BRANCHING OUT
Maryland's Woodland Stewardship Educator
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES
go.umd.edu/woodland
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION | WOODLAND STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION
Volume 34, No. 4 Fall 2026

Time to Make Like a Tree

Andrew A. Kling, editor

You are reading this issue of *Branching Out* because, in one way or another, you are a fan of trees. Perhaps you have woodlands on your property and are interested in learning all you can to keep your trees healthy for generations to come. Perhaps you live in a suburb with a community park nearby where you can enjoy the trees' colors in the fall or sit under one in the heat of summer and enjoy a good book in the shade. Perhaps you grew up climbing trees in your neighborhood but now live in an urban center where you have few contacts with trees on a day-to-day basis. Or perhaps you never really gave them much of a thought until you experienced something – a storm, a vacation, a chance encounter – that led to a budding appreciation of trees and an interest in learning more.

In the more than thirteen years that I have served those of you who read this newsletter, I'd like to say that our readership – the fandom, if you will -- has grown both in raw numbers and in geographic breadth. Both of these are affected by each new issue, after each I receive notifications that someone new has read the issue, wants to learn more, and has joined us by visiting https://go.umd.edu/susbscribe. Over the years we've had subscribers join us not only from throughout the region but from across the country. *Branching Out*'s masthead proclaims it as "Maryland's Woodland Stewardship Educator;" clearly, we serve readers in more than just this one state.

If you have ever been involved in creating a periodic publication – a community newsletter, a school calendar, an alumni roundup, or whatever – that has a set schedule, then you are familiar with some of what goes on behind the scenes at *Branching Out*. Because this is a quarterly publication, we have time to research, investigate, develop, and write – or, at least, that appears to be the case. In my early days here, it was not unusual for other work-related matters to take precedence, until suddenly newsletter founder Jonathan Kays and I realized it was September and we still owed our readers three issues by the end of the year. Eventually, we agreed on a regular schedule that I am proud to say we have followed for ten years. Developing regular features helped as well, so that we could count on their content in each issue. I should also recognize the contributions of several colleagues who wrote for the newsletter over the years before moving on to new challenges. These include Nevin Dawson, Agnes Kedmenecz, and John Hooven, as well as Jonathan.



Oak tree with mast, Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, Washington DC. Photo by Andrew A. Kling

Along with the more scholarly topics of woodland wildlife, native trees of Maryland, and invasive species, we've had a lot of fun bringing the "Brain Tickler" feature to these pages – and I am continually amazed at the speed at which many of our dedicated readers reply with the correct answer. Some have stumped you more than others – if nothing else, they have been a reliable indicator that at least part of we produce is being read!

However, after stewarding this newsletter through 58 issues of pruning, mulching, and encouraging growth, it is time for me to echo that old saw: "Time to make like a tree and leave." I will be leaving the University and Extension in January, so this is my last issue as editor.

So, to all of you, near and far, I will simply say, "Thank you."

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American Beech Trees May Carry Genetic Resistance to BLD

phys.org



Two American Beech trees growing side-by-side in a Holden Arboretum forest (Kirtland, OH) showing range of BLD. Photo by Anna Funk/Holden Forests & Gardens

A study led by scientists at the Holden Arboretum in Kirtland, OH has found evidence that beech leaf disease (BLD) symptom development is genetically controlled, providing the first evidence that some American beech trees may have genetic resistance. This finding supports further investigation and development of breeding populations for BLD resistance. Nearly a third of beech trees near BLD's epicenter in northeastern Ohio, the majority of which were smaller trees, have died since the disease was discovered in 2012.

The new research, published in the journal *Forest Pathology* this past August, was led by David Burke, vice president for science and conservation at Holden Forests & Gardens, along with Mary Mason and Jennifer Koch of the USDA Forest Service's Northern Research Station.

