

# FRIENDS OF FOREST HILL PARK



*The Forest Hill Park Post*



[www.friendsofforesthillpark.org](http://www.friendsofforesthillpark.org)

**Summer 2022**

Old Azalea Garden Renovation and Habitat Restoration

Suzette Lyon

The Old Azalea Garden in Forest Hill Park was once home to a large collection of ornamental azaleas like those that decorate our spring gardens with splashes of color. In 1950, approximately 4,000 cuttings were donated to Richmond by the city of Norfolk to establish this garden. However many plants did not thrive, most likely since there is bedrock near the surface in this area and so were moved to establish the azalea garden in Bryan Park. I now refer to this as the "Two Azalea Garden" since two ornamental azaleas grow there at this time. It is not known if these two plants were part of the original collection. Due to the difficult conditions on the site, it is doubtful.

When renovating an old house one would remove the outdated, dysfunctional portions but preserve the original character and then update the plumbing, climate control and appliances. That is essentially what we plan for a small area of Old Azalea Garden. A large number of non-native plant species have already been removed. These plants were once commonly used in our gardens as ornaments, but they have spread far and wide on their own causing habitat destruction. We now realize the harm they can cause and consider them to be "outdated" choices for planting – we should not keep them around. They are also certainly dysfunctional since they do not contribute to the functioning and diversity of the ecosystem that we do desperately need to preserve. We upgrade our houses for energy efficiency and function. Our native plants can be our 'Energy Star' appliances.

The renovation starts small - think of it as room by room - and begins with one area that is just west of the stone pyramid. Most of the non-native, invasive plants were removed this spring. Throughout summer, we will continue to search out and destroy the remaining outdated, destructive plants. In the fall we hope to plant a variety of native species that belong here in the Richmond area. Cultivars will not be used and we hope that most plants will be locally sourced and local ecotype where possible. One of the plants we hope to find is *Rhododendron periclymenoides*, a native azalea (shown at right in the photo.)

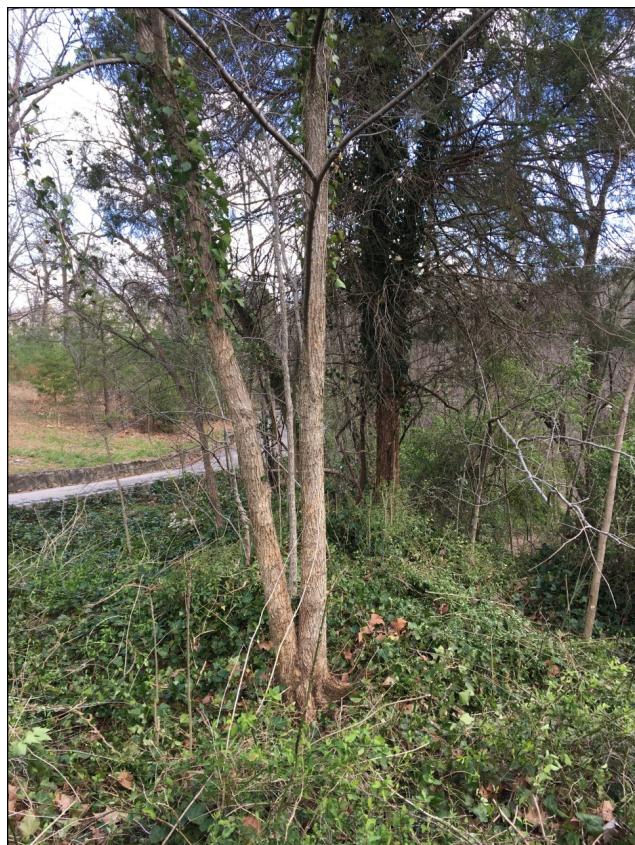
We certainly hope our efforts in this small patch will help a variety of native species to thrive and also support the wildlife that depends on them. If we are successful, this area will be informative and enjoyable for park visitors. If you would like to help with the project please contact [chriscatanzaro3@gmail.com](mailto:chriscatanzaro3@gmail.com).



