A publication of the Friends of the National Arboretum

ARBOR FRIENDS

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Dear Friends of the National Arboretum:

Fall is arriving at the National Arboretum as I write this. It’s a glorious time of year, leaves are cascading, and the autumn flowers in the gardens are blooming. The shorter days of fall bring a change of pace as visitation to the Arboretum slows from summer’s peak. But FONA’s office will be as busy as ever during the fall and winter as we work to add new programs and activities to our calendar and prepare for 2018.

For instance, FONA will be running Full Moon Hikes through the Arboretum grounds every month. We recently took on responsibility for the lakes from the Arboretum staff and will be increasing the number and variety of lakes, as well as making it easier for FONA members to register for them. Keep an eye on our e-mails and website for details.

In addition, we are launching several initiatives that I believe our members will find as exciting as we at FONA do. First, we will be offering a volunteer program to guide visitors around the Arboretum and give them the opportunity to learn firsthand about many of the Arboretum’s features and collections. We’ll be replanting the restored streambed of Springhouse Run with native plants and grasses this fall, and work will continue in the spring. We also plan to enhance FONA’s intern program by increasing the number of intern spots we place with Arboretum staff to help with research and horticulture.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, we’re working on our year-end fundraising campaigns. As for many nonprofits, this is FONA’s most important time for fundraising. We count on our members and friends to help us support the Arboretum, provide programs, and engage visitors.

Thanks so much for all the support you, our members, have provided. Your assistance continues to be critical for filling the needs created by the government’s woeful lack of funding, so when you hear from us, please make as generous a contribution as you can to FONA’s work.

We—and all the others who care about the Arboretum and enjoy its beauty—appreciate your help. Please visit us soon so I can offer my personal thanks and so you can enjoy this spectacular place.

Richard T. Olsen, Director
The United States National Arboretum

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Letter from the Director

Re-discovery and Relevance

As the heat and humidity of summer fade, gardeners are reinvigorated by the crisp cool days of autumn, and I find myself looking for any excuse to pick up more plants for the garden. This weekend I re-discovered John Creech sedum (Phedimus spurium ‘John Creech’).

I have long admired the person, Dr. John Creech, who as our director in the 1970s oversaw an expansion of our budget, collections, and relevance that cemented our reputation as an international research facility and public garden. As if that were not enough, he also orchestrated the 1976 bicentennial gift of 53 priceless bonsai from the people of Japan to the United States, thus establishing the first public bonsai museum in the world here at the National Arboretum.

But I had forgotten about the plant. Creech collected seed of Sedum spurium from the Central Siberian Botanical Garden in 1971, noting that the species had ornamental potential with exceptional cold hardiness. Like the taxonomy and nomenclature of the Crassulaceae, our uses of sedums in the landscape have evolved, adapting to new niches that renew their relevance. Sedums—under various botanical monikers—are critical elements in green infrastructure such as green roofs and rain gardens because of their xerophytic adaptations (succulent leaves and unique photosynthetic metabolism). Visitors to the Arboretum will notice several varieties in our newly installed rain gardens in the R Street parking lot. Executed by our friends at the District Department of Energy and Environment, the rain gardens demonstrate not only the aesthetic value of plants but also their valuable ecosystem functions.

Creech, as one of the USDA’s great plant explorers, led their plant exploration germplasm division before merging and leading those efforts through the National Arboretum. Those efforts were finally recognized as being critical to American agriculture and our economy when in 1987 the National Arboretum was officially incorporated into the National Plant Germplasm System. Prior to this designation, the role of preserving wild relatives of our ornamental plants was scattered across USDA locations that were focused primarily on edible crops of garden plants. While we carefully track our plant breeding contributions—more than 650 and growing—we often lose track of plants derived from seed or propagules distributed from our plant explorations that are late introduced or named by the nursery industry, like John Creech sedum.

John Creech, the person as well as the plant, has a lasting legacy and continuing relevance, nearly five decades after the seed was first collected and sown. These long-term efforts are why we exist, whether it’s breeding, collecting, and studying or displaying and promoting great plants for American landscapes. Our economy and gardens grow richer through these efforts, even if our role is temporarily forgotten. Thank you for your enduring support for, and for not forgetting your National Arboretum.