For years, forest professionals in the region have noticed that in BLD-affected areas, not every beech shows the same severity of symptoms. They've been documenting and monitoring trees that appear healthier in otherwise heavily symptomatic areas, building a roster of these special trees.

Such trees will be conserved for use in further experiments to determine if genetic resistance to BLD can be passed from parent trees to their progeny, an essential step in developing a breeding program to create resistant trees.

The research also confirmed that the presence of the nematode suspected of being responsible for BLD is the root cause of the disease, and not any bacteria or microbes that might be associated with it.

Next, the team will continue their search for low- and no-symptom American beech in forests where BLD has been established for at least a decade. Additional trees, and more propagated copies per tree, need to be tested to confirm the genetic control and better understand its variation and strength.

Planning Some Planting in 2027?
The John S. Ayton State Tree Nursery is Taking Orders

Maryland's John S. Ayton State Tree Nursery is now open and accepting orders for the spring 2027 planting season at nursery.dnr.maryland.gov. This year's catalog features more than 51 species, with a few different choices from last year. Explore their selection of conifers, deciduous trees and deciduous shrubs to learn more about the species available and place an order now for your spring conservation planting project. The Maryland Forest Service provides **free** FedEx seedling delivery to your door, or they can be picked up at the nursery. Orders will ship in March or April.



Aerial view of the John S. Ayton State Tree Nursery. Photo by Maryland DNR.

The nursery sells hardwood seedlings in bundles of 25 per species and conifer seedlings in bundles of 50 per species. Please note that seedlings purchased from the State Tree Nursery must be planted for conservation, reforestation, forest products, wildlife habitat, riparian buffer, or Christmas tree production purposes. Homeowners and businesses seeking ornamental trees are encouraged to work with private nurseries, garden centers, and landscape professionals.

Native Trees of Maryland: American Holly, *Ilex opaca*

Lisa Kuder

As autumn's hues of gold, orange, and red fall to the ground, evergreens take their turn in the spotlight. American holly (*Ilex opaca*) brings welcome winter color with its dark green leaves and, on female trees, clusters of red fruit. Often found in the understory of deciduous forests, this native is also a familiar presence in cultivated landscapes. Its handsome form and year-round foliage give it lasting appeal, while its berry-laden boughs have long been favorites for holiday decorations.

American holly is a slow-growing tree that can reach 40-60 feet tall and 10-20 feet wide and may live up to 200 years. Commonly found in the understory of deciduous forests, it occurs throughout Maryland, from the mountains through the Piedmont to the Coastal Plain. It grows best in moist, acidic soil in full sun to partial shade, but tolerates different soil textures, full shade, and occasional dry and wet conditions, provided the soil is well-draining. When grown as a specimen tree in full sun, American holly typically develops denser foliage, more abundant flowers, and, on female trees, more berries, than it does in the shaded forest understory.



Three American hollies add fall and winter interest to the landscape. Photo credit: Mollie Freilicher, iNaturalist (CC-BY-NC). https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/346914005



American holly foliage and berries add color and whimsy to a holiday fruitcake. The leaves and fruits are toxic to humans and are for decoration only. Photo credit: grinnin, iNaturalist (CC-BY-NC). https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/84285025

American holly berries provide winter food for birds, including cedar waxwings and robins, when other food sources are scarce. This species is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers grow on separate trees. Only female trees produce fruits, and they need a nearby male American holly that blooms at the same time for pollination. Both male and female trees provide year-round shelter for birds and other wildlife, while their spring flowers offer food for pollinators.

While birds and pollinators benefit from American holly, deer generally avoid its leathery, spiny leaves. The tree also has moderate tolerance to saline soils and high tolerance to salt-spray, making it suitable for some well-drained coastal areas. However, excessive exposure to road salt and sea water can cause root damage or dieback.



Female American holly tree with berry clusters. Photo credit: dogtooth77, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC-SA). https://www.inaturalist.org/photos/149554033?size=original

Long after autumn's leaves have fallen, American holly continues to bring color, shelter, and food to the landscape, a native tree worth making room for.

