



The Hawthorn

Winter 2019

Merryspring's Winter Wassail A Community Celebration

The days are getting shorter, the wind is blowing colder, and the leaves have left the trees. Must be time to celebrate the winter solstice at Merryspring's annual Winter Wassail!

This year's event will take place on **Saturday, December 14 from 2:00 to 5:00 pm**, with a snow date set for Sunday, December 15.



Fires burn bright at the Winter Wassail.

A fun community celebration, our Winter Wassail is open to all ages, free of charge. A host of children's craft activities will be offered, including popular favorites like pinecone birdfeeders and winter crowns. The Highland Mary Morris dance troupe will return again this year, followed by a vocal performance of traditional and medieval carols by our resident Mill Street singers. Outdoors, crackling fires will keep guests warm, and American chestnuts will be roasted and served by longtime volunteer Eric Evans. As dusk falls, the traditional Finnish jätkänkynttilä will be lit, lighting up the winter night.

All throughout the day, hot wassail will be served. Wassail is a drink made of apple cider, served hot from a communal bowl and used in the tradition of wassailing. Dating back to the Middle Ages, wassailing was a way not only to celebrate a fruitful harvest but also look forward to a bountiful new year. Our wassail is alcohol-free and made from a mix of apple cider, other fruit juices, and spices.

In addition to the fun and games, a number of wreaths and greenery will be on sale as a fundraiser for Merryspring.

We hope you will join us in celebrating the end of the year, the winter solstice, the apple harvest, and our midcoast community at this year's Winter Wassail.

Hope to See You at the Craft Fair

Please come visit the Merryspring table during this year's Annual Craft Fair at the First Congregational Church in Camden during Christmas By the Sea on **Saturday, December 7, from 9:00 am - 2:00 pm**.

Merryspring will be selling many old favorites at the Craft Fair, from homemade centerpieces, decorative wreaths, and tree ornaments, to Jabebo earrings, greenery, herbal room sprays, paperwhites, and more.

All proceeds from the Merryspring table benefit the Nature Center. So come start your holiday shopping and support us and the many other talented vendors who will be there.

Any unsold merchandise will be available at the Merryspring office throughout December.



Be sure to visit the Merryspring table at the Annual Craft Fair.

Wassail Schedule

Saturday, December 14

2:00 – 5:00 – *Crafts, children's activities, wassail, and refreshments*

2:30 – *Highland Mary Morris Dancers*

3:00 – *Mill Street Singers*

3:30 – *Lighting of the Jätäkänkynttilä*

Merryspring Nature Center

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www.merryspring.org

Mission Statement

Merryspring's mission is to practice, teach, and advocate sound principles of ecology, conservation, and horticulture in order to protect our natural environment and to provide natural landscapes and cultivated areas for public enjoyment.

Hours of Operation

The park is open free of charge from dawn to dusk every day of the year. Our offices and library are open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., or by appointment.

Membership Levels

Individual	\$35—49
Family	\$50—99
Business	\$50 or more
Friend	\$100—249
Donor	\$250—499
Steward	\$500—999
Conservator	\$1,000—2,499
Partner	\$2,500—4,999
Patron	\$5,000 or more

Keeping in Touch

You can sign up for our **eUpdates** at www.merryspring.org to receive the latest news on programs and events. Or you can visit Merryspring's Facebook page, where you can check on upcoming events. Please go to www.tinyurl.com/merryspring-facebook/.

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President's Message

'Tis the Season

By Ray Andresen

It's that time of the year ... you know, when your mailbox starts filling up with holiday missives from family and friends carrying every little detail of the past year.

Well — ho, ho, ho — 'tis the season for a timely review of what's happened at your Nature Center during 2019.

First, our Tuesday Talks were more popular than ever. We attracted about 900 people to 34 different presentations on everything from Tidal Energy to the Snakes of Maine and from Backyard Herbalism to the Geological History of Camden and Rockport. The oldest of our Environmental Education Programs, this weekly series also included talks about Poisonous Plants, the Appalachian Trail, Skunks, Spiders, the Langlais Sculpture Preserve, and seven sessions devoted to Tending the Perennial Garden.

