



LOST IN THE PARKS? THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

There's now a FREE mobile app for your smartphone that contains all the county park trails. It allows you to "see" your position on the trails as a blue dot, so you can find your way if you get lost. If you are experienced with technology, skip ahead to the instructions on the next page. If not, here's some background.

When maps first went digital, moving off of paper and onto computers, they got a new name—Geographical Information System or GIS maps. GIS is the field that specializes in creating digital or computerized maps containing many layers of precisely measured data, using coordinates of latitude and longitude. Map features such as roads and highways, bodies of water, buildings and homes, park boundaries, geographic elevation lines, flood prone areas, etc. are now connected to large sets of data that users can access and manipulate.

Now that maps are computerized, the imagery is more advanced as well and you can choose among different viewing options. For instance, using a program like Google Maps, you can look up a location in a traditional view (like an old-fashioned paper map), satellite view (as an overhead photo), or street view (where you can 'zoom in' as if you are standing there).



Your smartphone can now be used to navigate the parks.



Even with good signage and a park map (brochure), forested trails can begin to look very similar.



Park System planners, architects, land acquisition specialists and ecologists use a suite of map products (called "ArcGIS") to map the features on park properties, such as parking lots, buildings and trails. Esri (Environmental Systems Research Institute) is a private company that supplies this GIS mapping software and we used it to upload a special layer of park information for the public. You can now download this park information for FREE onto your smartphone with Esri's 'Explorer' map app from the **App Store** or **Google Play**. Using this software, you can see your exact position on the Monmouth County Park System trails while you are out in the parks.

Continued...

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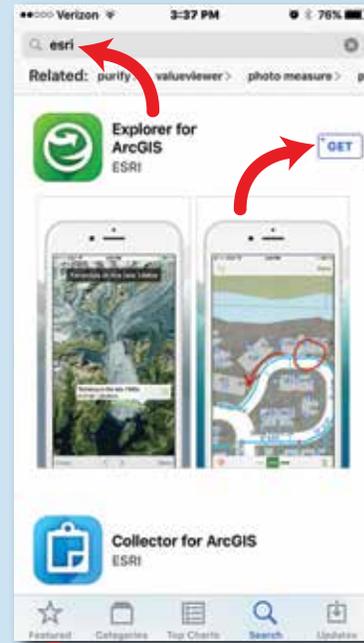
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How to Download and Use the Esri 'Explorer' Map App

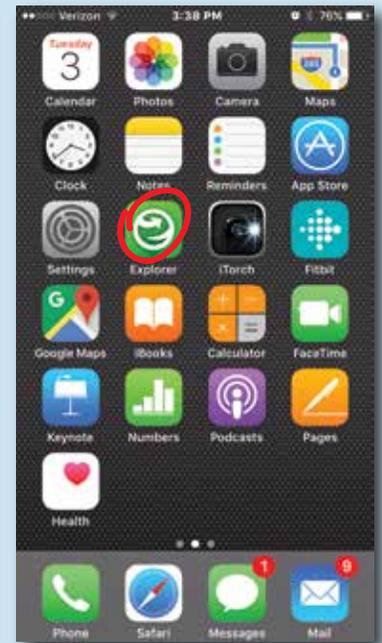
NOTE: Instructions for the iPhone are shown here, this app is also available for Android (not pictured)



Step 1 Click the App Store button on your phone homescreen.

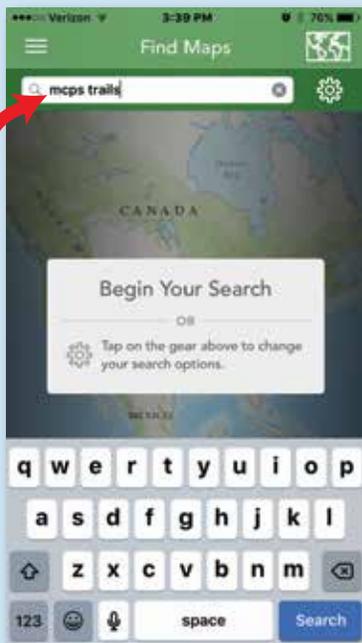


Step 2 Type 'Esri' into the search bar. Then download the Explorer app by clicking on the blue box, right.