The Right Plant for the Right Place

Eric Buehl & Dr. Andrew Ristvey
University of Maryland Extension

This past May, Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps members joined Extension faculty and helped plant two native plant beds at the Wye Research and Education Center as part of a broader demonstration project to educate landowners who live in the "Critical Area," the 1,000-foot buffer that surrounds tidal portions of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. In all, 150 native trees, shrubs, and perennial wildflowers were planted, creating a pollinator-friendly plant bed and a shoreline buffer. Although late spring is not the best time to plant, you take the hand you were dealt and move on.



Shoreline buffer plantings at the Wye Research and Education Center. Image: A. Goetz, MD Sea Grant.

Now that the surviving plants have established over their first full summer, we have reflected on what strategies we would employ if it were done again; in other words, here is the autopsy on our project:

- *Maintenance! Maintenance! Maintenance!* - excuses are plentiful (vacation, meetings, out-of-sight out-of-mind, etc.), but undesirable plants or "weeds" as most people call them, got the upper hand. Playing catch-up to control them was not easy and seemed like twice the work. Take-away message: allocate time for regular maintenance.
- *Site prep is key* - had we prepped the bed earlier with tillage and more weed control, we would have spent less time fighting weeds and had better survival of some plants. Take-away message: prepare the site well in advance of your planting day.
- *Question your soils* - Web Soil Survey indicated a well-drained soil and a good site for most of the pollinator species on the list, but some areas did not drain and there was standing water. Take-away message: dig a few holes beforehand to identify drainage or soil-quality problems. If you are not familiar with the site, talk to the owner. We later learned that years before, fill-soil had been spread in that area and vehicles may have compacted the soil.

Overall, the shoreline buffer plants did extremely well but the pollinator bed will require some replanting with species that can handle the unique soil situation there.

New Webinar Series, *Forests in Focus*, Announces Upcoming Speakers for 2026/2027

The University of Maryland Forestry Extension faculty debuted the new *Forests in Focus* webinar series in November. Advancements in forest technologies, policy, and research are progressing rapidly. These changes have important implications for Maryland's forests, and for those who own, manage, and value them. This monthly series will highlight experts from a range of disciplines and institutions, providing perspectives on their work, highlighting how their work connects to current forest issues, and identifying how Marylanders can address these issues.

Dates and registration information for future webinars is in the Events Calendar. Recordings of past sessions can be accessed on our Woodland Stewardship Education YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHVXoAqsADko

News and Notes

Solving the Mystery of an Ancient Apple Tree

This article in *Scientific American* starts with the work of an apple specialist at Washington State University, introduces an apple tree with an unknown pedigree, and eventually involves researchers as far away as Denmark. The intriguing deep dive reads like a detective story: apple varieties thought to be lost to time, genetics-based investigations, and little-known colonial history. Read how investigators connected a single tree on an isolated island in coastal Maine to a rich and almost extinct heritage.

Read the full story here.

Community Forestry Catalyst Fund Simplifies Access to Local Forestry Grants

Maryland communities seeking support to care for their trees and forests can now use a single application to access several funding sources through the Maryland DNR's Community Forestry Catalyst Fund (CF2).

Eligible projects include restoring a patch of woods, managing invasive plants, improving tree regeneration, getting professional forestry advice, planting trees, or equipping volunteers to take better care of the places they already look after. CF2 offers small grants generally ranging from $1,000-$10,000, intended to support modest initiatives or manageable phases of larger efforts. Park Friends groups, neighborhood associations, nonprofits, schools, and other community organizations are encouraged to apply.

Applications are available on DNR's Community Forestry Catalyst Fund webpage; potential applicants should review information here. Applications are accepted year-round; the next review deadline is Jan. 15, 2027. Questions about eligibility or the application process may be directed to forestry_grants.dnr@maryland.gov.