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Commemorative Benches at the U.S. National Arboretum

Lovely 6-foot teak benches are available for purchase as a way to commemorate family, friends, and loved ones, or to honor an occasion such as a birth, wedding, or retirement.

When you purchase a bench, your support provides important funding to further the mission of FONA and the Arboretum, in addition to being a commemoration. Each bench will have a plaque mounted on it, engraved with your message or dedication. Your donation of a commemorative bench is tax deductible.

Please contact Cathy Kerkam for a brochure and more information at cathy@fona.org or 202 544 8753.

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Friends of the National Arboretum

ON THE COVER: Fall colors in the Fern Valley Collection.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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COMMEMORATIVE BENCHES AT THE U.S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM

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decade-long process of raising awareness, building public support, and working with a number of government agencies has paid off—Springhouse Run is coming back to life as a healthy stream.

The Springhouse Run stream and watershed restoration project on the Arboretum's grounds was completed by Underwood & Associates this fall and involved an in-depth collaboration between the District Department of the Environment (DDOE) and the U.S. National Arboretum. The project included two parts—restoration of Springhouse Run, an urbanized tributary of Hickey Run that flows through the Arboretum property, and retrofit of a portion of the Arboretum's R Street parking lot with bioretention cells (also known as rain gardens) to more effectively manage stormwater runoff within the Arboretum's portion of the Hickey Run watershed.

Prior to initiation of this project, Springhouse Run's watershed featured degraded water quality, high sediment production, and a reduced riparian buffer. Springhouse Run had, at some time in the past, been channelized until it was basically a ditch with high levels of erosion, extreme sensitivity to disturbance, and poor recovery potential. The concrete and gravel channel and dense riparian vegetation, which had been helping to protect the stream from erosive forces, were beginning to show signs of instability.

Underwood & Associates used their innovative Regenerative Design process to restore 1,930 linear feet of Springhouse Run and reconnect the stream to the adjacent floodplain. The stream now features a sequence of riffles and pools to create a beneficial habitat for fish, insects, birds, and aquatic vegetation. In addition, the design reduces the volume of sediment and pollutants that were previously transported through the stream, eventually ending up in the Chesapeake Bay. By slowing down the water, spreading it out, and letting it soak into the earth, sediment can settle out of the stream flow. Roots of native plants within the project area absorb many of the nutrients and pollutants. This results in cleaner and clearer water as it flows across the Arboretum to join Hickey Run and then into the Anacostia River.

Another beneficial feature of the project is the springheads created when the water, instead of rushing down the old channelized stream, flows through and along the restored streambed's sand and gravel with a clay bottom and then bubbles up further downstream. This summer, water entering the restored section of Springhouse Run was monitored at 80°F while the water surfacing at the springheads was 68°F. This reduction in water temperature is an excellent indicator of extensive travel through underground passages that serve to cleanse the water of a wide range of pollutants. The cooler water also makes the stream more habitable for a number of species, some of which have already begun to return.

The restoration of Springhouse Run will prevent further deterioration and will also serve as an educational opportunity for visitors to the Arboretum. They can learn about the benefits associated with clean water and stream restoration and about native plantings and wetland creation.

The next stage of the restoration will be planting thousands of native shrubs, grasses, and sedges that have been stored in the Arboretum's greenhouses and will now be gathered by garden clubs and other groups. Many of the plants will be planted by FONA volunteers this fall. These plants, especially the woodies, will readily survive the winter and will benefit from having their roots spreading through the ground during the cooler months. Other plants will need to wait until spring so they have a chance to become established when the weather is warmer. Keep your eyes on the FONA website and e-newsletters for details about FONA’s celebration of the Springhouse Run’s revival and additional volunteer planting events. And be sure to take a look at this exciting new addition to the National Arboretum’s list of attractions.

Pegeen McGlather and Tom McGuire

works at Underwood & Associates, the company in charge of the Springhouse Run renovation. TOM MCGUIRE is FONA’s Executive Director.
The Seasonal Splendor of Fall

The contributors to the autumn festival of colors are many. Here are a few standouts:

HAMAMELIS VIRGINIANA
The delicate flowers of the native witch-hazel, Hamamelis virginiana, are a discreet yellow but bloom so late there is little floral competition. Often, the yellow of the flowers overlaps with the bright yellow of this small tree’s falling leaves, so be sure to appreciate the blooms close up. They can be found scattered throughout Fern Valley.

