



Summer 2021

# Can You Dig It?

Well here we are, almost mid-summer. The days are warm and humid, and nights too....our gardens are thriving, vegetables are coming on, and life is good! Families and friends are once again visiting....the beach is calling and so is a dip in the pool, and life is good! So enjoy your summer, get a glass of iced tea and sit back and be entertained by this issue of **Can You Dig It?**

We are covering two main subjects this time.....one about plants and nature, and then thoughts about our planet and what we can do to help it and us.....plus a book review!

Enjoy, and we will see you again in a few months.

*Trish Reynolds*, Editor

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Design & Layout, Rebecca Gaffney

## Magnolia Grandiflora: A Standout in This Year's Garden

✿ Samantha McCall

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I know it's probably too early to call but the winner for best blooms in my 2021 garden is by far the octopus-like stand of Magnolia grandiflora growing in the backyard.

Never have I seen such large, creamy white blossoms bloom so profusely nor for so long than I have this growing season which seems all the more beautiful in a (fingers-crossed) post-pandemic world.

For years, the large trees along the rear property line in my backyard have consistently offered big glossy leaves that were attractive all year but they barely bloomed, much to my disappointment. But this year is a completely different story. I'm convinced that just when I was planning to do a massive pruning of this unruly stand, the



Photo of an up close magnolia by ©Tom McCall

magnolia gods overheard my thoughts and decided they had better rise to the occasion and earn their right to grow in my garden or else axes for them.

Big, cup-shaped fragrant blooms that grow up to 8" to 12" long, have many attractive qualities. These natives are virtually pest-free, deer don't like them, they are good looking all year long and the blossoms last for up to two weeks on the tree, far less so in a vase. Flower arrangers love them as do those who like to entertain and need a quick, elegant solution to decorate the table, a bedside table for a visiting guest or entryway.

Their one pitfall, in my opinion, is their messy leaves that take forever to decompose.

Luckily for me, noted Landscape Designer Gordon Hayward – who came to my humble garden on one of his visits to Talbot County many years ago – gave me permission (Yes! Me!) to **not** rake the leaves and treat them as mulch. I thought I could get away with that approach for years but now the leaf piles are almost taller than the trees.

Today, I'm thrilled to report that my stand, which is the superfluous growth emerging from a mother tree that got struck by lightning more than 20 years ago, is covered with long-lasting blooms from top to bottom this year.

Why, I do not know. I didn't change the way I cared for them, which is probably best described simply as *ignorance*. So what makes this year different from any other? And is it really a spectacular show or is it just my imagination?

I took these questions to two of our most trusted and wise garden club members, Caroline Benson and Virginia Sappington. They both agreed that this year is unlike any they've seen before. They both also agreed that LAST YEAR'S monsoon season during spring and the timing of its arrival are the two primary factors for this year's abundance of blooms.



Photo by Trish Reynolds

The increased growth on old wood could be accounted for in last year's rainy spring and its subsequent bloom period now, a year later, in what some call a two-year cycle. As gardeners, we tend to look at cycles in one year increments but there are many plants, magnolia included, that work on two year cycles, if not more.

So while our lives went into Covid hibernation this past year, the magnolias did not. It's almost as if nature conspired with them to get their acts together this year to reward our patience and obedience with a spectacular display.

The peak blooming season for these hardy, evergreen sentinels in the Coastal Plains and mid-Atlantic area is usually from April to June. As we enter July, there seems to be no sign of the blooms easing up and that's just fine with me.



Photo by Trish Reynolds

This phenomena is not happening just in my garden. Everywhere I seem to go in our county, these beloved magnolias are putting on a show like none other for all to see and appreciate.

