

FRIENDS OF FOREST HILL PARK



www.friendsofforesthillpark.org

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Oaks – Nature’s “Power Trees”

Suzette Lyon

Over millions of years, the flora and fauna in a given area have developed significant relationships with each other. As an example, the genus Quercus (oaks) is considered a keystone genus since oaks are critical to the survival of other organisms in the ecosystem. Some of you may already be aware of the relationship between oaks and the decline in bird populations. Here is the explanation in an acorn shell.

- The genus Quercus supports more than 500 species of moth and butterfly caterpillars in the Mid-Atlantic states, more than any other genus.
- The great majority of birds feed their babies almost exclusively caterpillars.
- Baby birds require lots of caterpillars and parents must be able to find enough in a small area to support the nestlings.
- As land development continues, healthy native forests are being replaced with non-native plants and an abundance of lawn; these types of plants do not support native insects.
- Thus, there are not enough caterpillars to support bird populations. There are many other reasons that oaks are such powerful trees. Here are a few:
- The bounty of caterpillars produced by oaks in a short time frame may be one reason some birds migrate to breeding areas where oaks, and therefore caterpillars, are abundant.
- Some caterpillars winter over while tucked in the crevices of the bark. Some of them become food for small birds such as kinglets, nuthatches and chickadees which cannot survive on seeds and berries alone; they need insects too, even in winter.
- Caterpillars provide food for other small animals such as frogs and toads.
- Acorns are an important food source for some birds and mammals.
- Some insect species are dependent on acorns or the leaves and twigs to complete their life cycles. In many instances these then become prey for other insects and so the predators are also dependent on the oak.
- Even oak leaf litter is teeming with life. Oak leaves take 2-3 years to decay so the ground is usually covered all the time, making good habitat for many very small organisms. There are even some moth caterpillars that feed on dead leaves in the litter rather than the green leaves on the tree!
- Oaks support a very complicated web of life.

While the focus here is on oaks, all native plant species are important to their local area for one reason or another. Native hickory species, maple species, black willow, black cherry and others also support large numbers of moth and butterfly species. Some plants provide food for only a few caterpillar species but they are vitally important! For example, the tulip poplar, *Tulipifera liriodendron*, is a host plant for caterpillars of *Epimecis hortaria*, the tulip tree moth. The same ideas apply to all native plants, not just trees. There are native shrub and perennial species that support many different critters and there are those who support a few who specialize on specific plants. All have a role to play in the ecosystem.

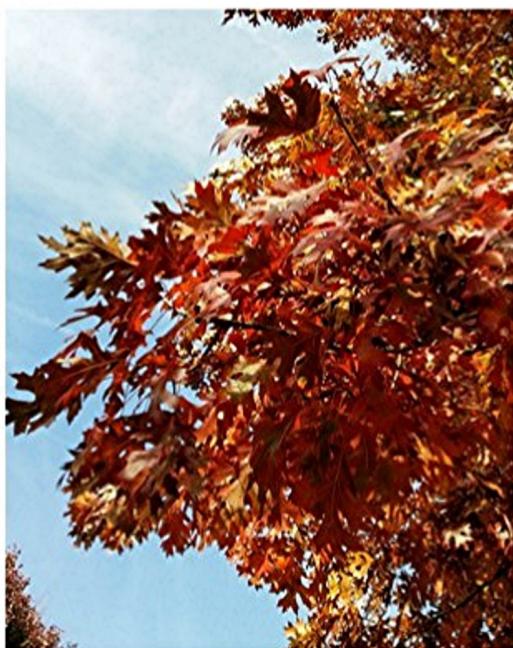
What can you do?

- Plant native species, preferably local ecotype, in your landscape. Consider planting some species that will support the most critters, including pollinators. Plant an oak if possible.
- Protect and care for the trees you already have. Wood chip mulch (2-4 inches deep) or leaf litter around the tree is very beneficial, but never on the trunk!
- Do not allow English ivy or other non-native vines to grow on any tree.

- Reduce or eliminate chemicals from your landscape.
- Join community group efforts to remove non-native species and replace them with natives, including oaks and other top caterpillar producing plants.

Forest Hill Park is fortunate to have a significant number of mature oaks and other plant groups that support many critters. Recent plantings in the park aim to establish a new generation of plants so that we can maintain healthy forests with diverse species and genera and have trees of all ages. Please contact Suzette Lyon(suzette.lyon1@gmail.com) or Chris Catanzaro (chriscatanzaro3@gmail.com) if you are interested in joining us in this effort. Many details in this article came from the book, *The Nature of Oaks*, by Doug Tallamy. This book and others are available from the Reedy Creek Coalition lending library. Check it out at <https://reedy creek coalition.org/good-reads-for-the-watershed/> Reedy Creek Coalition is an affiliate of Friends of Forest Hill Park.

Some years oaks produce many acorns. It's quite a feast! Most of these at the base of this oak have already been eaten, only the shells remain.



A brilliant oak in autumn.

Epimecis hortaria, tulip tree moth. One host plant for this moth is the tulip tree. The caterpillars do not feed on oaks. This is a good example of why diversity is important.

