

Grasses for the Masses- February 2012

Hope, the thing with wings according to Emily Dickinson, is as important a condition for living as faith and charity, but hope is not sufficient for progress. If we want Chesapeake Bay to be healthy, we have to do more than hope; we have to do every bit we can to make it happen! Grasses for the masses is one of those important bits. .

Volunteers in the program grow wild celery, a type of underwater grass, in small tubs in their homes for ten weeks, then help plant them in local rivers to boost the population of this critical Bay resource. It is a fun and easy way to improve water quality. Chesapeake Bay Foundation provides the equipment, instructions and support needed for growing the grasses.

A headline from a newspaper eleven years ago reads: "Chesapeake Bay is an undeclared ecological disaster!" Unfortunately, not enough has changed. One reason, aside from the lack of political will and the funding shortfall, is the growth in population.

It is not just the tremendous increase in 'we the people', but the concurrent increase in our standard of living requirements; - more sewerage, more lawn and agricultural runoff, more power plant emissions. Land development throughout the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed, which extends to mid New York State, has meant more nutrients and sedimentation for the Bay to handle. The Bay needs our help.

Sixty years ago Chesapeake Bay was both beautiful and productive with extensive grasses that stabilized the Bay's bottom, provided a nursery for fish, shellfish and the abundant blue crab. Even the waterfowl that wintered here to enjoy the submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) now bypass the Bay for waters further south.

The bottom line is that Chesapeake Bay needs us to make an investment in its future by replacing those lost grasses. The investment payoff is real: it means money as the restoration of the Bay's productivity would translate into jobs, jobs that are important to a traditional Virginia way of life.

Underwater grasses (SAV) do more than provide food and shelter for aquatic creatures and filter pollution. They also slow wave action and reduce shoreline erosion, two factors becoming important as more ferocious weather becomes more prevalent as our climate changes.

There will be a workshop introducing the grasses program at Whitcomb Lodge at Beaverdam Park, 8687 Roaring Springs Road, Gloucester, on Saturday, February 4 from 10:30 until 12:30 AM. There is a \$40 program fee per grass unit that helps to continue the program by providing equipment for grass growers across the state.

Don't delay signing up as space in the workshop is limited. E-mail Bill Walker at wwalker@inna.net or phone 804-693-6540. Bill will be glad to answer any questions you may have. In addition, once your grasses have matured, you will have the fun of planting them at designated restoration spots along the James River with CBF staff. This excursion is done by permit only, but guaranteed to be a neat experience.

A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR THE BIRDS!

Master Gardener, Felicity Ericson is again this year supporting the Northern Neck Audubon Bird Club in their outreach to provide the perfect 'rentals' for bluebirds. Wonderful cedar bluebird boxes will be available at 'Curves' in the Edgehill Shopping Center and at the Morning Glory Gallery in Ware Neck, near Brent and Becky's Bulbs.

Designed to provide habitat requirements specific to bluebirds, these elegant houses remain \$15. One may not be able to prove cause and effect but Felicity informed us that last year the Gloucester-Mathews Christmas Bird Count turned in the highest bluebird numbers for the entire United States. Hope is definitely the thing with wings.