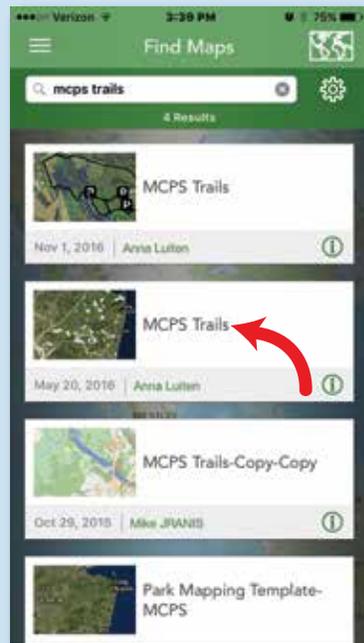


Step 3 Now, click the new 'Explorer' button on your phone homescreen to open the app.

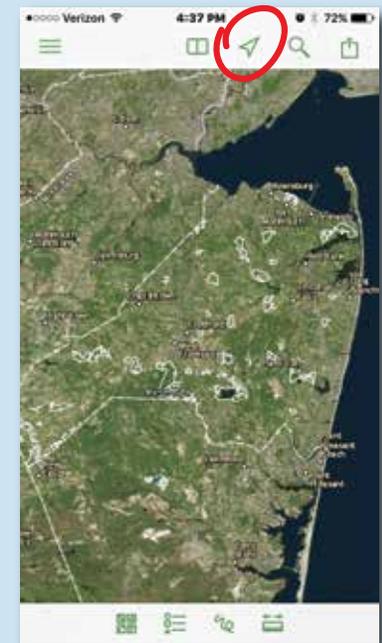
If you already downloaded the previous version of this app, Esri 'Arc GIS', you can continue using it. But Esri is no longer providing updates, so that version will become out of date at some point. When that happens, download this new version and delete the old one.



Step 7 Type 'mcps trails' in the search box on top of the Find Maps Screen.



Step 8 Click the second MCPS Trails panel, the one showing all the county parks in white outline (you could click on either MCPS map panel labeled Anna Luiten (the Park System Map Specialist who created our trail maps).

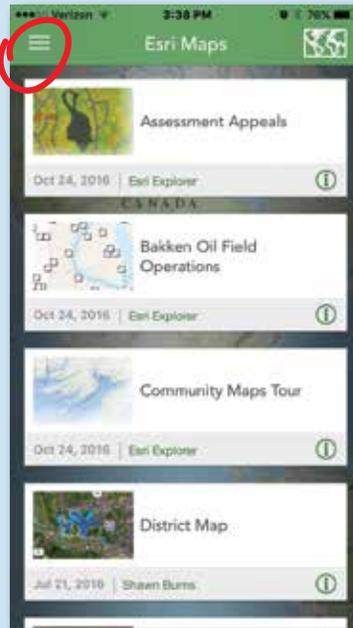


Step 9 A map of Monmouth County will open, showing the county border and all the county parks in white outline. Click the directional arrow in the top panel to geo-locate yourself as a blue dot on the map.

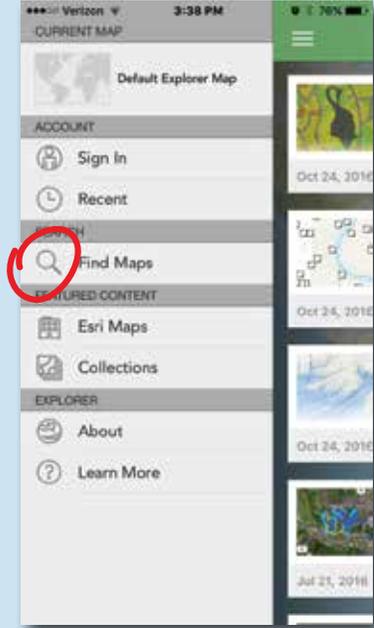
***IMPORTANT* Caution While Using This App!**
 Please don't stare at your phone screen while running, walking, hiking, biking, horseback riding or while engaged in any other activity! Always watch your footing and be aware of your surroundings while in the parks and on the trails.



