

Baltimore Green Space News

preserving neighborhoods' treasured open spaces



Summer 2012

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Baltimore's got...Forest Patches!

People who live near forest patches usually love the trees and the birds who visit. And the forest patches make a vital contribution to Baltimore's tree cover. But few neighborhoods have been able to protect their forest patches, or even to get official permission to care for the forest patches. And few residents know how to discourage dumping and get rid of invasive plants while encouraging neighbors to enjoy the forest as an urban oasis.

People sometimes assume that forest patches in a City mainly consist of "junk" species such as tree-of-heaven. But we've seen many white oaks, some lovely American elms, native holly, tulip poplar, and willow oak.

The bird life is also impressive! During bird walks at a few of Baltimore's forest patches, we've seen large birds such as bald eagles and a nesting pair of black vultures. Also spotted were migrating species such as bay-breasted warbler, least flycatcher, and red-eyed vireo. And of course, familiar favorites such as goldfinches, cardinals, blue jays, hummingbirds, mockingbirds, and many, many more.

We've worked most closely with the Friends of Springfield Woods, a 2.5-acre tract with large oaks and other species, and a stream. The Friends have been pulling bags and bags of glass and other trash from the stream, and have cut paths so that people can visit this lovely oasis. Baltimore Green Space helped the Friends get permission from the owner for their stewardship activities.

Baltimore Green Space is currently forming a stewardship group for people who want to care for neighborhood forest patches. Let us know if you are interested!



Neighborhood forest steward Butch Berry at Springfield Woods with birder Mike Hudson

Community Space Spotlight: 500 N. Block Duncan Street Garden



This tiny jewel of a garden, started in 2002, is tucked into the flower-decked 500 N. block of Duncan Street.

At just over 1,000 square feet, the garden provides just the right amount of vegetables for the residents nearby. The garden has been a wonderful collaboration from its start – involving students from MICA and resident artist Ivy Parsons; additional residents on the block; and support from several community organizations.

Baltimore Green Space is currently working to protect the 500 N. Block garden.

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Enjoying the Fruits of Hard Work

In a lot of ways, the hard work is finished for the Upper Fells Point Garden. Of course there is always weeding to be done, but the original vacant lot was cleaned up over twenty years ago, and since then, a fence has been built, the pests have been driven out, and garden membership has stabilized – there is even a waiting list. And the gardeners know that the site is protected by Baltimore Green Space.

So what do you do when the work is done? Well, enjoy the fruits of your labor, of course. Upper Fells Point Garden often serves as a place to relax and play. Gardeners can spend restful evenings here, escaping from the city or talking with neighbors. There have also been parties in the garden, with up to forty people crowded onto the small grassy areas, eating dessert and listening to music. The garden managers, Jan and Kurt, have encouraged the use of the garden as a community area.

Jan, who grew up gardening, is particularly glad to see kids having fun in the garden, “because I enjoyed it so much as a child,” she said. The garden often serves as an outdoor classroom for kids from nearby Wolfe Academy, who get to learn about nature in a hands-on way. Eating a fresh tomato, or smelling a rosemary bush, makes an impression on these city kids, who might not understand where food in the grocery store really comes from. Jan observed that the first time they come to the garden, the kids are often hesitant to get their hands dirty. But once they do, they always enjoy it. “It’s great to see them get into it,” she said.

The garden also served as entertainment last Halloween, as the backdrop of the haunted garden party. Neighborhood kids were led through a garden of dry stalks, while adults waited in various hiding places. One gardener jumped out of the shed, brandishing a chainsaw, while Kurt, as Frankenstein, emerged roaring from a large toolbox. The children’s screams quickly turned to laughter. “That was one of our more exciting events,” Jan said.

Upper Fell’s playful spirit even extends to gardening itself. One of the gardeners, Blaire, grows roses, hot peppers, squash that looks like “something from the Jetsons,” and anything else that takes her fancy. For a few years, she even grew a eucalyptus tree, which grew to



Barb, an Upper Fells gardener, posing with green beans.

fifteen feet tall before falling over. Her enthusiasm is as abundant as her produce – which during the summer she has to pick nearly every day, before it overripens. “It still amazes me that things grow,” she said.

Of course, the work is never really done. There are always repairs to do, or new projects to start. But because this garden is well-established, and has the full support of the neighborhood, it is easier to step back sometimes and just appreciate it. Upper Fells Point Garden reminds us that a garden is a place to play, imagine, and enjoy, for adults and kids alike. Jan admits that she, too, still feels that sense of child-like wonder when she visits the garden. “I just like watching things grow,” she said. “The whole process is amazing.”
– Kelsey Miller

Upper Fells Update

- The Upper Fells Point Garden is slated to be a pilot site for a program to install water *inside* gardens.
- Coming soon: a lovely mosaic in front of the garden. Artist Cinder Hypki is working with the neighborhood to create this unique artwork.
- Baltimore Green Space has finished its acquisition of the garden. We protected 2 of the 3 lots in 2009, and were able to protect the third in early 2012.