If you haven't noticed yet, please make an effort to look. Your efforts will be elegantly rewarded. ✨

► **Sidebar for magnolia blooms:** *While researching the story about magnolias and their unusually prolific bloom this summer, I happened upon some fascinating magnolia facts:*

- *Did you know magnolia blossoms are edible and safe to eat? Of course my mind goes first to decorating a wedding cake with them but I digress.*
- *Apparently, the petals are great mixed in salads (like pansies or nasturtium) and have a cardamom/ginger taste. Any takers?*

## Hérons at Trippe Creek

\* Kim Eckert

Recently, I experienced the wonderment of where we live through my house guests' eyes. Early one morning, they spotted a Bald Eagle perched on a tree limb overlooking Trippe Creek. As we walked closer, he flew across the cove to perch on an oak limb. I took that opportunity to show them the Great Blue Heron colony above the Eagles new landing spot. Approximately 14-20 herons perch at the top of a stand of pine trees and oaks where multiple nests can be seen. My guest stood in awe. Upon returning to the house, I embarked on a quick study of the Great Blue Heron.



Great Blue Heron - marylanddiversity.com



Rookery - emissourian.com

We live alongside these beautiful birds and forget how stunning they are. The herons live year-round in marshes and wetlands throughout the Chesapeake Bay region. The male builds the nest in early February and the female will lay 3-7 eggs sometime between March and June. There can be several nests in a single stand of trees forming a colony or rookery. Each couple remains monogamous through the season and take turns sitting on the eggs for 28 days or so until they begin to hatch. Typically, the first few hatchlings survive and grow strong enough to push the weaker ones out of the nest. As space becomes a bit tighter, the raucous behavior of the colony becomes more and more audible. The hatchlings fledge from the nest after about 60 days.

The diet for the Great Blue Heron varies by region. Here, by the Chesapeake Bay, the heron feasts mostly on fish, but will also feed on insects, amphibians, crustaceans and other small animals. It silently stalks its prey in shallow waters, then plunges its bill into the water to capture it. It will spend about 90 percent of its waking hours hunting for food (CBF).

The Great Blue Heron lives for about 15 years. The oldest heron was recorded was 24 years old. Herons do have natural predators. Crows and ravens seek out heron eggs, and eagles, hawks and raccoons are known to attack juvenile as well as adults. Unfortunately, since the heron swallows its food whole, it can also choke to death. Fortunately, Great



nkytribune.com



Blue Heron numbers are stable and increased in the U.S. between 1966 and 2014, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. In some places where there has been a decline, it is mainly due to water pollution and loss of wetlands.

Trippe Creek is known for the preservation of its headwaters and is looked upon as an example of how to restore and maintain a healthy eco environment. A heartfelt thank you to Sally and Chip Akridge who worked with the USDA Conservation Reserve Program and other agencies to impact the health of Trippe Creek. To read about their successful effort, follow this link: [https://www.conservationfund.org/images/resources/sustainable\\_chesapeake/Sustainable-Chesapeake-Chapter-6-USDA-Conservation-Programs.pdf](https://www.conservationfund.org/images/resources/sustainable_chesapeake/Sustainable-Chesapeake-Chapter-6-USDA-Conservation-Programs.pdf). ❁

## Rose of Sharon

\* Trish Reynolds



*Rose of Sharon - Bunny Bond's garden*

Whenever I take a walk in Oxford this time of year I always try to walk by Bunny Bond's former home. For those of you that never knew Bunny, she was a member of TCGC for quite a long time. Bunny's home was always neatly kept and her gardens well tended ....and this time of year she had a special treat for all of us.

Hibiscus syriacus is a species of flowering plant in the mallow family, Malvaceae. It is native to south-central and southeast China, but widely introduced to many countries, including the U.S. ....it is a vigorous, vase-shaped, deciduous shrub with large showy flowers resembling hollyhock

blooms.....and comes in a wide range of colors – blue, red, pink and white. These flowers will decorate the bush well into the season, a most valuable attribute at this time of year.

This shrub is easy to grow reaching 8-12' ....you want to plant it in full sun or part shade in average to medium moist soil. It is tolerant of drought, and heat and humidity....it will attract birds and butterflies....