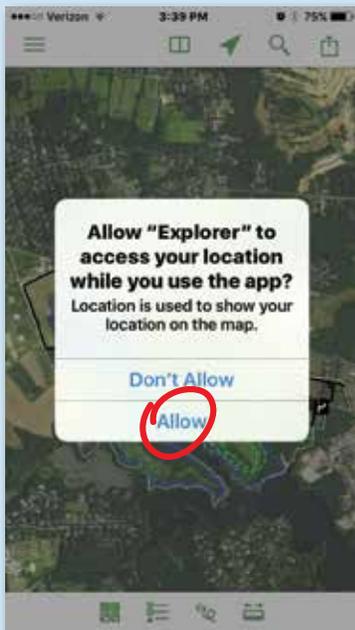
Step 4 Click 'Continue Without Signing In' on the welcome screen.



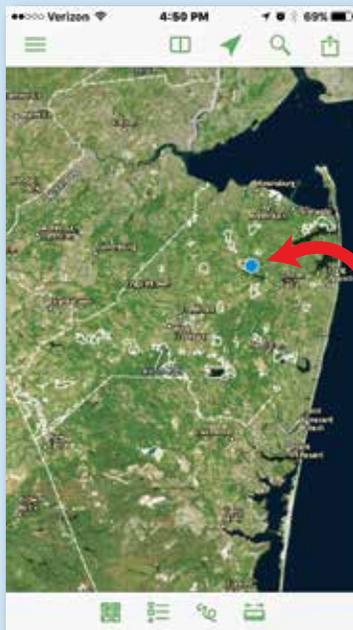
Step 5 Click the three bar icon on the upper left to search Esri's catalog of maps.



Step 6 Click the magnifying glass icon 'Find Maps' (center) to search Esri Maps for the map of Monmouth County Park trails.



Step 10 First, a screen will appear asking for permission to access your location while using this app. You will have to click 'Allow' to use the blue locator dot. (You might wish to read up further on how this may affect your Privacy Settings.)



Step 11 This article was written at Park System Headquarters in Thompson Park, Lincroft—so the blue dot shows the writer there in this screen capture.



Step 12 The app will zoom in to show your precise location in the park and will follow you as you walk. The trails appear as dashed lines: green trails are EASY and blue trails are MODERATE. A black dashed line is CHALLENGING (none at this park), while a black solid line is a paved trail. Click on the trail itself for more info.

IS YOUR TOWN AMONG THE MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE GRANT AWARD WINNERS FOR 2016?

Many towns in Monmouth County anticipate the coming of spring not only for the beautiful weather but for the arrival of the Municipal Open Space Grant Program handbook. This annual document doesn't affect the weather, but it does brighten their day because it means another round of funding for local open space, park and recreation projects.

Since the program began in 2003, 47 of the Monmouth County's 53 towns have been awarded almost \$28 million in funds to acquire land and develop or redevelop recreational facilities.



Neptune City —The Memorial Beach project received Municipal Open Space Grant awards in 2009 and 2012 to improve circulation, update the Pavilion, replace the bulkhead and provide a boardwalk with lighting and access to the river. The grants awarded totaled more than \$400,000.



Avon— The acquisition of Riverfront Park Marina was assisted by a grant of \$250,000 in 2008 and the development of the bulkhead, ramps, marina slips along with construction of the Marina Building was assisted by another grant of \$250,000 in 2010.



Red Bank — Count Basie Park has benefitted from grants in 2003, 2009 and 2010. The latest improvements to the ballfields, including artificial turf and lighting, were assisted by a \$250,000 grant in 2010. In 2015, Red Bank received a \$223,000 grant for additional improvements at the park for an outdoor exercise area and walkway.

Some towns have also used this matching grant for historic preservation projects, such as:

- restoring the historic Coast Guard Station in Manasquan
- purchasing a blacksmith's shop in Wall
- renovating homesteads in Little Silver and Millstone



Little Silver—The Parker Homestead Restoration Project received a \$250,000 Municipal Open Space Grant award in 2012. It was used to repair three gorgeous historic buildings—a cow barn, horse barn and wagon shed—so the site can function as an educational center on local farming history.

