

RAP GARDENS IN FOCUS

Explore Sites That Participate in the AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program

Adkins Arboretum: A Chesapeake Native Garden

by Mary Yee



MARYLAND'S Eastern Shore is a popular destination for locals and tourists who come to sample steamed blue crabs, see quaint lighthouses, relax on the beach, or go for a day of sailing, but the water is only part of its identity. This region sits on the eastern side of the Chesapeake Bay, an important ecosystem in the mid-Atlantic where the salty ocean water meets freshwater, creating an environment that supports a diversity of plants and wildlife. One place that stewards the natural landscape for all to enjoy is the Adkins Arboretum in the small rural town of Ridgely.

Opened in 1980, the 400-acre preserve is located within the much larger Tuckahoe State Park but is administered independently by the nonprofit Friends of Adkins Arboretum. "We are one of the few botanical institutions focused on the conservation and promotion of coastal plain flora," says Adkins Executive Director Ginna Tiernan. "Our collection fea-

tures native plant communities in their successional stages of old fields, meadows, pine plantations, young hardwood forests, mature bottomland and upland forests, and non-tidal wetlands."

DEMONSTRATING SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING

At Adkins, Tiernan says, "the main attraction is nature itself." Much of the property was farmed through the first half of the 20th century. Since that time, restoring the land's natural habitats has been top priority. The cultivated displays, which are limited to the entrance median and the parking lot, demonstrate ecologically responsible landscaping practices.

More than half of the space of the median gardens at the drive-in entrance has been planted with a base of purple

Above, left: A bridge provides a vantage point for viewing the plants and wildlife in the wetland. Above, right: The South Meadow Loop is one of several easy-to-walk trails.

love grass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*), a tough native that thrives in the location's poor, sandy soil and exposure to full sun. "The remaining area is interspersed with perennials that emerge seasonally to create 'color events'," says Tiernan. The grass itself offers multi-seasonal appeal, from its green blades in spring to pink summer flowerheads and reddish fall foliage.

The parking lot and its gardens are designed to serve as bioretention areas. Filtering substrate beneath the parking lot's permeable pavers controls sediment. Stormwater is channeled to the gardens rather than running off to pollute the Chesapeake Bay. The gardens contain more than 17,000 native species, such as blue mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*, formerly *Eupatorium coelestinum*), narrowleaf mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*), and soft rush (*Juncus effusus*). Tiernan notes "visitors spend a good deal of time in the parking lot identifying plants and sighting birds, butterflies, damselflies, and dragonflies."

HOW THE RECIPROCAL ADMISSIONS PROGRAM (RAP) WORKS

This American Horticultural Society program is designed to encourage people to visit gardens, arboreta, and conservatories while traveling. As a current member, you receive free admission and/or other special discounts at more than 330 sites throughout North America! Here's how to make the most of this member benefit:

- View the current list of participating locations and the RAP benefits they offer at www.ahsgardening.org/rapgardens. This list is also published in a booklet. To order, visit <https://www.ahsgardening.org/gardening-programs/rap>.
- Contact the garden to confirm the RAP benefits it offers. (Some sites may choose to enforce a 90-mile exclusion policy; if your zip code falls within that distance from the location, you would not receive the offered RAP benefits there.) Admission to special events may also be excluded.
- Present your current membership card at the admissions counter or gift shop to receive the RAP benefit(s) offered by that garden. Each card will only admit the individual(s) listed on the card. In the case of a family, couple, or household membership card that does not list individual names, the garden must extend the benefit(s) to at least two members; it is at the garden's discretion to extend benefits to more than two individuals. Some gardens may require a photo ID.

POPULAR DESTINATIONS

A one-acre wetland greets visitors upon entering the arboretum. Once a farm pond, the wetland is now filled with native marsh species that have been planted, together with many that have volunteered. The Wetland Boardwalk leads visitors into a watery habitat for blue herons, turtles, frogs, and dragonflies. A bridge allows for crossing over to the Visitor's Center (which is currently closed due to the pandemic).

Five miles of trails from a mile to three miles long provide for easy hikes through other parts of the preserve. A couple of trails takes visitors to the meadows, which

provide plenty of opportunities for spotting birds, including eastern bluebirds and indigo buntings. The raised Meadow Platform features small amphitheater seating and is popular for picnicking, open-air painting, and other activities.

The mature forest is filled with many species of oak as well as tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), and American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*); some specimens are over a century old. Native azaleas bloom in the understory in spring. The Beech Overlook provides a view of a particularly grand specimen near Tuckahoe Creek, where beavers can sometimes be sighted.



Comprised mainly of big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) and Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), the South Meadow—with the Visitor's Center in the background—shows off its fall colors.

Additional Information

Adkins Arboretum

12610 Eveland Rd., Ridgely, MD 21600
(410) 634-2847
www.adkinsarboretum.org


- Hours: Grounds are open year round dawn to dusk. Visitor's Center is currently closed due to the pandemic.
- Admission: \$5 (adults); \$2 (ages 6–18); free (under 6).
- RAP benefits: Free admission.

Families with young kids will enjoy the stone labyrinth, passionflower teepee, and mud kitchen station for making mud pies in Emily's Play Garden. The garden is conveniently located near a pen for a small herd of resident goats, which earn their keep by eating invasive weeds.

BUILDING A LOVE FOR NATURE

Nature education for both adults and children is offered year round, ranging from guided bird migration walks to workshops on invasive plant identification. The popular spring and fall plant sales provide a wide selection of native species for home gardens. In past years, a fall beer garden with live music has attracted a diverse demographic of all ages, and the Fairyfest has been a favorite with families with young children. For now, most events have been postponed or gone virtual.

History buffs will appreciate Adkins as one of the stops on the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway. A self-guided audio tour interprets the role the Eastern Shore's natural landscape played in the flight of African Americans from slavery to freedom in the 19th century. Although the tour is currently unavailable because the Visitor's Center is closed, plans are underway to make it accessible virtually.

About 20,000 visitors come to Adkins each year to hike, bike, and simply get away from city life. Land steward professionals and school groups come to learn about the ecological importance of native plants in the coastal plain. "We meet people at whatever level of interest they have in nature and try to build on that," says Tiernan. In short, Adkins has something for everyone. 

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