Second, we almost doubled our number of Weekend Workshops. Between March and November, we held 17 workshops on everything from Composting to Mushroom Identification, from Building Nesting Boxes to Invasive Pests, from Experimenting with Indigo to Seed-Starting and Garden Planning. We also have held a total of 10 Free Family Programs, including the ever-popular Bug Safari, Vernal Pool Walk, and Fairy Festival (see page 4); and we'll make it 11 on December 14 with our annual Winter Wassail (see page 1).

Third, we continued to expand our Community Outreach by engaging more than 550 children from local schools, scouting troops, and youth organizations in a year-long series of nature hikes, classroom activities, and outdoor learning experiences. And for the sixth consecutive year, we co-sponsored two weeks of Summer Ecology Camps at Merryspring with the Knox-Lincoln Soil & Water Conservation District.

Fourth, we made more improvements to our "physical" plant. We have a new fence around the Rose Garden, a better ventilating system in the greenhouse, a refurbished floor in the Rose Cottage, three new footbridges along the Perimeter Trail, and even a new oil tank in the basement. We also have undertaken a scientific survey of invasive plants at Merryspring and will be unveiling a remediation plan in the near future.

Fifth, and finally, our cultivated gardens continued to be a big attraction for visitors from near and far, including a group of Italian tourists (see page 4). The gardens were the centerpiece for several weddings and parties during the year, as well as the Annual Maine Herbalist Gathering. Our raised beds continue to be a big hit with our friends from Coastal Opportunities.

So, all in all, it's' been another exciting, eventful year at Merryspring, and we have lots to be thankful for.

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Volunteers Needed

Merryspring can always use more volunteers. If you have some free time to help with our gardens, trails, educational programs, or fundraising events, please call us at 236-2239 or stop by the office to find out how and when you can help. In particular, we are looking for extra volunteers to help with the following:

- Rose Garden
- Herb Garden
- Hosta Garden
- Trail Maintenance
- Invasives Removal
- Holiday Crafts
- Winter Wassail
- Spring Plant Sale
- Summer Kitchen Tour

For more information, please contact Program Director Brett Willard at education@merryspring.org.

Montessori Students Enjoying Field Trips to Nature Center

Since mid-September, students from the Children's House Montessori School in Camden have visited Merryspring every other Thursday for a series of outdoor field trips with Program Director Brett Willard. The trips were planned with Germaine Koomen, lead teacher for the Jade Door classroom at Children's House.

The Montessori group includes students of mixed ages, between 4 and 9 years old. Some of the students have been visiting Merryspring for several years through our partnership with Children's House, while many visited the park for the first time this season. All of the students have been engaged in nature walks, experiments, observations, and creative activities surrounding ecology and the changing seasons.

"One of the highlights of our curriculum has been the biweekly nature lessons with Brett," said Ms. Koomen. "Brett worked with me to create a curriculum based on our class studies. He led us on nature walks where he patiently and knowledgeably examined and explained the students' observations. One kindergartener exclaimed 'I have eagle eyes!' after his joy in finding a mushroom.

"Brett was able to capture the interest of all students in our k-3 group. We studied the seasons, needs of plants and animals, native Maine wildlife, and migrations of different animals. We had some amazing experiences: finding a fifth instar monarch caterpillar, a nymph grasshopper, and identifying trees and native plants.

"After each lesson, Brett helped our students create and complete nature journals. It became difficult to convince students to leave their work to go home!

"These experiences have led to a heightened interest in finding insects in our own playground. The students joyfully searched for ladybugs and moths. Each citing of a butterfly or moth caused the entire class to run to any finding. Many students began animal research reports.

"Thank you, Merryspring, for enhancing our studies and bringing ecology to our curriculum. Early experiences with nature create a lifelong love of our environment. These are our future ecologists."

... and some comments from those future ecologists

"When I went to Merryspring, I learned about plants and animals from doll's eyes to moose skulls. We also touched mushrooms and looked in bird's nests. In the beginning, it was warm. In the end, it was cold. In between, it was colorful and brilliant."

"I liked the bunny fur and being right in nature and I liked learning how to measure a tree."

"I love the deer game. I love the animal's skin that you showed us. I love the animal skulls. I especially love the rabbit skin."