If these projects give you some ideas for your own town, get a copy of the current application form and Policy and Procedures Manual on the Park System's website at www.monmouthcountyparks.com. Click "About Us," then Municipal Open Space Program. If you have questions or would like a hard copy of the Manual, please call 732-842-4000, ext. 4472.

2016 Municipal Open Space Grant Winners

Like previous years, the majority of grants in 2016 were awarded for park and improvement projects (most years, 75% of grants are awarded for park improvements and 25% for land acquisition). Congratulations to this year's award recipients:

Allentown	North Main Street Acquisition	\$125,000
Asbury Park	Bradley Cove Acquisition	\$250,000
Sea Girt	Baltimore Park Improvements	\$50,000
Ocean	Community Pool - Wading/Activity Pool	\$200,000
Wall	Municipal Complex Splash Park	\$200,000
Sea Bright	Shrewsbury River Riverfront Park	\$100,000
Aberdeen	Pocket Park Improvements - Phase 1 - Deerfield Park and Midland Park	\$150,000
Highlands	Highlands Beach Park and Snug Harbor Beach Park Revitalization - Phase 1	\$150,000
Keansburg	Keansburg Bayfront Boardwalk Replacement	\$73,000
Union Beach	Scholer Park - Phase VII	\$66,000
Colts Neck	Town Hall Walking Path Paving	\$94,000
Oceanport	Fort Monmouth - Murphy Drive Acquisition	\$250,000
Allenhurst	Railroad Plaza Open Space Improvements	\$125,000
Bradley Beach	Sylvan Lake Park Improvements - Phase 1	\$161,000
Spring Lake	Divine Park Improvements	\$200,000
Hazlet	Natco Park Environmental and Restroom Building	\$200,000



This annual competitive matching grant is funded by the County Open Space Trust Fund. Each town may file one application per year and is eligible for up to \$250,000. State-designated Urban Aid Communities are responsible for paying 25% of project costs; all other towns are responsible 50% of project costs.

Sea Bright – When Superstorm Sandy destroyed an existing apartment complex, the NJDEP Blue Acres program was used to purchase the property. Sea Bright agreed to develop a park on the site and received a 2016 grant award of \$100,000 to help develop the Shrewsbury River Riverfront Park with landscaping, trails and a gazebo. This aerial view shows the site's potential.

A Park Perspective on Your Lawn

Achieving a picture-perfect, lush green lawn is the pride of many suburban homeowners. Yet, there's a price to pay for that perfection—from the actual monetary cost of a lawn care service to some important environmental costs. Fertilizers wash into our storm sewers and pollute our rivers and bays; pesticides can kill off beneficial insects as well as harmful ones; there's the exhaust and noise from mowers and the waste of increasingly precious water. Landscape irrigation is estimated to account for nearly 1/3 of all residential water use nationwide, a total of nearly 9 billion gallons per day, according to the EPA. And it's estimated that as much as 50% of that water is wasted due to inefficient watering methods and systems.



Deep Cut Gardens has many grassy fields and glades. This early spring photo illustrates the difference between cool season grasses (already green) and warm season (still light brown) grasses.

The appeal of low-growing turf grass is deep rooted in our psyche, say experts, allowing us to stalk prey, see danger, graze animals, and later, play sports. While scythe cut grass was once the provenance of the wealthy, the introduction of the lawn mower in 1830 changed everything. In the U.S., famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead (designer of Central Park) and residential developer William Levitt (whose mass produced housing of the 1950s-60s earned him the title “father of American suburbia”) helped popularize the notion of a lawn for every home.

Today, we are searching for greener methods and alternatives to that ideal, and Deep Cut Gardens offers a variety of different lawn types and grasses for the home gardener to explore through the seasons.

Managing Vegetation & Opening a New View

With a combination of fields, glades, meadows and areas of managed turf, the staff at Deep Cut Gardens are keenly aware of the complexity of maintaining different grasses while also protecting the environment. As a garden destination, this site also strives to meet the highest standards for beautiful and healthy fields across variable geography, and with changing light and moisture conditions. It's a full plate of goals to achieve, but it can be done.

