



Virginia's Chesterfield County transforms turf into an urban orchard

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In discussions of water quality and environmental stewardship, you often hear people talk about the need to eliminate “managed turf.” The term refers to those big grassy expanses that must be fertilized, watered and mowed, and that generally aren’t as good as more natural landscapes at trapping and filtering rainwater.

Virginia’s [Chesterfield County](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795)

[\[http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795\]](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795) had just such a stretch of grass along its Government Center Parkway, a four-lane road that runs through its municipal administration complex.

But today, that stretch of land is a place where you can find some great examples of native Virginia fruiting trees, such as the [pawpaw](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32835/asiminia-triloba)

[\[http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32835/asiminia-triloba\]](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32835/asiminia-triloba), or the [common persimmon](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32845/diospyros-virginiana-32845)

[\[http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32845/diospyros virginiana-32845\]](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32845/diospyros-virginiana-32845), along with plums, peaches, apples and more.

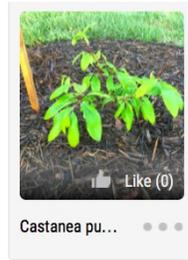
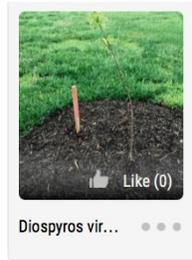
From field to orchard

This is Chesterfield County’s urban orchard and tree walk. The orchard was started in 2013 in partnership with Virginia-based Zynnovation LLC. It was used as a testing ground for the company’s “TreeDiaper” watering mats.

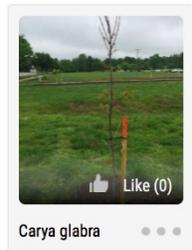
TreeDiapers—which have proven effective at keeping young trees adequately watered without as much maintenance and added

water as typical tree bags—are still used in the orchard. The landscape has since been expanded, thanks to a grant from the Richmond Urban Tree Canopy Initiative.

“This is something different, and hopefully everyone will really enjoy it,” said Lisa Ferrel, a certified arborist and horticulturalist who works in Chesterfield County’s horticulture shop. “We thought having an edible landscape was a neat idea.”



The trees are at varying stages of maturity. While some have been in place since 2013, the most recent additions are in many cases very small saplings. Ferrel has been entering all of the trees in the orchard onto [Chesterfield County’s Plants Map profile](#)



[<http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795>], which helps ensure the smaller ones aren’t overlooked.

“Right now this plant is so small I have marked it with flags!” she notes on the Plants Map page for a [New Jersey Tea tree](#) [<http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32915>] within the landscape.

Educating the public

She plans to keep notes on Plants Map about how the young trees fare, in the hopes that information shared about pests and other challenges can help local homeowners or landscapers. Ferrel placed a priority on selecting native varieties for the urban orchard and tree walk. She hopes seeing these plants on county property will have an impact.

“I hope it will lead to people requesting them more from their local garden shops,” she said. “Maybe we’ll see more of these plants around.”

Ferrel found Plants Map while searching for ways to add Web-enabled identification tags [<http://info.plantsmap.com/tags>] to the plants in the urban orchard and tree walk. Her goal is to create an interactive landscape where county employees, residents and others can come for fitness, fresh air, seasonal fruits and education about the plants around them.

She wants to incorporate the tree walk into the county’s fitness program for employees, and she plans to invite the local cooperative extension office to host talks there.

More trees, more visitors

Already, she notices that the area gets more foot traffic with the addition of the trees.

“There are a lot of people who walk up and down Government Center Parkway on breaks or lunch,” she said. “There’s a sidewalk where I planted an alley of [linden trees](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32847/tilia-americana-32847/) [<http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32847/tilia-americana-32847/>], and they’re small now, but I’ve just seen people walking more on that sidewalk instead of cutting through the field.”



County utilities workers, who pass through the orchard on their way from the utilities building to their trucks, are in an especially good position to benefit from the orchard.

“They get the first pick at the fruit, since they pass through every day,” Ferrel

said.

In addition to food for humans, the orchard and tree walk also include species that provide specific benefits to wildlife. [Arrowwood Viburnum](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32834/) [<http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32834/>], for example, is attractive to butterflies and birds. The [shagbark hickory](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32841/) [<http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/plants/32841/>] develops a shaggy textured bark as it matures, and the crevices of its bark provide important roosting habitat for animals such as bats.

Ferrel hopes to provide facts like these through the trees’ Plants Map pages. She is planning to order and install [Plants Map interactive plant signs and tags](http://info.plantsmap.com/tags) [<http://info.plantsmap.com/tags>] in the orchard and tree walk, so that passersby can learn a little something from a landscape that is gradually morphing into something much more than a green field of mowed grass.

To learn more, visit [Chesterfield County](http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/) [<http://www.plantsmap.com/organizations/24795/>] on Plants Map.

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