



The Conservation Strip

John Marshall Soil & Water Conservation District

An Agricultural Book Review

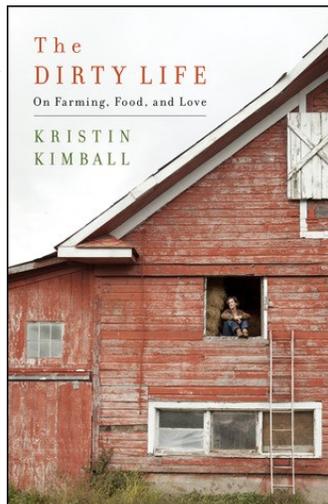
Fall 2020

by Melissa Allen, Conservation Specialist

The Dirty Life – On Farming, Food, and Love, By Kristin Kimball

I will be the first to admit my reading list is getting long. Who am I kidding? My life “to-do” list is getting long. I often wonder what I did with my time before marriage, children, and a career. How did I fill my free time? I remember reading more – curling up with a good book and getting lost for hours, even reading into the wee hours of the morning. Now, I prefer to listen to audiobooks because my multitasking brain insists that I listen to a book and check another task off of my “to-do” list at the same time. Back to my reading list... I am always listening to what landowners and farmers are reading. I want to read what they are reading; it makes for a much more interesting conversation in the field. One landowner and farmer (we won't name him because it makes it more interesting for him to remain a mystery) always contributes to my list of books. I scribble the titles of these books on the edge of my clipboard,

maps, and whatever scrap paper I have. Sometimes these scraps of paper elude me and I have to email him for the title. Earlier in the summer he mentioned *The Dirty Life* by Kristin Kimball and how he thought I would enjoy the book. He described the book and I was hooked. I needed to see if an audiobook copy was available. Well, no such luck. I was going to have to READ a book. Well, I have read the book – I won't embarrass myself and tell you how long it took me to READ.



Kimball describes her life journey as she leaves her career as a freelance writer in New York City for a 500-ac farm, Essex Farm, in upstate New York with a farmer she just interviewed. *The Dirty Life* details her first year on this new farm with new responsibilities, new hardships, and new joys. Kimball uses descriptions that bring to life each farm chore as she struggles to find her footing. She describes a cow as being “no better lesson in commitment” with her udder

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Mission Statement

Our Mission is to provide leadership, technical assistance, information, and education to the citizens of Fauquier County in proper soil stewardship, agricultural conservation methods, and water quality protection so as to ensure the wise use of the county's natural resources.



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When Volunteers Go Bad

by Sarah Parmelee, Area Forester, Virginia Department of Forestry

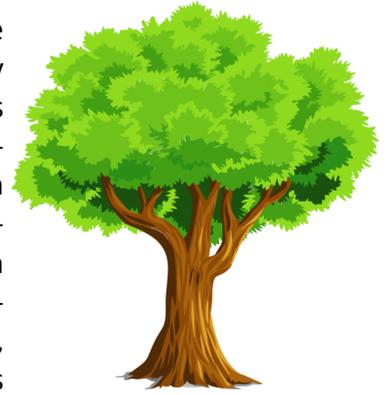
Last fall, a little seedling popped up in my yard. It was too young to be readily identifiable, so I left it on the off chance that it was something cool. This spring when it leafed out, I realized that it was a butterfly bush. Now, I do not have any other butterfly bushes in my yard, but other folks in my neighborhood do, and this "volunteer" bush in my yard likely came from seeds spread from a neighbor's yard. Aside from non-native butterfly bushes, my neighbors also have non-native Japanese barberry, burning bush, and Bradford pear that they care for and maintain as part of their landscaping.

Our choices for landscaping may seem innocent enough, but what we plant in our yards matters to our neighbors and our forests because plants like to spread. Some will spread through roots or rhizomes like mints, irises and tree-of-heaven. Others like sycamore, mulberry or cockleburs will produce seeds that disperse in the wind or will be spread by animals. In a yard with a mowed lawn and weeded flowerbeds, there may be few "volunteers" popping up, but downwind, downstream or along paths taken by wildlife, there may be many.

Why does this matter? Many of the plants that we plant in our yards and gardens are not native to this area (such as the plants in my neighbors' yard mentioned earlier.) Plant species spend thousands of years developing important relationships within the place where they grow. This includes relationships between plants and pollinating insects, as well as with larger critters such as birds and deer. When we take a plant that has evolved to live in and contribute to its local ecosystem and replace it with a plant that's native to an ecosystem halfway across the world, we disrupt many of these relationships.

Plants that do not have these developed relationships with the other native fauna are not as easily controlled because they have few natural predators. For example, deer like to eat the growing tips of na-

tive hardwood trees like oak seedlings, but they do not like to eat the tips of tree-of-heaven or Japanese barberry (both non-native, invasive species). Therefore, when the seeds of these non-native plants disperse, there are no predators



to slow their growth and spread. This contributes to the widespread infestation of private and public forestland with various non-native plants, some of which were first introduced in our landscaped yards. This is detrimental to forest health because these plants do not support important insects (think about pollinators!) and compete with native plants for resources such as sunlight and water.

There's good news, however: you can help! As we focus on our gardens and landscape plans, I encourage you to take a moment to research what you are planting in your yard. For example, a quick Google search will show that butterfly bush is actually bad for butterflies, and local pollinators would be better served if you plant a spicebush or flowering dogwood. There are many trusted resources available to help folks find native plants that work with their landscaping, such as the Virginia Native Plant Society, which provides regional guides for the whole state.