One recent project highlights the effort to restore “high value” habitat with low maintenance grasses (www.monmouthcountyparks.com, “About Us,” Park Improvement Projects). Initiated in April of last year, visitors may have already noticed a large, new clearing east of the rose parterre (walking from the Horticultural Center, look to the right of the rose garden).



Nearby Thompson Park has converted some high-maintenance turf to low-mow meadows of mixed wildflowers and warm season grasses to achieve a stunning effect.

Visitors may have noticed a large, new clearing east of the rose parterre. Invasives were removed and will be replaced with a native mix of grasses and wildflowers.

This landscape improvement project removed 0.3 acres of secondary growth woodland and 0.7 acres of invasive plants (bittersweet, porcelain berry, grapevine, and invasive trees) from a forested field. In its place, a mix of low maintenance, warm season grasses (like big bluestem and little bluestem) and native wildflowers were seeded.

Removing invasive species will help restore the native habitat needed to preserve the diversity of local wildlife. The project also reestablishes a historic 'view-shed' between two knolls—the rose garden and the new picnic grove. On a recent visit, Deep Cut's Senior Park Manager Ken Olsen stood just to the northeast of the iconic rose parterre and surveyed the new field, "Just imagine what this view will look like with a wildflower meadow in the background."

Restoring Newly Cleared Land

Achieving that colorful meadow of native bloomers such as ox eye sunflower (heliopsis), blanket flower (gaillardia), purple coneflower (echinacea), bee balm (monarda), black-eyed susan (rudebekia), (wild blue indigo) baptisia, and coreopsis isn't as easy as simply spreading seeds. "When you disturb the land and cut trees down, light hits that seed bank in the ground and invasive plants will germinate too," says Olsen. "Mugwort, especially, is a problem, and to prevent it from taking over in newly cut ground, the area has to be selectively treated with herbicide." (On a small scale home environment you can just weed, but on this larger scale, treatment is necessary). "Then you watch the area to see what it does. This spring, we'll see what germinates."

It may take three to four years of seeding and spraying before the area reaches its goal. While time intensive, this process represents a seasonal progression toward a healthy native environment of grasses that will attract bees, birds, butterflies and other elements of a thriving habitat. "Then it's just yearly maintenance," says Olsen.

For the homeowner with a large property, converting a traditional lawn to a mix of native warm season grasses and wildflowers like those seen at Deep Cut Gardens can present challenges. A two to five foot tall meadow around a home's perimeter can be naturally problematic due to rodents, ticks, and of course, municipal laws. Even shorter grasses such as fescues, at about eight inches, may flop over and decay or dry in summer drought conditions, creating a fire hazard. Yet if you try to cut some types of fescues shorter, they simply won't thrive.

Optimizing Turf

At Deep Cut Gardens, the maintained turf is a cool season blend of perennial rye, bluegrass, and tall and/or chewing fescue. In a blended seed mix, the blades of grass look the same but different species will thrive depending on conditions. Fescues tend to dominate in areas of reduced light or moisture (under trees, along stream banks), while ryegrasses do well along perimeters, pathways and green stretches.



Newly opened view from the rose garden. Habitat restoration includes native wildflowers and grasses (which will establish themselves over the next few seasons.)



New view from the picnic grove back down to the gardens.



To get an idea of the specific wildflower species planned for Deep Cut, take a look at this colorful mix containing purple coneflower (echinacea), yellow ox eye sunflower (heliopsis), and white queen anne's lace. That's a large patch of invasive mugwort growing alongside the wildflowers, lower right.



Achieving lush green lawn is important for certain garden areas, for picnic sites and for play/event areas—so it is balanced with environmentally sustainable practices. A cool season grass mix of perennial rye, bluegrass, and tall fescue is used.

Mowing is crucial: the timing (season) and frequency will encourage certain grass species to thrive and discourage others. Mow height is important, too. “For our turf areas, 4 inches works best,” says Olsen. Any lower and light penetration encourages weeds. There are some exceptions, of course, because some park areas may need shorter grass for a specific use.