"I learned so much more because I was right in nature. I remember the smell of the skunk, the soft fur of a weasel, and watching the trees drop their leaves on the cold ground."



Montessori students go birdwatching...



and find out how to measure a tree...



and learn about American chestnuts from Program Director Brett Willard.

“Buongiorno,” Merryspring

In the course of a year, Merryspring welcomes visitors from midcoast Maine, New England, many other states, and even from around the world. But 22 Italian tourists, all at the same time? That happened this October when the Nature Center hosted 22 Italian tourists for a guided tour led by Garden Manager Denise DeSpirito and Program Director Brett Willard.



Visitors from Italy gather at the Merryspring perennial garden for a photo with tour guides Denise DeSpirito and Brett Willard.

The tour visit was made possible by John Jordan of the Italian Program, a company based in Boston that offers Italian language courses, tours, and cultural exchange programs. The group was traveling north from Boston through New England, with their final destination being Acadia National Park. After a stay in Portland, the group visited Merryspring before heading up the coast.

The tour of Merryspring started with a guided walk through the gardens, led by Denise. The group learned a short history of Merryspring and saw many late-blooming flowers, including many native species. The pollinators gave their best display as the autumn blooms attracted a great variety of bees, hoverflies, and wasps. Wandering out of the gardens, the tour group continued through the Merryspring grounds, viewing the vernal pool, stopping at a few interesting trees (including a black walnut, which Denise pointed out is used to make the popular Italian liqueur nocino), and passing by the Merry Spring, before ending up at the Goose River overlook at the top of Trail #4, where the visitors were greeted with a dazzling display of autumn foliage, with the red maples at the peak of their showy season.

Huge Crowd Attends Annual Fairy Festival

If you visited the park on Sunday, September 29, you would have been greeted by crowds of families and fairies as this year’s annual Fall Fairy Festival brought close to 200 people to the Nature Center.

The Fall Fairy Festival has been an annual tradition at Merryspring since 2013. The event brings in children and their families from all over midcoast Maine and expands upon Merryspring’s (and Mane’s) long tradition of building fairy houses in the forest. This year was a fantastic success, bringing families to Merryspring — including many for the first time — to create, explore, and imagine in our gardens and woodlands.



Far left: forts being built amid the fairy houses; Left: a fairy house fit for a king; Top: Fairy sisters Ida and Thea dressed for the occasion.



2020 Events Calendar

WINTER TUESDAY TALKS

Sponsored by  Allen
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- Jan 21 A Trip to the Arctic—*Carla Skinder*
- Jan 28 The World of Beetles—*Bob Emmons*
- Feb 4 Restoring Wabenaki Sweetgrass in Acadia National Park—*Suzanne Greenlaw*
- Feb 11 How to Eat an Acorn—*Frank Giglio*
- Feb 18 Summering with Vultures—*Don Reimer*
- Feb 25 More of Meryspring’s Secrets—*Harbour Mitchell*
- March 3 Coffee from Crop to Cup—*Meredyth Lynn*
- March 10 Entomology of Fly Fishing—*Clay Kirby*
- March 17 Health Benefits of Wild Blueberries—*Dorothy Klimis*
- March 24 Birds, Flowers, and Song—*Gary Roberts*
- March 31 Art & Environment: MFT’s Fiore Art Center—*Anna Witholt Abaldo*
- April 7 Pinnipeds in Maine’s Rivers and Coastal Waters—*Kristina Cammen*
- April 14 The State of Maine’s Loons—*Nick Lund*

SPRING TUESDAY TALKS

- April 21 Coyote: America’s Song Dog—*Geri Vistein*
- April 28 Re-Tree Us—*Richard Hodges*
- May 5 Maine Seabird Survey—*John Anderson*
- May 12 Mars, Glaciers, and Climate Change—*James Fastook*
- May 19 The Maine Butterfly Survey—*Herb Wilson*
- May 26 Opening the Spring Garden—*John Fromer*

All Tuesday Talks begin at 12 noon and generally last about one hour.