New Newsletter from UME: "Maryland Community Trees and Forests"

The University of Maryland Extension has created a new free newsletter devoted to urban and community forestry. Entitled "Maryland Community Trees and Forests," the newsletter is written by Bill Hubbard, UME's Urban and Community Forestry Extension Specialist. October's inaugural issue introduced three regular features. *Deep Roots* shares the foundational knowledge and skills needed to plan, manage, and sustain community forests. *Growing Forward* offers practical tools, emerging technologies, new approaches, and the development of Maryland's Extension program. And *Around the Canopy* offers news, resources, learning opportunities, and ideas from across the community forestry world. To subscribe, email communityforestry@umd.edu .

"Forest Innovation Platform" Launched

In September, American Forests announced the debut of a new platform for assessing forest condition and risk, developed by American Forests with support by the USDA Forest Service and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. The Forest Innovation Platform (FIP) is a free, all-lands resource that turns the best-available forest and climate data into actionable assessments.

The FIP provides free and open-source forestry data and climate projections, curated by experts, to help users quickly understand and communicate the risks facing forests today and in the future. With easy access to the most rigorous and up-to-date nationwide data, users can assess forest vulnerabilities, validate a management plan, support a grant application, or justify a policy ask with credible evidence.

Contact FIP@americanforests.org to schedule a demonstration for your network.

Invasives in Your Woodland: Perilla Mint

There's an old saying: "One man's trash is another man's treasure." I was reminded of this recently – or, at least, the different perspectives part of it – as I reviewed the draft of an upcoming UME publication about weeds found in mid-Atlantic pastures. I was struck how many of the plants considered "weeds" in the text were native to the region. It included many invasive plants as well, and a few that were both invasive and toxic to domesticated animals if ingested. I wondered if any of the plants in the guide were a) found in woodland settings, b) were toxic to livestock and other animals, and c) were used in human recipes. The answer is this issue's spotlight: Perilla mint. (Note: Although there is no current scientific documentation that it is harmless to pets, many ingested plants can cause gastrointestinal upset in cats and dogs.)



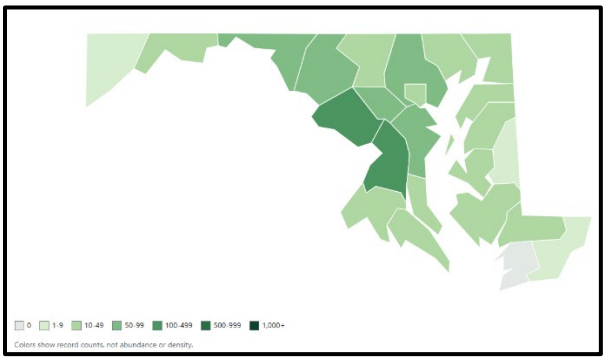
Perilla Mint, Kent Co., Maryland. Photo by Nancy Martin via Maryland Biodiversity Project.

Perilla mint (*Perilla frutescens*) has several other names, including "beefsteak plant," "purple mint," and "shiso" (when used as an ingredient in Japanese and Korean recipes). The plant is native to southeastern Asia and was imported to the U.S. in the early 19th century for ornamental planting, and more recently for cultivation for cooking. However, it escaped cultivation and is now found in from eastern Pennsylvania to Missouri and to the Gulf coast. In Maryland, the plant is recorded in every county except Somerset (see map below).

What is it?

Perilla mint is an annual herb in the mint family. Its rapid growth and prolific reproduction allow it to spread into natural areas and compete with native vegetation. It colonizes roadsides, disturbed ground, landscape beds, and woodland edges. It grows in full sun or partial shade and tolerates conditions ranging from moist, rich soil to relatively dry sites. Consequently, it can spread in both cultivated landscapes and adjoining natural areas.

Reported Perilla Mint infestation in Maryland. Note that color gradient reflects count records, not abundance or density. From Maryland Biodiversity Project.