There are also several general dos and don’ts followed by staff at Deep Cut: “DO” amend soil (adding top soil or compost), aerate and lime according to soil tests; “DON’T” water the grass (except for special event areas) or use insecticides. “Thankfully, we don’t have a lot of insect damage,” says Olsen, and “for us, the use of certain insecticides no longer outweighs the damage to beneficial insects.” Instead, staff work to increase the general health of plants with fertilizer (just once a year during fall or early spring) to minimize susceptibility to insect damage. [Homeowners should be aware of the 2011 NJ Fertilizer Law, which prohibits phosphorus—except in certain situations—and limits nitrogen.]



In this mowed pathway, cool season grasses like rye and bluegrass dominate in the center. That same seed mix, when allowed to reach full height along the edges, looks like a meadow.



A few dandelions here and there are ok.

Are there any simple ways to reduce the environmental impact of our lawn obsession besides converting to native grasses and wildflowers? “Sure there are,” says Olsen. “We generally leave our dandelions alone and are willing to accept a little brown grass in August, and we mulch fall leaves directly onto the turf or blow them into the woodline so they can break down into organic matter as opposed to hauling them away.” Ultimately, it’s such “cultural practices” that are going to drive change.

See www.jerseyyards.org/threats-to-bays-rivers/new-jerseys-fertilizer-law for more information.]

Home Composting Workshops

Saturday, March 25, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Saturday, April 29, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Turn your food and yard waste into a valuable soil additive. Two spring workshops will be offered by the Monmouth County Office of Recycling at Deep Cut Gardens. Attendance is FREE; composting bins are available at a discounted fee of \$35.00. Pre-registration is required through the Monmouth County Office of Recycling at 732-683-8686, ext. 6721.

Daylily Seminar at Deep Cut Gardens

Sunday, April 9, 1:30-4 p.m.

Come to beautiful Deep Cut Gardens and learn how to hybridize daylilies along with other fascinating daylily culture tips! Join us in the Horticultural Center Program Room at Deep Cut as experts share their knowledge and passion for gardening with daylilies.

Bonsai Workshop

Monday, April 10, 1-5 p.m.

Interested in the ancient art of bonsai? Advanced or beginner you will find something of interest in this workshop. Enjoy guest lectures and demos in a fun yet informative format.

Great Spring Perennial Plant Swap & Earth Day

Saturday, April 22, 8:30 a.m.-12 p.m.

Plants may be dropped off between 8:30-10 a.m. to allow for plant inspection. Plants may then be selected and taken between 10 a.m.-12 p.m. It’s fun, free and easy. Bring plants in one-quart, one-gallon or two-gallon containers and take home the same size and number of plants. Please label all plants. Herb and vegetable seedlings may also be exchanged.

It's TIME TO...



April ✓

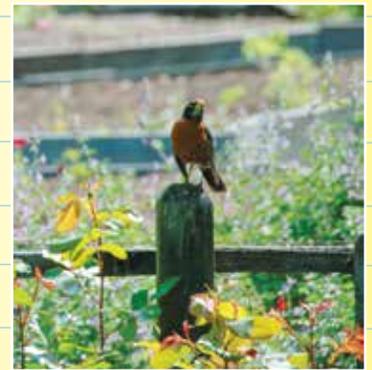
- Work compost and manure into beds as soon as soil is friable. Not composting yet? Visit the Horticultural Library at Deep Cut or take our **Composting Workshop** to learn more.
- Prune roses when the buds begin to swell.
- Before plants get too large, divide those that are crowding their neighbors and set out supports where needed.
- Most annual and perennial seeds can be started late this month.
- Set out hardy annuals such as pansies, violas and alyssum. Harden off plants started indoors or under cover.
- When applying granular fertilizer, make sure it does not contact plant foliage – it will burn.
- Over seed lawn; prepare poor spots by loosening soil. If using pre-emergent weed-killer, use early this month.



Azaleas are in the pink by late April.

May ✓

- Prune spring-flowering shrubs as soon as flowering is finished (deer damage- winter kill).
- Leave bulb foliage until it has died - green foliage is making food for next year's bloom.
- Chemical controls will be ineffective against grubs now; wait until mid-July or August.
- Wait until the soil warms to transplant tomatoes and peppers.
- Transplant well-hydrated seedlings on a cloudy day or provide temporary shade. Pinching off flowers and buds now will encourage a stronger root system.
- Remove any finished cool weather crops to make room for warm season vegetables.
- Direct sow seeds outdoors for basil, beans and other warm-weather plants.
- Mulch plants to conserve moisture, stabilize soil temperature and reduce weeds.
- Acclimate houseplants to outdoor conditions and keep them in light shade.