ILEX 'SUNNY FOSTER'
The leaves of this holly, Ilex ‘Sunny Foster’, that grow in the sun are bright yellow; leaves growing in shade are chartreuse. Its colorful red fruit is small but showy, about one-third of an inch wide. There are several large specimens in the Lavender Border at the east end of the Herb Garden.

ILEX VERTICILLATA
In concert with yellow fall foliage, red berries as well as the orange- and yellow ones of winterberry, Ilex verticillata, and its cultivars shine like bright jewels and often persist until late winter when they become a significant food source for cardinals.

CALLICarpa
And the berries of beautyberry plants, Callicarpa species, present a lovely and unexpected purple or white. Some can be found in the Asian collection, but hurry, since the tasty berries are devoured by birds almost as soon as they ripen.

PYRACANTHA
Firethorn, Pyracantha ‘Teton’—This is a dense, columnar, evergreen plant with fine-textured dark green foliage. Its fruit begins to ripen in mid-October as a light yellow and later matures to a medium yellow orange which persists into January. There is one visible from the road by the Greenhouse.

W
hile fall foliage viewing is a traditional Washington rite, for those who want to avoid the rural traffic jam of Skyline Drive, the National Arboretum offers an autumn show of everything from trees to grasses changing into their fall colors.

Many areas of the Arboretum were designed for year-round viewing, and these collections offer an opportunity to see the changes not only in the deciduous trees, but also in the shrubs, grasses, ground covers, and perennials that are impacted by the seasonal change when the green chlorophyll of summer fades to reveal the yellow and orange flavonoids, and leaves manufacture the red and purple anthocyanins that we associate with autumn.

Just as each blooming season brings subtle changes in the flowers, autumn color varies from year to year depending on changes in the climate. Autumn color is a complex physiological phenomenon dependent upon the length of night, intensity of sunlight, sugar formation in the leaf, air temperature, and for some plants, even the condition of the soil. Rainy, warm weather with little sunlight greatly reduces the development of intense fall color since anthocyanins come from sugars that are produced in the leaves and trapped there; more intense sunlight leads to more rapid degradation of chlorophyll and the early appearance of intense orange and yellow hues from flavonoids in the leaves.

Ready to find these plants and more at the Arboretum?

Visit the Arboretum Botanical Explorer (ABE) page at usna.usda.gov/abe or download the free Arboretum app, available in the Play Store, to search the database and see the map of the Arboretum.

ARBOG FRIENDS

Fall at the Arboretum has always been full of splendid plants and sights. This piece combines two articles from the Arbor Friends archives, including Carole Otteson’s “Fall” piece in Fall 2012, and an unattributed “Arboretum Adventure: Finding Fabulous Color in Curator’s Collections” in the September-October 1995 issue. Arboretum staff reviewed this piece for accuracy in today’s collections.
What You Will See
While itineraries vary depending on the season and weather, many hikes leave from the Administration Building and commence with a climb to the top of Mount Hamilton which, foliage permitting, provides a lovely view of the Capitol dome and Washington D.C.
Leaving Mount Hamilton’s summit, hikers often walk through the rhododendron and azalea collections, cross the large meadow and walk on to the Capitol Columns, which are spectacular in bright moonlight. Most hikes then continue on from the Columns through the woods of Fern Valley to the Asia Valley gardens and conifer collections on the opposite side of the Arboretum. Most guides finish up the hike by visiting one of the largest trees on the grounds, a large willow oak, which looks enchanting in the moonlight.

What To Expect
A typical Full Moon Hike is a brisk walk through moonlit gardens, meadows, and woods. Your guide will share specially chosen points of interest and seasonal highlights as you walk the grounds for about two hours. We encourage hikers to take in the experience. That means we don’t allow flashlights or cell phones—the whole philosophy is to leave those things behind. You’ll be led by two trained guides who will help you enjoy the Arboretum by moonlight while keeping you safe.
When you come out to the Arboretum for a Full Moon Hike, you should prepare for a 3-4 mile walk over hilly and uneven terrain on a combination of roads and trails. The pace is a steady hike, not a garden tour, so prepare accordingly and wear appropriate shoes. People have walked a Full Moon Hike in work shoes, but we don’t recommend it!

