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Newsletter

Preserving and Protecting the Historic Princeton Nursery Lands

Here is what we've been up to since the last newsletter...

First Day Hike: Three score and ten walkers and five dogs joined President Karen Linder for a hike in the Mapleton Preserve on the bright and chilly inaugural day of the year. Nice to be able to see so many new people come to the Preserve for the first time, in pursuit of a New Year's Resolution to get outside and get some exercise. The walk started with a loop around the Princeton Nurseries warehouse buildings and propagation house, followed the ginkgo row to a left along the nursery road that runs alongside the Arboretum, and continued across Mapleton Road to the former nursery seedbeds, returning via the D&R Canal and a trail through old nursery plantings.



Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service: Sixty-plus volunteers reported for duty in the Mapleton Preserve in sub-freezing temperature and sunshine to make this our most productive Martin Luther King Day of Service ever! Our hardy corps included FPNL members and perennial Day of Service participants, neighbors, four students from Rutgers, a large, cheerful group from HOPE worldwide, and newly elected Assemblyman (and South Brunswick resident) Andrew Zwicker. Bob Wells and employees of Wells Tree and Landscape volunteered their time and equipment to do some serious chipping of the fruits of our labors. We are deeply grateful to our enthusiastic volunteers for all that they accomplished.



Hope worldwide volunteers warm up in the Education Building (formerly Princeton Nurseries' blacksmith shop) after their prodigious efforts!

Bamboo Blast: A special clearing session was held in March to clear a swath of bamboo for a power line to supply electricity to the propagation house. A dozen energetic volunteers cut, dragged, and stacked a mountain of bamboo, and created a clear channel for the lines in anticipation of a grant application that FPNL had applied for from the 1772 Foundation. Unfortunately, we did not get the grant, which was for a security system in the propagation house.

Arbor Day 2016: This Arbor Day, FPNL honored the untimely passing of our good friend Dave Reed of Mapleton Nurseries with the planting of a pink dogwood. Dave was ever generous with his time and experience, advised FPNL on tree-related issues, served as a supplier and planter of trees for the Flemer Arboretum, and was a host for some of our events. His wife and three sons were in attendance, as were past employees of Mapleton Nurseries. Following this, Bob Wells of Wells Tree & Landscape led a tree walk. He prefaced it with a fascinating excursion into the geology of New Jersey and how the ancient past determined the topography and soil composition of the land on which we stood.



At the **FPNL Annual Meeting** in June, we were treated to an impassioned and information-packed talk on LICHENS that made many of us think differently about these underappreciated bellwethers of the health of our environment. James Lendemer, lichenologist from the New York Botanical Gardens in the Bronx, did a fabulous job of introducing us to this partnership of fungus and algae, to the benefit of both.

We liked his talk so much that we immediately invited Dr. Lendemer back to the Mapleton Preserve to lead a winter lichen walk at the Mapleton Preserve in 2017. Stay tuned to our website at www.fpnl.org - we will post it as soon as a date for the walk has been announced.



National Public Lands Day, in September, saw 17 cheerfully enthusiastic volunteers weeding the butterfly garden, picking up litter, and hacking away at bamboo, brush and vines that were threatening specimen trees, including the Dawn Redwood, which now has much more breathing room. Our heartfelt gratitude to everybody that helped, with a particular shout-out to David Southgate, who took on the unpleasant job of cleaning the Clivus Multrum.

Mapleton Preserve update: When the Mapleton Preserve property was preserved, the Management and Use Agreement stipulated that the two large warehouses on the property would have to be razed if the funds and plans for their preservation weren't procured and in place in 10 years. That 10-year mark arrived in mid-December, 2015. Since that time, the Mapleton Preserve Commission, Princeton University, South Brunswick Township and the State of New Jersey have been working on the modification of the Management and Use Agreement to allow the adaptive re-use of the warehouses. We are hopeful that this agreement will be updated by 2017.

Propagation House stabilization - some good news: The discovery of asbestos in the glazing of the old greenhouses attached to the Propagation House brought to a screeching halt the plan to restore the Princeton Nurseries Propagation House. There is a substantial grant funding in hand from the N.J. Historic Trust for the restoration project, but that money cannot be used for asbestos remediation. A \$52,000 bid for partial remediation was obtained, but this is still a daunting figure for a small non-profit such as FPNL. Fortunately, a donor has stepped forward to offer a \$40,000 contribution, which will cover the bulk of this cost. FPNL has agreed to pay for the remaining \$12,000 so that remediation can begin after further bids have been solicited. We are exceedingly grateful to this unknown benefactor, and also for the generous donations to the David Knights fund by our members.

Membership Renewal Appeal: It is amazing how fast the year flies by - it is again time to renew your membership with the Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands for 2017 (or join us for the first time). Since we solicit renewals and donations only once a year, we urge you to join or renew your membership in the Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands TODAY. For those who are new to FPNL, our programs are generally free and open to the public. Your donations will be used for speaker and program fees, tree and trail upkeep, as well as the newsletter. In addition, FPNL is soliciting additional funds for stabilization of the propagation house, a project that should be starting soon, once asbestos abatement is completed.

Visit our website at www.fpnl.org to join or renew using either PayPal or by downloading a membership form. Please give as generously as you can.