A robin drops by the 'All America's Garden' in May.

June ✓

- Continue to plant warm-weather flowers, vegetables and herbs. Water thoroughly before and after transplanting and mulch well with organic mulch.
- Check squash vines for borers and remove any you find.
- Keep after plants that need staking, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, tall annuals, dahlias and lilies.
- June 19-24 is Pollinator Week. Are your gardens pollinator-friendly?



This scaredy-cat scarecrow kept park visitors company last June.

Earth Day Celebration

Saturday, April 22, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.

Beautiful flowers are back in bloom. Discover this charming park's floral beauty, hidden places, and native plants. Find out how to become an earth-friendly gardener.



Tours, talks, walks and demonstrations—there's so much to learn about at Deep Cut Gardens special events.

Become a Garden Ambassador - Volunteer!

Saturday, April 29, 1-3 p.m.

Join us and learn how to become a Deep Cut Garden Ambassador. We will train you in the seasonal points of interest within the gardens as well as our upcoming special events. Spend a couple of hours touring the gardens and learning how to be a welcoming, informative presence on the grounds. Ages 18 and up are welcome. Please dress comfortably.

National Public Gardens Day

Friday, May 12, 2-8 p.m.

On the Friday before Mother's Day stop in at Deep Cut Gardens for free activities and information. Join a guided tour, get answers to your garden/landscape questions and earth-friendly garden tips, sit in on a raised bed gardening demo, and try your hand at a scavenger hunt.

CORNER

NATURE

LIZARDS OF NJ: NEITHER LOVED NOR FEARED

By Chris Lanza, Principal Park Naturalist

New Jersey has supported a surprisingly rich and varied number of reptile species over geologic time, and is home to three of the five major groups of reptiles: lizards and skinks; snakes; turtles; crocodylians—which are no longer found in New Jersey because they are mostly prehistoric; and birds, while technically reptiles, are not popularly thought of as such.

Of these reptile groups, lizards are the least likely to be noticed even though they have existed in New Jersey for millions of years. Evidence from the Monmouth Brooks (a group of well-known, local archaeological sites) indicates the presence of various lizard species in prehistoric NJ that are comparable to modern skinks,

geckos, and iguanas.¹ These small animals lived in the shadows of massive and dominating dinosaurs that still exist in the form of their bird descendents. The fossil record is unclear after a certain point, so we don't know if today's lizards can be linked to these early species, or if they spread to New Jersey from another location.



The aptly named fence lizard is found throughout southern NJ and southern portions of central NJ. It is pictured here at Turkey Swamp Park in Freehold.

PHOTO: Park Ranger Mike Towle.

References

1. Gallagher, W. B. (1997). When Dinosaurs Roamed New Jersey. In W. B. Gallagher, When Dinosaurs Roamed New Jersey (p. 113). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
2. The Audubon Society. (1979). Field Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians. In J. L. Behler, The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians (p. 487). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
3. Schwartz, V., & M., C. D. (2002). Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of New Jersey (p. 17). Vineland: New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife.
4. Paterson Field Guides. (1991). Reptiles and Amphibians Eastern/Central North America. In R. Conant, & C. J. T., Reptiles and Amphibians Eastern/Central North America (p. 127). New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
5. Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey. (2016, 12 6). New Jersey Endangered and Threatened Species Field Guide. Retrieved from Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey: <http://www.conservewildlifenj.org/species/fieldguide/view/Scincella%20lateralis/>

Lizards vs. Salamanders & Snakes

At first glance, it's understandable that people might confuse lizards and salamanders because their appearance is so similar—a long body, four legs and a tail. But closer inspection reveals that the lizard has scales, claws and external ears, which are all absent from the smooth skinned salamander. Of course, salamanders are not reptiles at all, they are amphibians. And like their frog cousins, they need water to reproduce and must remain moist.

Lizard



Compare the claws and scaly skin of the lizard above to the smooth, shiny skin of red-backed salamander.