So next time you are in Oxford, drive by Bunny's former home and enjoy her beautiful Hibiscus syriacus. ❁



*Trish's Dry Stream Bed*



## Blue Pollen

\* Janet Mackey

In case any of you are growing *Nicotiana langsdorffii* (which is a flowering tobacco with no common name) this summer, I want to alert you to an extraordinary bit of botanical information. This flowering tobacco has little green flowers – which in itself is a bit unusual – and those green flowers produce *blue pollen!* Blue! What a marvelous distraction on a hot day!

Most flowers we are familiar with produce pollen in various shades of yellow and orange. When a honey bee or bumble bee collects pollen, she packs it into pollen baskets (called corbiculae) on her back legs to transport it back to her hive as a source of protein for her young. If you hang around flowers, you most likely have seen bees weighed down with pollen.

I became aware of blue pollen when I grew Woolly Blue Curls (*Trichostema lanatum*) in northern California. I noticed the color of the pollen when I saw a honey bee with odd blue blobs on her sides.



*Nicotiana langsdorffii*



*Trichostema lanatum* - Woolly Blue Curls



*Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Rubinato'

Some native bees that don't have pollen baskets carry the pollen on sticky hairs on their hind legs or on the underside of their abdomen. Look at the pollen on the bee visiting my Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Rubinato') this week. Her abdomen is coated.



*Siberian Squill* (*Scilla siberica*)



*Campanula americana*

The only other flower I am aware of that produces blue pollen is Siberian Squill (*Scilla siberica*). I imagine bees are happy to find pollen of *any* color early in the spring when so little is flowering.

I just discovered that there is a plant native to this area, American Bellflower (*Campanula americana*), that produces purple pollen! I am starting a hunt for seeds of that treasure so I can grow it next year.

I wish you a summer of pollen-filled flowers and pollen-laden bees! 🌸

## Childhood Memories - Lilacs and Snowball Bushes

✿ Pam Keeton

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Have you found that certain flowers conjure childhood memories? Whether in our own gardens or those of grandparents or aunts and uncles, many of us have fond memories of certain flowers and plants from when we were children. My favorites were lilacs and snowball bushes.

Lilacs were planted across the front of our property and when they were blooming I would open my bedroom windows to take in the scent. It was heavenly. When I was old enough, I cut large bouquets for us to enjoy.

Back then, we most likely had common or French lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris*). I lived outside Milwaukee, WI, in zone 5b and we had cold winters. Most common lilacs need freezing winter temperatures, which is why they struggle in the south. However, modern varieties have been developed for moderate zones, such as southern California. Those varieties are called Descanso hybrids.



*Syringa vulgaris* – [gardenia.net](http://gardenia.net)

There are more than 25 varieties of lilacs and they come in several colors, from white to dark purple. Most lilacs originated in Europe and the Far East. A few names that give away their places of origin include Chinese Lilac, Dwarf Korean Lilac, Hungarian Lilac, and Beauty of Moscow, which is said to be a favorite of lilac aficionados.



*Hydrangea arborescens* "Annabelle"

We also had a snowball bush that I thought was magical. What I didn't realize is that there are two kinds of snowball bushes – hydrangeas and viburnums. And there are big differences in the two.

Because we had hard winters, the type of snowball we most likely had was *Hydrangea arborescens*. It was average in size and the blooms lasted for a couple of months, sometimes reblooming in the fall.

For many years I lived in Texas where lilacs and snowball bushes struggle, so I didn't have them in my landscape. I was thrilled to learn when we moved to Maryland that lilacs and snowball bushes thrive. But to my surprise, the snowballs didn't last as long in Maryland as those from my childhood and I wondered why.

Most snowball bushes in Maryland are *Viburnum macrocephalum*. They grow well over six feet tall and the flower heads are much larger than the hydrangea variety. Their leaves resemble those of maple trees. But their blooms only last a few weeks.