**Before**



**After**



On a recent Saturday, three FFHP volunteers concentrated their efforts in a small area of the park near Reedy Creek and Forest Hill Avenue. Non-native vines and shrubs were blanketing the ground and swallowing up tree trunks and canopies. Included were English ivy, winter creeper, mahonia, nandina, autumn olive and privet, which was by far the most prolific of the unwanted greenery. The small area was also home to native greenbrier, grapevine and poison ivy as well as some "potholes" that demanded careful stepping.

The area of concentration is a triangle. One side is the service road going to the lake, another side is Reedy Creek and the third side is a walking-biking trail. As park visitors passed by on all sides, they offered greetings and thanks to the vine-pulling trio.

At the end of two hours, the young hardwood trees and a grand old cedar tree had been freed of vines. The volunteers also had removed or cut back a lot of the non-native plants and vines growing along the ground.

Although small, this habitat restoration effort will prove beneficial to animals, birds and insects that live in the park. Positive contributions to the environment help everyone.



*Article contributed by Pat Wood*

## Fungi Living in Mulch

Landscape mulch usually consists of hardwood shreds or bark chips, providing cover to hold moisture and add a finished look. Wood in mulch also provides a food source for fungi that are natural decomposers, breaking down plant material and utilizing organic matter. Without fungi, dead leaves, twigs and branches would clutter forests and landscapes. We see fungal fruiting bodies after growth of threadlike mycelium in soil and mulch. The most recognizable of these spore producing bodies are mushrooms, but sometimes they produce other structures.

A common surface mold is slime mold (ex. *Physarum sp.*) that will rapidly grow over the surface of mulched areas, characterized by a yellow, orange, or white, soft gooey mass. They are harmless, and can be raked away. Undisturbed, they will produce spores and then dry up, but may grow again after rain events.

Stinkhorns (ex. *Mutinus sp.*) are common, characterized by an upright tube like structure that may reach 6 to 7 inches in height overnight. Stinkhorns

have a slimy, smelly cap on which spores are produced. The smell attracts insects to the cap where they pick up spores and carry them to new locations. Stinkhorns are harmless and may be broken up by raking lightly over mulch.



Bird's nest fungi (ex. *Cyathus sp.*, below right) produce small (1/4 inch or smaller) cup-shaped fruiting bodies on top of mulch, usually in clusters. Cups have very small round spore bodies (peridioles) in the bottom, which look like miniature eggs in a bird nest. Spore bodies (eggs) are splashed out of cups during rains, or moved around by animals or man, spreading spores of the fungus. Bird's nest fungi are harmless, and raking prevents growth and movement of spores.



The artillery fungus,  
(*Sphaerobolus spp.*, below left) may be-

come problematic in mulch, due to the production and release of spores. This fungus produces very small, inconspicuous cup shaped fruiting bodies (about 1/10 of an inch) that contain a dark round spore body (peridiole). Accumulation of water and nutrients in the fruiting body eventually leads to a pressure release of the spore which is shot toward any light source up to a distance of several feet. Spores land on light colored siding, building foundations, or cars. Spots can be very unsightly and spore bodies have a sticky substance on them which can make removal extremely difficult. Soap and water with a scrub brush can be effective before material dries. Growth of artillery fungus is favored by hardwoods in mulch, excessive rainfall, or irrigation of foundation plantings.



## Home Grown and Homemade

In the days prior to fast food, casual eating was an art form. Cooks did not have prepared, frozen or dehydrated ingredients, but relied on their imaginations and skill to create culinary delights. Many people grew their own vegetables.

This recipe for a vegetable sandwich is from Dehra Godsey who lived on Stonewall Avenue. Can you imagine anything tastier on a summer day?

### Summer Vegetable Sandwich (submitted by Carolyn Paulette)

5 fresh tomatoes  
1 sweet green pepper  
2 medium-sized fresh cucumbers

White sandwich bread for 4 sandwiches (Pepperidge Farm)  
Mayonnaise for each slice of bread

Chop the tomatoes, green pepper, and cucumbers into about 1/4 inch cubes, combine, and add to the bread already spread with mayonnaise.

A refreshing summer lunch with some potato chips and iced tea.  
Use leftover vegetables in a mixed salad.



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