



# Washtenaw County Conservation District

FEBRUARY 2019

## Pickin' Up Pawpaws By Shawn Severance of Washtenaw County Parks



Photo by Shawn Severance

### WILD FRUIT

If you are kayaking the rivers of Washtenaw County in September, let your eyes scan the banks for a 30' tall grove of trees with smooth grey bark and large oval leaves. In the branches you may notice a greenish fruit about the size of a potato. Dock your vessel instantly! You have discovered a rare Pawpaw patch. The Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) is North America's largest native fruit and the northernmost member of the largely tropical Annonaceae (custard apple) plant family.

If you are lucky, the raccoons may have left you some fruit to find. You can pick the fruit up off the ground and eat it like our first president would have - fresh out of the skin for dessert, with a spoon. The mellow golden flesh is like a banana cream pie growing on a tree - with tropical hint of mango and pineapple, vanilla and berries.



Photo by Shawn Severance

### PART OF OUR FOOD HERITAGE

Today, the Pawpaw has fallen into obscurity perhaps because it has stubbornly resisted domestication. A few generations ago, it was

so richly woven into our food heritage and local ecology that it inspired a traditional folk song, *Way Down Yonder in the Pawpaw Patch*. "Where oh where is pretty little Susie/Way down yonder in the Pawpaw Patch/Come on kids lets go find her/Pickin' up Pawpaws and puttin' 'em in her pockets/Way down yonder in the Pawpaw patch."

Hiding within the lines of this catchy little ditty is a Big Science Question. If Pawpaws grow on trees, why do you harvest them from the ground? We don't do this with apples or pears or cherries. Why would a tree put the energy into making a large fruit that envelops large seeds only for them to dessicate and die under the dripline of parent tree?

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## Cultivating Farm Economies Upcoming Program

By Jae Gerhart of MSUE

With commodity prices low and interest rates climbing, local farmers are looking for alternative ways to generate income on their farms. In response, local planning and zoning officials are seeking regulations that serve the public good and also support new income-generating activities on the farm.

Officials, farmers, and interested residents are invited to join MSU Extension educators and community partners to learn how to successfully maneuver through local regulations and to hear about policy best practices related to three of the most popular "farm diversification" strategies in Michigan: Agritourism, value-added processing, and alternative energy generation.

This program will address:

- Why farms are looking to diversify their operations
- The unique perspective of local township officials
- The scope of farmer protection under the Right to Farm Act
- Local ordinance language and recommendations
- Taxes and other financial considerations
- Insurance recommendations
- Examples from the field
- Facilitated discussion

The day-long program will be held in Ann Arbor on Thursday, March 21st from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. at the Washtenaw County MSU Extension Classroom (705 N Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48103). The cost to attend the program is \$20 and includes materials and lunch. The program is sponsored by Michigan Farm Bureau.

Contact Jae Gerhart with questions at [gerhart1@msu.edu](mailto:gerhart1@msu.edu), 989.430.0926.

## Washtenaw Native Plant Expo & Marketplace

**Saturday, June 1st, 9AM—2PM**

**Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds**

**Featuring over 10 businesses and organizations offering a variety of native plants, seeds, tools, resources and programming to expand your native plant landscapes or get started from scratch!**

**For a complete list of vendors visit the**

**WCCD website at**

**[www.washtenawcd.org](http://www.washtenawcd.org)**

## What is a Pesticide Review? By Nick Machinski

The District is teaming up with Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) to host a Pesticide Review Class on February 27th at 8am at the MSU Extension office on 705 N. Zeeb Rd. Ann Arbor, MI 48107. If you are not a farmer and wondering how this pertains to you just, consider the pesticides that you might use at your house.

A pesticide by definition is anything that kills pests. So, your weed killer, rat poison, even your anti-bacterial soap, are all forms of pesticide. Some pesticides are more potent and dangerous than others. To help protect the health of the environment and public, the State of Michigan requires a license to be obtained by anyone who wants to spray what are called Restricted Use Pesticides (RUP). You won't find these at your local hardware store and a state license is needed to even buy these materials.

Getting a license to use RUPs is more difficult than getting your driver's license. A multiple-choice must be taken for each sub-category of license (i.e. row crops, fruit, turf grass, aquatic plants, etc.). An individual must take the exam every three years or must attend enough review classes to maintain their license.

What is covered in our Pesticide Review Classes? We review the Core Manual which relates to many of the laws pertaining to pesticides such as making sure to read the label and how to take accurate records of what one is spraying. We also cover the different danger symbols related to certain chemicals. Applying at the right rate and making sure pesticides are stored properly are also covered. Finally, we give a demonstration with our groundwater-flow model to show how pesticide spills and accidents can impact the surrounding environment. RSVP. Cost is \$10 per person.

## Volunteer for the Tree Sale By Megan DeLeeuw

Our tree sale wouldn't be the success that it is today if it were not for a dedicated group of volunteers—some of whom have been helping for over a decade! Volunteering is a great way to meet new conservation minded friends, give back to the community and log volunteer hours for programs like Master Gardeners and/or Conservation Stewardship Program! RSVP with Megan at [megan.deleeuw@macd.org](mailto:megan.deleeuw@macd.org).

### Tree Sale pre-packing party

**Tuesday, April 9th, 5:30-7:30 PM**

**WCCD office (7203 Jackson Rd)**

Help count and bundle marking flags, fertilizer tablets and other materials prior to the tree sale!