Scheduling Your Full Moon Hike
Full Moon Hikes happen year round the day before, the day of, and the day after a full moon. Depending on the season, most hikes leave an hour or so after sunset and last two hours. And hikes go on regardless of the weather—we generally cancel only for driving rain, snow, or threat of lightning.
Hike reservations are available approximately one month in advance on FONA’s website. We currently take only 25 people each night. Once you reserve your spot on a hike, you’ll receive an email confirmation and periodic updates as the hike approaches.
We can also take large parties (15 or more) on dedicated hikes if the schedule permits. Contact FONA directly, at hike@fona.org, if you’re interested in a group reservation.

TOM MCGUIRE is FONA’s Executive Director.

Recently, FONA and the Arboretum staff agreed to shift management of the Full Moon Hike program from the Arboretum staff to FONA. Managing the Full Moon Hikes and simply meeting demand for them had become more of a challenge for the already over-taxed Arboretum staff. The Hike program is a good fit with FONA’s mission and focus on providing educational programs for Arboretum visitors. FONA will be working with the Arboretum staff, FONA members, and our volunteers to increase the number and the kinds of hikes available. We’re contemplating additional hikes such as those oriented toward specific interests, like birding, and a less rigorous hike. We want anyone who wishes to experience the Arboretum after dark to be able to do so.
Trellised Trees

The 446 acres of the Arboretum are full of trees, but a few specimens deserve special notice. Here is a selection to seek out on your next visit.

Northern Catalpa, Western Catalpa, Cigar Tree
Scientific name: Catalpa speciosa
Common name: Northern Catalpa, Western Catalpa, Cigar Tree
Family: Bignoniaceae
Natural distribution: Western Tennessee and northern Arkansas to southern Indiana and Illinois
Zone hardness: Zones 4 to 8
Fall color: Varies from yellows to browns
Growth rate: Medium
Location at USNA: The Grove of State Trees
Approximate age: Unknown
Comments: This is the largest Catalpa speciosa growing at the National Arboretum. In the spring, large white flowers appear, and through the winter, long pendulous fruit persists, giving it the name Cigar Tree.

Momi Fir
Scientific name: Abies firma
Common name: Momi fir
Family: Pinaceae (Pine Family)
Zone hardness: Zones 6 to 9
Fall color: Evergreen
Growth rate: Medium
Location at USNA: Gotelli Collection
Approximate age: 75 years
Comments: Some of the Arboretum’s earliest plantings are still thriving today. In the center of the Gotelli collection stands a trio of Abies firma received from the Tingle Nursery Co., Pittsville, MD, planted in 1940. Considered “the highest and most stately fir in Japan,” this fir usually reaches only 50 feet in American gardens. It is one of the few firs tolerant of our area’s summer heat and humidity, and it prefers moist, well-drained soil and full sun. The Momi fir is proving to be a good understock for firs that we may not be able to grow this far south or in our heavy soils.

Tall Stewartia, Hime-Syara
Scientific Name: Stewartia monadelpha
Common Name: Tall Stewartia, Hime-Syara
Family: Theaceae
Zone hardness: Zone 6
Fall color: Maroon
Growth rate: Slow
Location at USNA: Asian Collections
Approximate age: 50 years
Comments: Native to Japan and Korea, Stewartia monadelpha thrives in the shady canopy of the Asian Collections. The growth habit of this small tree is rounded to pyramidal. With its exfoliating cinnamon brown bark, abundant white flowers in late May/early June, and a reddish maroon fall color, the tall Stewartia makes a spectacular specimen for the larger garden.

Bald Cypress, Swamp Cypress
Scientific name: Taxodium distichum
Common name: Bald Cypress, Swamp Cypress
Family: Taxodiaceae
Natural distribution: Delaware to Florida and west to Texas
Zone hardness: Zones 4 to 9
Fall color: Copper, reddish brown
Growth rate: Medium
Location at USNA: Gotelli Collection
Approximate age: 60 years
Comments: Taxodium is one of six genera of deciduous conifers. This native tree has a fine texture with its light, feathery foliage and one-inch cones. When the tree grows near water, knees develop, possibly to help aerate underwater roots. An excellent addition to the landscape for its form and texture. Good for that sunny bottom land area of your property.