Growing conditions vary between the two types as well. Hydrangeas need constant moisture, while viburnums can tolerate drought. I also learned, the hard way, that the two types require very different pruning. Hydrangeas can be cut back hard in late winter to encourage leafy growth in the spring. Viburnums need to be pruned right after flowering. If you wait too long and prune during the winter, you will cut off the flower buds and won't have flowers the following spring.✿



Snowball Viburnum - source -  
Marsie Hawkinson

Sources for this article: [gardenerdy.com](http://gardenerdy.com) and [gardeningknowhow.com](http://gardeningknowhow.com).

## Planetary Health

✿ Nancy Laplante

Planetary health is a growing interdisciplinary field that incorporates population health, ecology and environmental health. It has gained interest from those who want to better understand human, environmental, animal, plant and global health. We know that human health is tied to the environment, however often times humanity is responsible for threats to key life supports of the Earth. The Planetary Health Alliance (<https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/>) is a consortium of over 240 universities, non-governmental organizations, research institutes, and government entities from around the world committed to understanding and addressing global environmental change and its health impacts.



Changing land use and land cover is one focus area for the Planetary Health Alliance:

“The Conversion of natural habitat to land used for agriculture and industry is occurring on a global scale, driven by an increasing demand for food, animal products, biofuel, and even cosmetics. Habitat conversion alters the structure and function of ecosystems in many ways, including:

- Substantial reduction of biological diversity, and nitrogen and phosphorous deposition from agricultural field runoff.
- Local air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from land clearing by burning, which is particularly problematic in tropical and subtropical regions where oil palm cultivation is rapidly increasing.
- Soil degradation, causing desertification and contributing to greenhouse gas emissions by eroding soils and releasing stored carbon.”
- Impacts on water quality and quantity, and exposure to water-borne and vector-borne disease in ways that are inadequately understood.”

(Source: <https://www.planetaryhealthalliance.org/changing-land-use-and-land-cov> )



**PLANETARY  
HEALTH  
ALLIANCE**

As we learn more about environmental issues in our communities, we can actively address them (e.g. air pollution, contaminated soil). Help neighbors, families, and communities prepare for extreme weather events and plan for prolonged drought or extreme flooding. “

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESTORA SCHOOL OF NURSING offers some tips on how to achieve planetary health and suggests that you shift the way you live to model resiliency and actively work to maintain the

health of the planet; partner with respected leaders in the community and those with scientific knowledge to understand the interconnected relationship of human health and our planet; address policies and practices that impact land use and natural preservation; and participate in environmental clean-up.

Communities can advocate for collective change and for a future where humans live in reciprocity with the natural world. ✿



## The Facts About Matter and The Matter of Facts About Plastics

✿ Lin Moeller

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Matter can neither be created nor destroyed. We were taught this in grade school along with the fact that the smallest unit of matter is the atom. The atoms that were here millions of years ago are still here in solid, liquid or gas forms. Those that were once a part in the plants of last year's garden or a long extinct dinosaur, are part of something else today. Infinitely, microscopically small, yet they bond together forming molecules and molecular chains to create things all around us, and us! The most common atoms are hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, helium and carbon. All living things are organic, meaning they contain carbon in their molecular chains and are biodegradable.

As with the changing interactions of atoms, the earth is constantly changing. In the last few thousand years man has been a significant part of the change. Over the last decades, the changes in the land, oceans and atmosphere spurred by man's actions have led to the global climate and pollution concerns of today.

One global pollution concern is plastics. Although they breakdown over time into smaller pieces called microplastics; **they are not biodegradable**. These simple plastic organic polymers (chains of molecules) contain lots of additives (toxic chemicals) depending on their purpose of use. It is hard to believe that the first patent for a synthetic polymer plastic was in December 1909 for Bakelite! Today, in every part of our daily living from the moment we awake, we are touching and using some form of plastic.



In the June 2021 edition of the BAY JOURNAL is an article by Whitney Pipkin, 'Picture of Chesapeake Microplastics Grows Clearer' that discusses the concerns of microplastics and studies their impact on local ecosystems and aquatic organisms that ingest them – oysters, crabs, rockfish, mussels, etc., which many of us consume.