### Tree Unpacking party

**Thursday, April 25th, time TBD, Farm Council Grounds**

Help the board and other volunteers unload trees and prepare for the sale! Free pizza & beverages for volunteers!

### Tree Days

**Friday, April 26th, 1-6 PM**

**Sat, April 27th, 9-10:30AM**

**Farm Council grounds**

The main event! Help residents select and pick up trees & shrubs!

## **THE MISSING MEGAFUNA**

Fruits exist for one reason - to entice a critter to gobble them whole, seeds and all, and carry the embryonic Pawpaw off to a new location, safely stowed in the warm wet gut of the animal. If a fruit is rotting on the ground, its animal disperser is missing. Many animals alive today love to eat Pawpaws, but they are not good seed dispersers - they eating the sweet flesh and spit the seeds out onto the ground to wither. A large fruit with a large seed evolved to attract a large animal. In the case of the Pawpaw, it was probably Mastodons, Ground Sloths and Gomphotheres - megafauna that have been extinct for centuries.

Imagine the town of Pawpaw a mere 12,000 years ago. There could have been herds of Mastodons stomping through, hoovering up the fruits and ambling off towards modern-day Chicago, dropping pounds of steaming dung laden with dozens of seeds. In the heat of the rich dung, the seeds would happily sprout and new Pawpaw patches would spring up everywhere these large animals went.

## **PAWPAW CULTIVATION**

Today, modern humans are the Pawpaw's only remaining animal seed dispersal partner (the seeds are also dispersed by moving water). Luckily for local Pawpaw fans, we have creative farmers like Marc Boone continuing to advance our understanding of how to cultivate them. This fall, Marc tried duplicate the mastodon method of germination with sheep manure and piles of leaves, "but the turkeys thought I was hiding something in those big piles of leaves and tore them apart and scratched the manure and seeds out in the open; all the seeds died." He plans to try again next year with chicken wire to deter the turkeys. Once established, a Pawpaw patch tends to be very resilient, resistant to deer browse, rodent damage and insect herbivory. Marc recommends planting Pawpaws in sandy to loamy soil, in full sun, at a 16' spacing so the trees don't get too tall, with a deep layer of straw mulch underneath.

Once Pawpaws become established they take about 6 years to bear fruit and 2 plants are needed for pollination. We don't know the ancient pollination partner of Pawpaw but we can speculate. Its flower is a brownish-red hue with a fetid odor. These types of flowers tend to flesh flies in search of a meal for their larvae. Just to be sure they get fruit, some farmers hand-pollinate. Some farmers hang road kill in the trees during blossom season, claiming that it boosts pollination by attracting more flies. Marc Boone doesn't bother with any of that, "I have never worried about pollination. I'm not sure exactly who the pollinator is." Scientists speculate it may have originally been a dung beetle that visited Mastodon dung.

As a visit in late September will attest, Paw Paws are still a vital part of our food system. Marc's trees are thriving under his care, and pollination is clearly occurring - the ground is littered with oval fruits. Nature is pretty resilient when given half a chance. Even though we can only imagine the beauty and majesty of a living Mastodon, we can still taste one of their favorite fruits.

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*Pawpaws are available for purchase through the WCCD Annual Tree and Shrub Sale. For details visit the WCCD website at [www.washtenawcd.org](http://www.washtenawcd.org).*

## Introduction to Native Planting Workshop

By Megan Deleeuw

Vern Stephens of Designs By Nature LLC and the WCCD will be hosting an Introduction to Native Planting Workshop on March 6th.

During the workshop, Vern will discuss why we choose natives, site selection, site prep, installation, species selection, management and maintenance. We will also learn to identify various native plants.

Vern and his family live on a 40-acre farm in Laingsburg where they operate Designs By Nature, LLC. Vern is a member of the Wildflower Association of Michigan (WAM) and served on the board of directors for several years.

Vern has over 30 years of experience working with native plants and restoration. He recently retired from the Michigan DNR Wildlife Division as a Senior Wildlife Assistant where his work specialized in grasslands and invasive species management.

Space is limited for the workshop, RSVP by Monday, March 4th. Cost for workshop is \$10.

## Upcoming Events:

**February 21st: Washtenaw Farmer Shop Talk** 9AM—12PM, Farm Council Grounds (5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Rd). Free lunch included. RSVP.

**February 27th: Pesticide Manual Review Class** 8AM—12PM, MSU Extension Washtenaw (705 N. Zeeb Rd, Ann Arbor). Cost is \$10.

**March 6th: Introduction to Native Planting** 6PM—8PM, Scio Township Hall. Vern Stephens of Designs by Nature introduces native planting concepts. Cost is \$10, RSVP.

**March 21st: MAEAP 5,000 Verifications** 10AM—3AM. The Lansing Center. Free lunch included.

**March 27th: Introduction to Beekeeping** 6PM—8PM, Scio Township Hall. Cost is \$10, RSVP by March 25th.

**April 26th & 27th 2019: Spring Tree and Shrub Sale**, Farm Council Grounds. Friday the 26th from 1-6PM, Saturday the 27th from 9-10:30AM. Pre-orders accepted through March 22nd.

**June 1, 2019: Native Plant Expo & Marketplace**, Farm Council Grounds from 9AM-2PM. Free to public.

**June 1, 2019: Fish Stock Distribution**, Farm Council Grounds from 12-3PM. Pre-order at <https://harriettahills.com/live-fish/fish-day/>