If we bring native plants back into our yards and lives, we will be giving a helping hand to the many important insects and other critters that are so important for keeping our forests healthy and beautiful. Although the butterfly bush was an undesirable discovery, I have also found yellow-poplar, flowering dogwood and sycamores in my garden that have spread there from trees in the neighborhood. Wouldn't it be cool if instead of spreading harmful plants we could inadvertently spread lots of good ones?

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knowing no exceptions or excuses for a milking cow must be milked. Her respect for the cow becomes apparent as she names the cow the cornerstone of the farm. She continues her reverence for the cow describing the various dairy products in great detail concluding that if you do not own a cow or know someone who owns a cow, you must never try raw milk because it would be cruel to taste it once. I admit I have turned up my nose at the offer of raw milk, but now, with Kimball's description, I want to try raw milk. I want to know what I have been missing. As she continues her story to grow everything a community needed, I would find myself full on belly laughing at her descriptions. So much so that my husband and children would want to know what was so funny and I would read the passage to them. One of these was Kimball's sharing of an old joke that a Jersey dairyman keeps a Holstein in the barn in case the well runs dry, so he'll have something to wash the dishes with. I laughed and laughed – thinking of farmers I could share this joke with.

In another passage, she begins to describe a sugar bush. I remember thinking "what the heck is a sugar bush?" As someone from rural Virginia (along the

North Carolina border), I had never heard of such a thing. It turns out that a sugar bush is a group of trees, mostly sugar maples, which is used for maple syrup. Her description of the history left me wanting to know more – more about the process, more about sugar maples. I was hooked and planning a sugar bush on a small piece of land of my own. I found myself researching species and wanting to devour all the information I could find. Kimball's many descriptions of their first year at Essex farm have done just that – captivate and create longing. She captivates you with vivid descriptions and provides just enough information that you MUST go searching for more. Kimball ends the book with the following, "unknown outpaces known like to do outpaces done." This simple but profound phrase may become my new mantra. How true this statement and how very important is to remember that the unknown will always be, just like there will always be more items on my "to-do" list. I have enjoyed this book so much that I cannot wait to purchase my own copy. I also will be READING her next book *Good Husbandry; Growing Food, Love, and Family on Essex Farm*. And thank you to the mystery farmer for always sharing a good book. Stay tuned for the next review.

Pondzilla

by Roger Flint, Conservation Specialist

Every late summer, and spring the John Marshall SWCD is contacted by concerned pond owners about algae, and pond weeds taking over their ponds. This can be attributed to several factors, such as nutrient saturation, the depth of the pond, or a water source that leads to poor water quality.

Nutrients or fertilizers come from stormwater runoff in nearby fields, roads, lawns, or other areas. Bare land & fields lacking in vegetative cover contribute to soil erosion and an increase of sediments, which can also have fertilizers attached to them. These fertiliz-

ers and nutrients serve only to feed aquatic plants like algae and lily pads, causing them to grow rapidly. Also, wildlife such as waterfowl can add a lot of nutrients to the pond when many geese, and ducks nest and feed around a pond. These birds need to be encouraged to move on or keep their populations down. Both waterfowl, and sediments can be controlled by leaving a buffer of grass around the pond to act as a water filter, and, with some height by limited mowing, it will discourage the waterfowl from nesting in the spring for fear of predators.

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The depth of a pond can encourage aquatic plants to grow around the edge of a pond. A shallower pond can cause the water temperature to be warmer but also lets the sunlight penetrate to the bottom where the classic water weeds such as lily pads get their start. The deeper the pond edge is, the less likely the weeds will get started. Ideally, you would want the pond to be 3+ feet deep at locations 3 feet from the bank. Darkening the water color a deep blue color with a safe dye in the spring may also help to control aquatic plant growth. Of course, this depends on the inflow and outflow of the water source for your pond.

The water source of your pond needs to be evaluated for water quality and quantity. The most ideal source of water would be a large bold spring originating on your property and with little influence by surrounding areas. The planner should also take into account the land that will drain into the pond. Is it cropland that may provide sediment or pastures with grazing livestock that can provide extra unwanted nutrients. It is critical to be conservation minded of your soil and water resources in order to manage not only your pond but the surrounding lands as well.

Calendar of Events

October 12		John Marshall SWCD Office Closed	
October 14	4:00 PM	John Marshall SWCD Board Meeting	Extension Office
November 3		John Marshall SWCD Office Closed	
November 11		John Marshall SWCD Office Closed	
November 11	TBD	John Marshall SWCD Board Meeting	TBD
November 25	12:00 PM	John Marshall SWCD Office Closed	
November 26-27		John Marshall SWCD Office Closed	
December 9	4:00 PM	John Marshall SWCD Board Meeting	Extension Office
December 24-25		John Marshall SWCD Office Closed	

Staying Connected: The John Marshall SWCD makes it easy to stay connected through social media. If you're on Facebook, "Like" our page to get more-frequent updates on what's happening at the District.



The Conservation Strip is a quarterly publication of the John Marshall Soil & Water Conservation District. To be added to our email list, please send an email to Wendy Merwin at: wendy.merwin@fauquiercounty.gov.

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