Microplastics are defined as plastic pieces 5 millimeters in length down to one micron. Many are so small that they can pass through water filtration systems into rivers, streams and oceans. Fish and other tiny organisms ingest them. A testing of tap water across the country found microplastics in 94% of the samples!

There are two types. **Primary microplastics** are tiny when they enter our ecosystems and include plastic pellets released through industrial processes, synthetic fibers in our homes – upholstery, carpet and clothing that release fibers through daily use and in the washing and drying processes, the remains of rubber tires and paint on roads, cosmetics, shower soaps, etc. The other, **secondary microplastics** are created by the larger, one-time-use plastic debris that breaks down over

time as it is battered by wind, sun and water and include Styrofoam, plastic bags, packaging and water bottles. The pandemic also added COVID trash, masks and gloves to the list!

The amount of microplastics we consume through the air we breathe, water we drink and the food we eat is difficult to measure. One source stated that depending on where one lived, it could equal eating a credit card every day! A number of environmental and health organizations are presently studying the effects to human health of ingesting microplastic particles. Thankfully, some states presently are developing legislation to ban a number of single use plastic items.

As gardeners we need to stay as natural as possible. So far there has been no indication in any studies of microplastics being absorbed into the cellulose fibers of our annuals, perennials, herbs or vegetables, but in staying natural, we need to be concerned for the environment we live in and the impact of plastics on it and on us! Perhaps one day there will be a patent for a plastic that is biodegradable and will be broken down again into simple atoms. ✿

# What's Wrong with Floral Foam?

✿ Susie Middleton

Putting together a flower arrangement? Like most of us the first thing you would do is grab a block of Oasis or Florist Foam. Floral foam was invented by product designer V.L Smithers (founder of OASIS®) 60 years ago.

Florists embraced it because it was lightweight, durable, easy to cut and mold but more important it holds up to 50x its weight in water and is a great framework for holding your flowers in place.



But the product has come under scrutiny from environmental groups leading the Royal Horticulture Society to ban its use beginning in 2021. Why did they do this and what are the alternatives?

There are two major concerns with the product (1) it isn't biodegradable contributing to plastic pollution and (2) it has toxic components. According to an article in Good

Housekeeping:

*Floral foam is contributing to the growing crisis of plastic of pollution. Thanks to its mossy texture, green hue and the fact that it's used with flowers, it can be easily mistaken as a natural product.*

*In reality, it's made from synthetic, non-recyclable plastic and is created using a combination of carbon black, formaldehyde and phenolic foam, which are all toxic.*

*Though it crumbles, floral foam doesn't fully dissolve in water or degrade in landfill or soil. Instead, it breaks down into smaller and smaller micro-plastics. These can take thousands of years to completely revert into natural elements and are a real menace for the environment by contaminating our marine life and food chains.*

With that in mind many florists are developing sustainable alternatives and all are worth trying:

**Chicken wire** - cut and molded to fit inside your contained. It is largely what was used prior to the introduction of Oasis.

**Kenzans also known a pin holders or frogs** – great for home use, the primary reason Florists don't use them is expense. Put a little floral clay on the bottom and place it in the bottom of a dry vase before adding the water.

**Stems and Vines** – stripped of their leaves they can be bent and curled to fill the interior of your container.

**Floral Pillows/Cage** – a product developed by designer Holly Chappel and available in multiple sizes. Fitted in the container it acts much like Chicken Wire, however it is washable and reusable. You can get it from a variety of sources including Amazon.

**Moss Roulade (Pillows)** – there is a whole technique to this – go to this site for step-by-step instructions on how to make them. <https://education.teamflower.org/learn/design/ssl/moss-roulade-a-floral-foam-substitute-mechanic>



Chicken Wire



Pin holder and "Frog" - Trish Reynolds



Floral Pillow—Trish Reynolds



Can You Dig It?