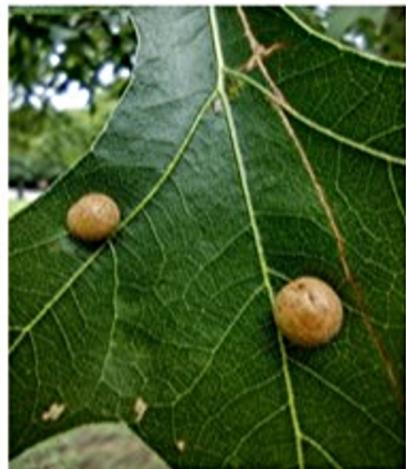
All images except the moth below were taken in Forest Hill Park.



L. Acorn with small hole indicates insect use.

R. Gall on oak leaf also indicates insect use.

Both are natural processes that do not injure the tree.



Oak bark with crevices.
Wonder if there is a meal hiding there?

Oak leaves in spring, not much use by caterpillars yet.



The third annual **Spring Classic Bike Race** will take place April 23rd. Mark your calendars and plan to join us for fresh air and family fun. Details will be forthcoming.



Native Trees Planted Near Stone House

Friends of Forest Hill Park extended the spirit of Arbor Day by planting seven native trees west of the Stone House on November 19th. FFHP members were joined by volunteers from HandsOn RVA. One fellow said he saw the event posted on Facebook and decided to come out to help.

PRCF arborist Michael Gee provided direction, nutrients, water, mulch, wire and stakes. He also used an auger to dig holes for the trees. As the little trees grow, they will provide homes and food for birds and animals that live in the park.



Little Free Library Ribbon Cutting

It's official! Friends of Forest Hill Park placed a Little Free Library containing books for grownups at the Stone House and held the ribbon cutting on November 19th. The City of Richmond was represented by 4th District Council Representative Kristen Nye and Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities was represented by Josh Feola. Kristen donated several books to the library.

The attractive finish of the library is the work of Chris Catanzaro. The pedestal was installed by PRCF.

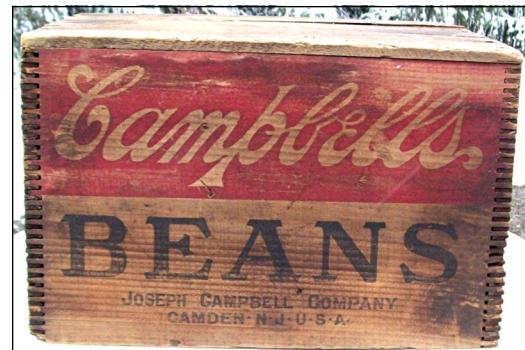


The Little Free Library at the Stone House is officially open for business. The location is fitting because the Stone House housed a library in the basement years ago before the Westover Hills library was built.

In the photo below, the ribbon cutters, left to right, are Josh Feola, Pat Wood, Chris Catanzaro and Kristen Nye.



The Art of the Picnic



Forest Hill Park has been the site of picnics for more than 100 years. In this image, our attention is drawn to the coffee maker and the glass bottle held by one of the men. There was coffee for the ladies and something stronger for the men, but there is also a can of Campbell's Pork and Beans in the picture, along with a pan that was probably used to warm the beans. Campbell's began selling their pork and beans in 1869 and the product is still popular today.

In addition to beans, in 1890 many other items, such as mayonnaise, were not available for purchase in cans, boxes or jars. Some extra effort was needed to get that picnic meal ready to take to the park.

Recipes for the kitchen staple known as salad dressing or mayonnaise appeared in all cookbooks and the directions were precise. The egg yolks must be at room temperature and the bowl used for beating the ingredients must be rinsed in hot water and dried.

This recipe is for two cups:

- 3 large egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 tablespoon English dry mustard or prepared mustard
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar or lemon juice
- 1 1/2 cups olive oil or vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons boiling water

Using a whisk or rotary mixer, beat the ingredients for three minutes until the mixture has thickened.

There were variations of homemade mayonnaise.

Mayonnaise Fines Herbes—makes 2 cups

2 cups freshly made mayonnaise
2 tablespoons parsley, finely chopped
1 teaspoon chives, finely chopped
1 tablespoon fresh tarragon, basil or dill, finely chopped

Curry Mayonnaise—makes 2 cups

2 cups freshly made mayonnaise
2 tablespoons good curry powder
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Mustard Mayonnaise—makes 1 1/2 cups

1 cup freshly made mayonnaise
1/2 prepared mustard
Lemon juice, to taste



No Dumping . . . Seriously

Many of us have come across unusual items discarded in Forest Hill Park, such as a detergent container, utility belt, sport coat, shoes, a baby doll and more. When found, such items are carried to trash receptacles for disposal, but what about yard waste?

Anyone who leaves items such as those described above on park property is breaking the law. We see the occasional personal possession that was left behind in the park, but we see a lot of plant debris, i.e. yard waste, probably dumped by residents who live nearby. The applicable section of the Code of Virginia follows:

- **State Law reference**— Similar provisions, Code of Virginia, § 18.2-147.
- Sec. 19-82. - Dumping trash.

(a)

It shall be unlawful for any person to dump or otherwise dispose of trash, garbage, refuse, litter, a companion animal as defined in Code of Virginia, § 3.2-6500 for the purpose of disposal, or other unsightly matter on public property

Forest Hill Park is an outstanding resource used and enjoyed by many people. It is also home to many creatures that depend upon it for food and shelter. There are methods available to neighbors to dispose of yard waste (plant debris.) Responsible folks will comply with the law.