In the spring, large white flowers appear, and through the winter, long pendulous fruit persists, giving it the name Cigar Tree.
THIS SUMMER, 15 HIGH SCHOOLERS JOINED WASHINGTON Youth Garden for a sweaty and rigorous 6-week job-readiness internship between June and August as part of our 2017 Green Ambassador Program. They were peer-mentored by two returning Crew Leaders, Erin Howe from our 2015 Summer Cohort (a sophomore at William and Mary University) and James Gross from our 2016 Summer Cohort (a senior at Washington Mathematics Science and Technology Public Charter School), making it our biggest cohort yet! Our Garden Manager, Jake Dacks, and Program Coordinator, Taylore Willis, were their supervisors and adult mentors.

Here's the what and why of their experience: Washington Youth Garden understands the power of the garden to transform lives. It’s not as easy as “if you build it, they will come,” but an abundant garden combined with

• passionate staff role models;
• structured workshops in garden maintenance, harvesting, cooking, carpentry, and team work;
• an economic incentive (aka payday!); and
• opportunities for future employment and support,
can make a difference in a young person’s life. This is especially true for youth of color from low-income families who are disproportionately affected by environmental inequalities and have limited access to nature and safe green spaces. A 2016 Brookings Institution report states that black teens in Washington, DC (age 16 to 19 years) have disproportionately higher unemployment rates than other groups: 29.6% in 2014 compared with 13.8% of white teens in the same study. Researchers noted that “early work experiences [part-time and in the summer] can provide valuable opportunities for teens to learn new skills, gain experience, expand their networks, and develop positive relationships with adults.” WYG aims to address these environmental and economic inequalities through our Green Ambassadors Program.

For 6 weeks this summer, our Green Ambassadors worked hard on a variety of projects that contributed to our one-acre Demonstration Garden and several school gardens, such as building raised beds and native bee hotels (picture E), designing and planting garden features like the sorghum maze (picture B), harvesting produce for donation to the Capital Area Food Bank, and harvesting honey from our hives (picture A). They also learned a lot through field trips and hands-on workshops about environmental stewardship, healthy food—cooking and eating it!—and how to give and receive constructive feedback to foster a productive and supportive work environment. A couple of memorable field trips/workshops this summer were canoeing down the Anacostia River (picture D) with the Anacostia Watershed Society and making herbal health remedies with Little Red Bird Botanicals (picture C). The diversity of projects and activities meant that each participant found their niche, and each student was challenged to take risks and grow beyond their comfort zone.

September 9 marked the start of the Green Ambassador Guild, the year-round extension program. Ten returning Green Ambassadors will join us every Saturday through mid-November to put their skills to use building school gardens and leading volunteer days at our Demonstration Garden. We’re excited to have them back!

NADIA MERCER is the Program Director of Washington Youth Garden. She first worked in the Youth Garden as an intern in 2009 and hopes to see another Green Ambassador intern rise through the ranks to take her place one day.

“I was surprised by how I kept pushing myself to stay on task and work harder. #nonstop”
- Ketuhra Bonner
(McKinley Technology High School, 10th grade)
The Fruits of Our Labor—*Viburnum*

Ruth Dix

Autumn at the Arboretum Signals a Time of Change

The fruits of our labor can be enjoyed both during and after summer’s nutritional display. Our gardens are teeming with edible fruits throughout the year, providing a second season of interest and delight. When the plants are purposefully selected, they reward us with spectacular fruiting displays in late summer and fall. However, the impact of these displays is often cut short by foraging wildlife intent on harvest. Beauty through all seasons has been one of the goals of the Shrub Breeding Program at the U.S. National Arboretum. To this end, four *Viburnum dilatatum* cultivars, ‘Erie’, ‘Catskill’, ‘Oneida’, and ‘Iroquois’, were developed and selected for their fruit persistence throughout the fall and winter. Of these, *Viburnum dilatatum* ‘Erie’ has drawn the most attention and was named one of the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society’s Gold Medal Winners in the 1990s.