WEEKEND WORKSHOPS

- Feb 15 **Drying and Arranging Flowers**—*John Fromer* \$35M/\$40NM
10–11 a.m. Learn to preserve the color and shape of flowers.
- March 28 **Seed Starting and Garden Planning**—*John Fromer* \$35M/\$40NM
9 a.m.—12 p.m. Learn the basics of starting seeds indoors.
- April 11 **Insect Identification and Preservation**—*Charlene Donahue* Cost TBD
10 a.m.—12 p.m. Learn to identify, classify, mount, and preserve insects.
- April 25 **Propagation, Rootings, and Cuttings**—*John Fromer* \$25M/\$30NM
10 a.m.—12 p.m. Learn to propagate plants indoors from rootings & cuttings.
- May 2 **Spring Foraging**—*Tom Seymour* \$10M/\$15NM
10 a.m.—12 p.m. Find what edible plants are growing in your back yard.
- May 9 **Birding Workshop and Walk**—*Kristen Lindquist* Free to all
8–10 a.m. Learn about the spring migration. Look and listen for birds.
- May 30 **Dividing and Transplanting**—*John Fromer* \$25M/\$30NM
9 a.m.—12 p.m. Learn to transplant seedlings outdoors; divide perennials.



Worm Bin Harvest Party

January 16, 6–8 p.m.
Jock Robie teaches how to turn kitchen waste into useful soil amendments using earthworms. Pre-register for a free worm bin. Free to all.



Winter Ecology Walk

January 25, 10–11 a.m.
Explore Meryspring’s fields and woodlands, learn how to identify trees without their leaves, look for tracks and other signs of animals. Free to all.



Family Spring and Vernal Pool Nature Walk

May 23, 10–11 a.m.
Observe Meryspring’s vernal pool habitat, look for spring wildflowers, and listen for birds. Free to all.





Members of Ms. Doshi's class from Ashwood Waldorf School help to close the garden beds.

Putting the Gardens to Bed

Putting Merryspring's gardens to bed each year is no small feat. With all of the mulching, pulling, and pruning to be done in the autumn, any volunteer help is welcome.

So it was a pleasant surprise this year to have not one, but two different school groups play an integral role in closing up our gardens for the winter.

First came a group from the Ashwood Waldorf School, which has a long history of volunteer projects at Merryspring. This year we were able to count on them to help with the Maine Daylily Society display garden. Students as young as six (and some of their even younger siblings and parents) came with Ms. Doshi's class to pull dried stalks and weeds and to help close up the beds with our own volunteers. The class was visiting as part of its annual Fall Service Day, which sends students, teachers, and parents into the community to volunteer.

Later in the fall, students from Herring Gut Learning Center in Port Clyde visited Merryspring to clean up the Children's Garden, including pulling and composting plants and spreading compost and mulch. After their garden work, the group hit the trails where they helped pull invasive plants and widen corridors ahead of the winter season. Led by Herring Gut's Liz Bowe and Georgie Burruss, the group was composed of high school students from around midcoast Maine who meet regularly throughout the year for career-readiness, science literacy, and service-learning projects. This was Herring Gut's first visit to Merryspring in many years, and we hope to continue a mutually beneficial partnership with them in the future.

Greenhouse Classes Return in 2020

With such a short growing season, starting a garden in Maine can be difficult for newcomers. To help novices get up to speed, or for just anybody who wants to learn tricks about starting their garden from scratch, Merryspring will offer a three-part workshop series about starting a garden indoors.

Part of our Weekend Workshop series, these once-a-month classes will be led by Merryspring volunteer instructor John Fromer. Each class will take place in the Aileen Lubin Greenhouse. Participants can sign up for each class individually; you do not need to commit to all three. Each class will be hands-on, and guests will be able to take home seedlings and plants at the end of each session.

The classes will start with Seed Starting & Garden Planning on March 28, where each guest will plant and take home two flats of selected flower and vegetable seeds. On April 25 we will offer a Propagation, Rooting, and Cutting class, where each guest will be able to take home a lily and dahlia. Finally, the "greenhouse series" concludes on May 30, with a session on Dividing and Transplanting, where attendees will transplant previously started plants into the Merryspring gardens and then take divided plants home.

