

# ***Restoring Our Urban Forest:*** **18th EcoSavvy Symposium Kicks Off 2022**

*By Aimee Martin*

Since its inception in 2004, the Green Spring Gardens Master Gardener EcoSavvy Symposium has evolved into a well-respected annual forum addressing sustainable gardening practices to build healthy soil, increase bio-diversity, reduce water usage and runoff as well as limit pesticide use. This year's symposium carried this proud reputation forward.



From top to bottom, from satellite monitoring to the planting hole, the 18th Annual GSEMG EcoSavvy Symposium on Feb. 19 examined the challenges of *Restoring Our Urban Forest, One Yard at a Time*. Eighty-five participants (including 36 Extension Master Gardeners) from Fairfax County and outside the county attended this year's virtual symposium to understand the bio-environmental impact of a declining urban forest and to learn what each of us can do to slow/reverse further canopy loss.

Three presenters described the daunting challenges, but also outlined how public education and advocacy can lead to urgently needed change:

- **Our Shrinking Tree Canopy – Cause and Effect** with Dr. Eric Wiseman, Associate Professor of Urban Forestry and Director, Virginia Big Tree Program, Virginia Tech.
- **Case Study – Restoring and Enhancing the Tree Canopy of Washington DC** with Melinda Peters, Director of Education, Casey Trees of Washington DC.
- **Bringing It Home – Practical and Actionable** with Dr. Jim McGlone, Urban Forest Conservationist, Virginia Department of Forestry.



## **Our Shrinking Tree Canopy – Cause and Effect**

Dr. Wiseman outlined the current challenges facing Virginia and the United States to reverse the ongoing decline of the rural and urban forest canopy. Tree cover in US urban areas is declining at a rate of 138,000 acres annually, about 28 million trees per year, with the consequent loss of ecosystem benefits worth \$96 billion.

While we face many direct/indirect threats – urban sprawl, climate change associated with heat, drought and pest spread, and loss of soil – the primary direct cause of urban canopy decline is lack of consideration for protecting and replenishing trees when land is developed. Advocacy, education and investment are required at all levels to further educate everyone about the economic, health and environmental value of trees.

## **Case Study – Restoring and Enhancing the Tree Canopy Of Washington DC**

Melinda Peters described how a nonprofit agency takes this advocacy and action to the local level. Historically, trees have always been an important part of the district’s planning, but by 1995, 60% of the canopy had been lost. Since its founding in 1999 by philanthropist and advocate Betty Brown Casey, Casey Trees has developed a sustainable program of public advocacy for policies and laws, multiple different programs for tree planting and maintenance, public education, and training for all ages.

Casey works to pass legislation such as urban forest protection and to establish conservation easements to protect the DC urban forest. Casey trains advocates and volunteers to assist in planting and maintenance, and in training the next generation of tree protectors. They aim to include areas where more families are below the poverty line.



In 2021, Casey began working with Fairfax County’s Urban Forestry Management Division on a pilot residential tree planting initiative around the Richmond Highway Commercial Revitalization District. Over 92% of the 150 trees planted to date are medium to large trees.

## **Bringing it Home – How to Build a Forest in Your Front Yard**

Dr. Jim McGlone tackled the urban forest decline at the down-in-the-dirt level. He covered the basics: choosing plants suitable for your conditions and building plant communities with horizontal and vertical layers. Then he walked the audience through the steps: how to inspect plants before buying, prepping, and planting. Taking advocacy to the local level, Dr McGlone studs his garden with explanatory signs advocating native plantings.

Feedback from attendees strongly indicated that this year’s EcoSavvy Symposium provided the science-based, actionable information that previous symposiums became known for. When asked this question, more than 95% of the audience replied *Yes*: “This symposium gave me actionable ideas of what I could do to restore and sustain our tree canopy.”



**Please join us in 2023!**

*(Groundbreakers, Spring 2022)*