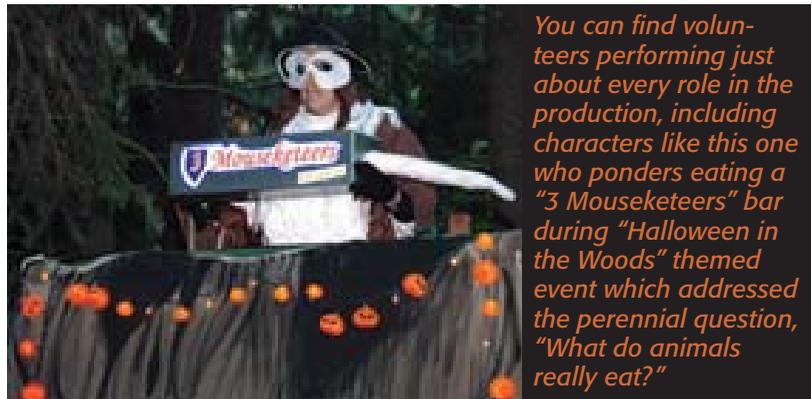


A mechanical device designed by Mac is still used today to hoist the Great Pumpkin out of the field.

A Lively Show Fueled by Creativity and Volunteers

Creatures of the Night owes much of its success to the creativity of late part-time naturalist Alton McDermott. A “McGyver” of sorts, staff say they would come up with lots of wild ideas, and he would figure out how to implement them. Many of the zip lines and other moving parts used at the entertainment stations for Creatures of the Night were designed by “Mac.” He was later renamed “Mac-mazing” due to his ingenuity. Alton McDermott passed away in 2003 but his legacy certainly lives on with this program.

But it’s not just staff who make it happen. Volunteers are a critical and high-energy part of this program’s success. About 20 high-school students assist with the production each night. Sometimes it is cold and damp outside, and for those unaccustomed to the sights and sounds of wildlife in the dark—it can be a truly educational experience. Park staffers take good care of the volunteers, however, and many have so much fun they return year after year.



You can find volunteers performing just about every role in the production, including characters like this one who ponders eating a “3 Mouseketeers” bar during “Halloween in the Woods” themed event which addressed the perennial question, “What do animals really eat?”

If you would like to find out what does go bump in the fields at night—plan to visit Huber Woods in October and find out! Call 732-842-4000 ext 1 or visit Program Registration at www.monmouthcountyparks.com to reserve your spot.

ON THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF NATURE...

Running a program outdoors is not without its own special set of challenges: wagons breaking down, set mishaps, rain delays, etc. But guests have always seemed to enjoy these natural surprises almost as much as the choreography. They treat it as part of the experience.

Woe is Me! Pumpkin Guts is a central character who returns each year. A real complainer, she (or sometimes he) laments how unappreciated she is compared to the Jack-O-Lantern. Over the years, Pumpkin Guts has taught visitors about composting, cooking, and character. Wait till you see what she is up to this year!



At the Creatures of the Night “Bug Ball” a Praying Mantis, Ladybug and Beetle (of course) do a song and dance about the importance of the insect world.



Participants enjoy refreshments served in the lodge, after the ride.



GREEN HERITAGE

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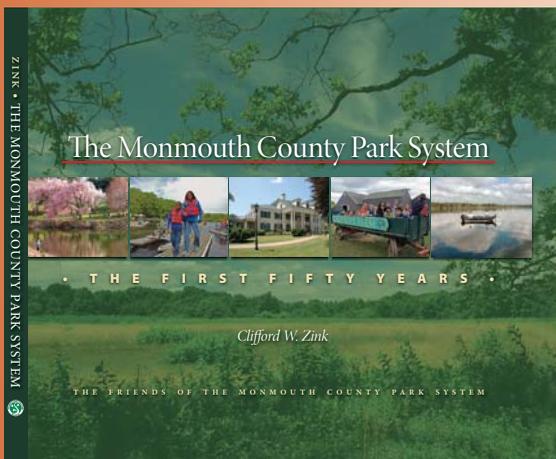
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