All materials for these classes are provided with the admission price. Space and materials are limited for each of these sessions, so guests MUST sign up prior to a set date. Each session fee is listed under workshops on the preceding page.



Participants will learn to start seeds in the first of three greenhouse classes offered at Merryspring.

Who Knew? More History Being Dug Up at Merryspring

By Harbour Mitchell

Hi again. Harbour Mitchell, here. I want to bring you up to date with the archaeology being done at Merryspring. I've completed my year exploring the archaeology of two different sites at Merryspring. The oldest site is a colonial period homestead last occupied by a man named Elisha Gibbs. It dates from about 1770 to about 1800. The younger one was first occupied by Asa Hosmer, an early Camden resident, and predecessor to many of the region's current inhabitants (ever heard of Hosmer Pond?). Asa Hosmer's farm dates from about 1800 to about 1825. This winter I'll be analyzing the archaeological materials, and writing a report of the findings. But I wanted to give you a little preview of the exciting results from testing the Elisha Gibbs Homestead Site. We'll talk about the Asa Hosmer Farm Site in a future newsletter.



Reproduction of 18th century Fazackerly delft bowl.

The Elisha Gibbs homestead appears to be one of the earliest homes in what is modern-day Camden. Fazackerly delft pottery (c.1760-1770), along with other, contemporary ceramics (English brown salt glazed stoneware, for example), suggests the homestead's original builders might even predate Camden's first recorded inhabitants (c.1769).

During the latter part of the Revolutionary War, the homestead may have also served as a small Continental Army encampment.

Gunflints and other European materials, along with materials attributed to Native Americans of the time, suggest a limited military force may have been stationed at the homestead, in the surrounding field, and at what is today the Conway House (materials identical to those recovered at Merryspring are also present at the Conway House).

As a result of archaeological efforts at Merryspring, it's now clear that an eleven-mile-long road led from the head of Conway Road (by the Subway Sandwich Shop), right through Merryspring, to Thomaston, the Continental headquarters at the time. During the latter parts of the Revolutionary War, a small Continental military force may have been stationed at Merryspring and the Conway House to guard this road, and thwart its use by the British.

In 1779, Continental forces lost a battle with British forces at Castine, resulting in abandonment of all settlements north of Camden to at least Stockton Springs. The settlers, along with the retreating Continental troops and allied Penobscot warriors, fled south, many taking shelter in Camden. As a result, in 1779, Camden became the Revolutionary War's northern-most "front line." Were British forces to land at Camden or Rockport's deep harbors, and take Thomaston using the then, so called "Warren Road," the British could have controlled almost all of the territory south, to Boston. And Maine may eventually have become part of New Brunswick.

After the war, the homestead was occupied by several different families, including the Hardy and Gregory clans. Elisha Gibbs became the homestead's last tenant in 1799. By then, the old homestead was probably in serious disrepair, and Gibbs likely began construction of what would eventually become (in 1803) Asa Hosmer's large, federal-style farmhouse.

Well, there you have it, a sneak preview of some of what we now know about Merryspring's history. Two years ago, we didn't know any of this existed.

Who knew?



Snowshoes Available to Members

Merryspring is a place enjoyed by nature lovers of all ages during all seasons, and that includes the winter months. When the snow falls, the Nature Center becomes a haven for cross-country skiers and snowshoe enthusiasts.

To make it even more enticing, Merryspring has six pairs of snowshoes that members can use for free. The snow shoes, donated by LL Bean, are available in sizes ranging from child to adult. Snowshoes are also available for free to anyone during winter programs on a first-come, first-served basis. So consider visiting us this winter for your next outdoor adventure. It's a great way to see the park in a whole new way.





P.O. Box 893
Camden, ME 04843



Reserve Merryspring for Your Event

Remember to think of Merryspring when you or your friends are planning a wedding, memorial service, meeting, or party. Conveniently located near Route 1 in Camden and Rockport, Merryspring offers a secluded, quiet location for your event. Stunning gardens and an outdoor hexagon are perfect for small ceremonies. A well-tended lawn bordered by flower beds filled with spectacular color from June through September will accommodate a tent for up to 200 guests. And the meeting room inside the Ross Center can accommodate up to 40 people.