Notes from the field - Witch Hazel:

Witch hazel is a multi-stemmed shrub that got its common name in colonial America, where the shrub's flexible branches were a favorite "witching stick" that dowzers used for searching out water. The word witch originates from "wych", the old English word for pliable branches. The "hazel" part of witch hazel's name comes from the resemblance of its leaves to those of hazel trees. An unusual feature of witch hazel is its tendency to flower in mid or late fall or very early in the New Year through March.



Witch hazel in the Flemer Arboretum - photo by Anne Zeman

The sight of witch hazel's fragile looking but robust clusters of flowers on a cold sunny day in mid-October, or a warm day in February, is always a treat.

The leaves of witch hazel are alternate, uneven ovals of 2.5 to 6 inches long, with prominent veining. They are ridged with wavy teeth on the margins of the leaf. Some witch hazel leaves have lovely fall colors - yellow orange, orange-red or clear yellow and many will hold tightly to their dried leaves well into winter. Cultivars with flower colors of cream, pale to deep yellow, orange, red, chestnut, and purple have been developed,

The scientific name for common witch hazel is *Hamamelis virginiana*. The name hamamelis combines two Greek word roots meaning fruit (apple) and "together," because the plant produces flowers at the same time that the previous year's fruits mature. The seed pods, which appear to be clothed in buckskin, hold edible shiny black seeds (apparently with a flavor like pistachio nuts). When mature, the seed capsules explode apart, shooting seeds many feet from the shrub.



An extract can be produced by decoction or distillation of twigs and bark - this produces an anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory mix of aromatic oils, tannins, flavonoids, and astringents. Witch hazel extract is used in perfumes, after-shave lotions, and in facial and medicinal products. It is an excellent astringent that can remove oil from skin, tighten pores and shrink bags under your eyes. Its anti-inflammatory properties combined with its tendency to tighten skin make it a key ingredient in treatments for hemorrhoids. Americans settlers learned to use witch hazel as an herb from the New England Indians.

Today, most commercial witch hazel is made in Connecticut, where it has been grown for harvest since the mid-1800's. An early 19th century Indian missionary and amateur chemist, found out that distillation from the twigs produced a more potent product than a simple tea did. In 1866, the Dickinson family established a business. To this day, the E. E. Dickinson Co. and the T. N. Dickinson Co., along with the American Distilling and Manufacturing Co., still produce most of the witch hazel extract sold on the American market.



*Witch hazel seed pods and flower.
Photo by Mary Holland, from her nature
guide, Naturally Curious*

Still to come

Thursday, November 26. 10-11:30 am - Thanksgiving Day Walk:

Join FPNL president Karen Linder for our annual Thanksgiving Day morning exploration of the Mapleton Preserve. This 10 am program will begin at the Main Office for the D&R Canal State Park, 145 Mapleton Road, Kingston.

Come search for signs of what our local wildlife is having for Thanksgiving dinner, learn about turkey tail mushrooms, and enjoy the abundance and subtle beauty of late fall. **Open to all, but preregistration IS requested. Call 609-683-0483 to reserve a spot.**

Sunday, Dec. 18th, Audubon Christmas Bird Count (BIRDERS TAKE NOTE!) Starts at 7:30 AM:

The Kingston segment of this year's Audubon Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by the Kingston Greenways Association, begins at 7:30 AM to catch the "early birds". We will bird until noon, when we take a break for lunch at Main Street Café. The group then continues with the count in the afternoon. You can join us for morning, afternoon, or both. If interested, give Karen Linder a call (609-683-0483) for more info. We would particularly appreciate the help of experienced birders for this event, but novices are also welcome.

Friday, JANUARY 1, 2017, Noon - 2 pm: First Day Hike:

Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands invites everyone to a First Day Hike in the Mapleton Preserve on Friday, January 1, 2017, at noon. For anyone who made a resolution to walk more, this is a great opportunity to start the new year off with an easy 1.5 mile loop hike through the Mapleton Preserve, into the fields on the other side of Mapleton Road, along the D&R Canal and back to the Preserve. We know you will want to sleep in a little, so the walk will not start until noon. It will begin and end at the Mapleton Preserve/D&R Canal State Park Headquarters at 145 Mapleton Road in Kingston. Dress for the weather. The walk is free and all are welcome. For more information, visit www.fpnl.org as we get closer to the New Year.

Monday, January 18th, 2017, Noon to 3 pm - Martin Luther King Day of Service work session in the Mapleton Preserve: We will be clearing small trees, brush, vines, and trash. Come spend a winter afternoon outdoors with us, and discover the special joys of stewardship! Bring saws, clippers, loppers and rakes. Work gloves, sturdy shoes, warm clothing and hats are a must. All are welcome. Call 609-683-0483 for more information, or if you would like to involve a group to help.

Sunday, February 26, 2017 - 1-3. Signs of Life in the Winter Landscape.

Join Karen Linder for a walk through the fields of the Mapleton Preserve, looking for signs of life in the winter landscape, be they plants, animals or birds, evidence of feeding, tracks or scat. It will probably be cold, and could be snowy or muddy, so dress for the weather, whatever it is. Hot chocolate will be served after the walk. **It is free and all are welcome, but preregistration is requested, to assure that we print enough handouts.** To register, call 609-683-0483.



Turkey Tail (Trametes versicolor)
photo by Karen Linder



Stay up to date. For more information on events in the New Year, see www.fpnl.org