**Agra Wool** – a product introduced in 2012 primarily for the hydroponics industry they have created a block version for floral design. Not readily available in the US at this time so it is pricey. Here is a link to their website: <https://www.thursd.com/articles/agra-wools-100-natural-floral-foam/>

**Oasis Bio-Degradable Floral Foam** – Oasis has developed a new version of floral foam that they advertise as being bio-degradable. The brick is Black so you can readily tell if you are using the new product. They advertise that it is “Equipped with Maxlife technology for enhanced biodegradability, the exclusive formula of OASIS Midnight Floral Foam is 100% biodegradable in 567 days.”

So, take your pick – you have a lot of options. ✨

Source: <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/uk/house-and-home/household-advice/a31130584/floral-foam-alternatives/>

## *Finding the Mother Tree, by Suzanne Simard– A Review*

✨ Chloe Pitard

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In 2015 a book titled *The Hidden Life of Trees* was published by a German forester names Peter Wohlleben. In this best-selling book, Mr. Wohlleben’s shocking premise was that trees were not powerless static beings subject only to natural selection and the whims of nature. Indeed, he asserted that trees exerted considerable, premeditated, willful influence over conditions in the areas where they lived. He observed that they intentionally restrict the above ground growth of their offspring to force them to first develop a strong root structure. They alert other trees in the forest to a nascent infestation of insects so they can begin natural defensive measures. Through interlocking root systems they pass water from mature trees to juvenile ones in times of drought. He cites these and many other known facts about how trees act in the forest environment. What was shocking was his perspective. From his point of view, the trees were actively in control

Mr. Wohlleben’s examples were mostly based on non-technical observed aspects of forest life, but he also cited the work of Dr. Suzanne Simard, now a professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Simard also began her career as a forester in British Columbia, working both for private logging companies and for the government. She has now published her own book, *Finding the Mother Tree*. This book is part autobiography, part a description of her work which began with her Ph.D. thesis showing technical scientific proof of many of the conditions observed by Wohlleben. The combining of the story of her BC childhood and personal and vocational life with a description of her technical, scientific discoveries resulted in a very readable, interesting book.

Dr. Simard’s work comes in direct conflict with the theories and practices of the logging industry in British Columbia and elsewhere. The practice there was, and mostly remains, clear cutting followed using chemical growth suppressants, (read RoundUp) to foster the replanting of single species trees deemed most valuable by the industry. Simard’s demonstrated in multiple controlled experiments that these practices were not in the best interests of the forests nor of the forest industries. Clear cut land was much less productive after cutting. Single plantation trees did not thrive nearly as well as those in mixed vegetation. Needless to say, her views were different and wildly unpopular with the then current industry leaders. Her story of how her ideas were accepted and not accepted is as interesting as the science.



**FINDING THE  
MOTHER TREE**  
Discovering the  
Wisdom of the Forest  
**SUZANNE SIMARD**

Simard's work demonstrated that through mycorrhizae fungi networks trees in the forest were indeed in communication with each other, not only within species but among various species to the mutual benefit of all. Mature trees share water and nutrients with other trees in the forest, all trees, not just their own species, but they provide it in larger amounts to trees of the same species.

Even more surprising, they provide it in the largest amounts to trees that are grown from seeds from their specific tree. I find that amazing!

New ideas are often slow to be accepted, especially in mature industries, but Simard's discoveries coupled with the effects of climate change foretell radical changes in forest management and are gradually being accepted, especially by younger people in the forestry industry.

All this is heady stuff. More work continues to be done in the field. Stay tuned. ✨

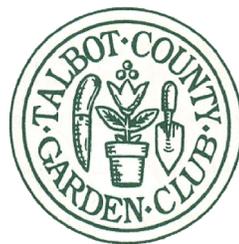
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**Enjoy the rest of your summer....  
and remember, life is good!**

**Trish**



*Trish's great nephew, Charlie*



TALBOT COUNTY GARDEN CLUB

P.O. Box 1524, Easton, MD 21601

\_\_\_\_\_ Member of \_\_\_\_\_

Garden Club of America

National Garden Clubs, Inc., Central Atlantic Region

The Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, District I