PHOTO: Brian Gratwicke, wikicommons

Salamander



Snakes and lizards may look different, but they have even more in common. Both are reptiles; snakes actually evolved from lizards. The most obvious difference is the lack of limbs, which sets snakes apart. But there are limbless lizards (yes, they do exist!), and these can only be distinguished from snakes by their moveable eyelids, which snakes do not have.² Lizards also have a sense of smell and taste, more like mammals, and therefore do

not use their tongue and Jacobson's organ to sample the air around them like snakes do.

Snake



Compare the pronounced eyelids of the lizard above to the lidless eye of this garter snake.

The Lizards of NJ

New Jersey is home to three lizard species, the fence lizard and two species of skinks. All are diurnal (active day and night) and seen mostly May through September. If you stop to think about it, you might realize you haven't seen too many lizards in the wild, if any at all. This is to be expected because lizards are well camouflaged and can blend into their environment and sit still, so they remain hidden. Or, when startled, they can move very fast to get away.

Lizards may be less well-noticed than other reptiles because they blend into their environment and move away quickly when startled.

Chances are, if you came across a lizard outside you probably didn't notice or, if you did, all you saw was flash of brown as it dashed by.

The northern fence lizard (*Sceloporus undulatus hyacinthinus*) is the only local representative of the spiny lizard—a large and widespread genus. It is found in the open pine woods throughout southern NJ and in Monmouth County, and southern Mercer and Middlesex counties.³ Fence lizards are very arboreal (think Arbor Day, they love trees) and are generally only noticed when disturbed. They usually remain motionless, but if approached, will dart upwards, alternating sides of the tree, until danger passes. The fence lizard feeds on small insects and arachnids (spiders); some researchers note a preference for beetles.²



Would you notice this fence lizard positioned in a tree while out walking in the woods?

Male fence lizards are brown with no pattern on the back, while females are gray with a wavy back pattern; both display a dark line on the thigh. Juvenile males and females look alike³, but as they mature males develop a vibrant blue on the throat and sides of the belly. This blue color is lacking in mature females or is much more subdued.



Distinct blue underside of a male fence lizard.

The Skinks. Unlike the arboreal fence lizard, skinks are mostly terrestrial, but some may climb trees if frightened (or in search of food). To protect themselves, skinks are alert and fast, but they can also bite.⁴ Plus, their tails will detach if handled roughly.

Skinks (a type of lizard) can bite to protect themselves and their tails will detach if handled roughly.

Skinks eat small insects, arachnids and other small animals (including mammals) that they encounter on the forest floor. They have smooth scales and resemble salamanders even more than fence lizards. But remember, lizards have scales and claws while salamanders do not.

The five-lined skink (*Eumeces fasciatus*) is found state-wide and measures 5-8 ½ inches long. Its colors and patterns vary. Juveniles have five, light yellowish stripes and bright blue tails. Adults have a brown background color (females may retain the juvenile stripes) and gray-blue tail. During mating season the males will sport a red-orange head.³



Five-lined skink
PHOTO: USFWS, in NJ

The ground skink (*Scincella lateralis*) is smaller, just 3-5 ¾ inches, but has a longer tail. It has a brown back (possibly coppery or shiny) with a noticeable black side stripe and a pale belly. It is much less widely distributed in the state, but can be found in southern Monmouth County, typically in rotting logs, wood or rock piles.



Ground skink
PHOTO: USFWS, in NJ

As of January 2016, the ground skink was listed by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife as a 'Species of Special Concern,' just one step below 'Threatened.' At this time, no rules or proposals have been put forth to protect their population⁵, but as with many of New Jersey's endangered or threatened species, habitat loss is a major factor. In this case, a loss of forest canopy and understory cover (from trees and shrubs) reduces the amount of ground cover and leaf litter. Without this cover, ground skinks are more exposed to predation and cannot stalk their prey.

The lizards of NJ are not nearly as well-loved as our turtles or as reviled and misunderstood as our snakes. But this middle position—neither loved nor feared—is almost worse; because they can go unnoticed. And when a changing world overtakes them, there isn't a ready group to come to their defense.



GREEN HERITAGE

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