How does it spread?

Perilla mint spreads by seed, with wind and flowing water dispersing the seeds beyond the original planting. The seeds remain viable in the soil for several years, so removing visible plants should be accompanied by additional scouting in succeeding years.

How can I identify it?

This upright, branching herb grows 1-3 feet tall. Its square stems bear short hairs; these characteristics are shared with many other mint-family plants. Leaves are opposite and broadly oval, wrinkled, with sharply toothed edges. Foliage ranges from green in the spring to purple or reddish purple in the fall, which can aid identification. Crushed leaves release a distinctive, sometimes musky, mintlike fragrance. Small, bell-shaped, two-lipped white and purple flowers appear in elongated clusters from July through October. See the photo gallery on the next page.

How can I control it?

Hand-pull small infestations, including the fibrous roots; plants are particularly easy to remove when soil is moist. Mowing can prevent seed production. Removing flower clusters before seeds develop also helps limit spread. Treatment with glyphosate can be effective, and return visits may be needed to ensure complete control.

For more information:

Learn more about Perilla mint:

Perilla frutescens (NC State Extension)

"Beefsteak plant" in *TPM/IPM Weekly Report* (UME)

Beefsteak Plant (Perilla Mint) (Perdue Extension)

Image Gallery:
Perilla Mint



Perilla Mint plants (above) and mat (below). Photos by John D. Byrd, Mississippi State University, Bugwood.org



Perilla Mint plant blooming in Wicomico Co., MD. Photo by Bill Hubick via Maryland Biodiversity Project.





Perilla Mint blooming in Frederick Co., MD. Photo by Mark Etheridge via Maryland Biodiversity Project.



Perilla Mint plants. Photo by Jil Swearingen, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org

Events Calendar

December 9, 2026, 12 noon – 1 PM
Forests in Focus: Forests and The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement
Online
Presented by University of Maryland Extension. This webinar features Dr. Katie Brownson, the USFS Liaison to the Chesapeake Bay Program and coordinator of the Program's Forestry Workgroup. In this capacity, Katie facilitates partnerships to advance forest restoration and conservation in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Join us for this session to learn more about the roles that forestry plays in watershed-wide policy and planning. This webinar is free, but registration is required. Register at https://go.umd.edu/ForestsFocusDec2026 .

January 13, 2027, 12 noon – 1 PM
Forests in Focus: Maryland's BiodiversiTREE
Online
Presented by University of Maryland Extension. Dr. John Parker is an ecologist and senior scientist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, MD. Join us to learn more about the applied research carried out by Dr. Parker's lab, and to hear actionable insights on how to establish biodiversity in afforestation and reforestation planting efforts. This webinar is free, but registration is required. Register at https://go.umd.edu/ForestsFocusJan2027

January 13 – March 10, 2027, 7:00 – 8:30 PM
The Woods in Your Backyard - Why Are They Important
Online

Presented by Penn State Extension, this 9-part webinar series explores forest ecology, soils, native landscaping, tree identification, wildlife habitat enhancement, water management, invasive species control, and practical woodlot stewardship. Attendees will also receive a copy of *The Woods in Your Backyard*, a full-color, 108-page guide to sustainable land care. Learn more and register at https://extension.psu.edu/woods-in-your-backyard-series .

This Issue's Brain Tickler...

Last issue, we asked for the species of tree that became the support for the fictional treehouse called "Falconhurst" by the family that constructed it. The Swiss Family Robinson built their treehouse in a fig tree. Congratulations to Joanne Sheffield!

For this issue, consider a twenty-foot-tall tree with its lowest branches three feet off the ground. If the tree grows two feet a year, how high off the ground will those branches be in another ten years? Email Andrew Kling at akling1@umd.edu with your answer.

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION

WOODLAND STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION

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Branching Out
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Published four times per year and distributed to forest landowners, resource professionals, and others interested in woodland stewardship.

To Subscribe:

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