Contrasted with the good yellow, orange, and red autumn coloration of the foliage, ‘Erie’ puts on a riveting display of orange-red fruit. After a few frosts, the fruit turns to coral and red berries that hold well into winter. This piece is from the Arbor Friends archives. RUTH DIX was a horticulturist at the Arboretum for many years and a regular contributor to the newsletter about new research and plant introductions.

**BUILD SOILS**

Building good garden soil is a continual process. The addition of organic matter annually will feed the necessary microbiological life of your garden soils. Your soil’s microbiological workers will improve the soil’s ability to retain nutrients and absorb water. Good garden soil can also protect plants from drought and disease. Fall is an excellent time to spread one inch of finished compost over garden beds. Top dress compost with freshly shredded leaves and eliminate the need for mulch.

If you do not have compost bins, now is the perfect time to build bins and to collect fall leaves and winter gardening debris. Build three 5-foot-diameter circular bins of 16-gauge, 3-foot-tall green PVC-coated garden fence supported by 4-foot T-posts. With three adjacent bins, one bin can be actively composting and the other bins can be available for receiving garden debris.

**PLANT TREES AND SHRUBS**

Fall is a good time to add trees and deciduous shrubs to your garden. Regular rainfall makes the gardener’s work easy. Fall soils are warm and will encourage establishment of strong root systems without pressure to produce foliage, flowers, and fruit. Strong root establishment is critical and will influence the robustness of your plants far into the future. Remember, the best time to plant a tree was yesterday! Select wildlife-friendly native plants like maple, *Amelanchier* (aka shadbush), *Viburnum*, *Ilex* (aka holly), and *Physocarpus* (aka ninebark). Remember to plant at the natural root collar as indicated by the particular tree or shrub. This crucial juncture should never be buried and is located where the shrub’s stem or tree’s trunk flairs out to connect with the earth.

**DESIGN GARDENS**

While the appearance of your summer garden is still fresh in your memory, take time now to evaluate areas of your garden. The 2017 growing season has been exceptional in the mid-Atlantic region; we’ve experienced reasonable temperatures and adequate rainfall. If plants or areas of your garden are looking less robust than you desire, now is the perfect time to consider new ideas. Study your site’s cultural anomalies and seek plants with appropriate cultural needs. It is always easier to choose the right plant for your site than to force a plant to be happy where it will not thrive naturally. Increase the mass size of your most successful perennials to make beds more cohesive. Place dwarf and unusual conifers strategically to create focal points. Repeat the use of evergreen shrubs to bring rhythm and continuity.

**Fall Garden Tips**

Fall is for building soils, planting trees and shrubs, and designing gardens.
The Friends of the National Arboretum is an independent, nonprofit organization established to enhance, through public and private sector resources, support for the U.S. National Arboretum.

**HAPPENINGS**

Check events on the USNA’s Events page at [www.usna.usda.gov/Education/events.html](http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/events.html)

**SPRINGHOUSE RUN PLANTING**
November 2, 9, and 18
FONA needs the help of volunteers to plant native shrubs and grasses along Springhouse Run, a newly restored stream that runs through the Arboretum and into the Anacostia River. We’re hosting three “open planting” days with 50 to 60 volunteers needed for each day: Thursday, Nov. 2; Thursday, Nov. 9; and Saturday, Nov. 18. Sign up at fona.org/planting

**BONSAI EXHIBIT: AUTUMN BONSAI: FALLING INTO WINTER**
November 4–12, 10:00am–4:00pm
National Bonsai & Penjing Museum
Enjoy bonsai in their autumn colors: see red maples, yellow ginkgos, and fruited trees in the Museum’s permanent collection pavilions. The gallery features formal displays with select trees during their peak fall colors. Free.

**2018 DATES TO SAVE**

**JANUARY 31**
Blue Moon Party

**MARCH 24**
Lahr Symposium and Native Plant Sale

**APRIL 28-29**
FONA’s Annual Garden Fair

**JUNE 6**
Dinner Under the Stars

**Help us to go green!**
To receive your ArborFriends issues via email only, and not in the mail, go to fona.org/greenarborfriends