

Montgomery County's Vine Cutting Program Needs to Exclude Natives



Clusters of large red-orange flowers of Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*) beckon pollinating bumble bees and hummingbirds. Photo by J. Swearingen.

Montgomery County's Department of Transportation (MCDOT) recently announced a new program, the Residential Vine Cutting Program (accessible via the QR code below), that urges residents to *save trees by cutting vines that grow on trees*. The program has worthy intentions, but it may be interpreted as encouraging the cutting of all vines on trees. It fails to distinguish between the destructive effect of non-native invasive vines and the ecological value of native vines. Native vines are extremely important ecologically and do not smother, choke, girdle, weigh down, or topple trees like non-native invasive vines are known to do.

In one instance, the program

description states: "*Some natives are worth saving*"--without specifying which native species are being referred to. **The Vine Cutting Program needs to clearly state that only non-native invasive vines should be cut, and that native vines should be left alone.**

In Montgomery County, there are many beneficial native vines. Some of the most common native woody vines that are likely to be encountered in suburban and urban settings are: Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*), Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), Cat Greenbriar (*Smilax glauca*), Roundleaf Greenbriar (*Smilax rotundifolia*), Summer Grape (*Vitis aestivalis*), and Frost Grape (*Vitis vulpina*). These plants provide



Striking floral displays of Coral or Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) attract pollinating bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Photo by P. Foster.

Regarding the many species of native grapes in the area, local botanist John Parrish states: "Tangles of grapevines provide excellent cover and nesting sites for songbirds as well as stringy bark for nesting material. Most importantly, grapevines produce plentiful quantities of fresh fruit consumed by birds and mammals from late summer through fall. Persistent dried raisins of the winter and summer grape are a substantial food source for winter resident songbirds such as the bluebirds, cedar waxwings, hermit thrushes, mockingbirds, and robins. In addition, grape leaves serve as a primary food source for the larval stage of several native moth species."

nectar and pollen for many species of pollinators, critical food for the caterpillars of many butterfly and moth species, and high-energy fruits for resident and migrating birds.

Many of our native vines are on the Maryland Commercial Native Plant List and are sold by Maryland's horticulture industry. Native vines and substitutes for invasives are featured in the Maryland Native Plant Program's regional guides.

We applaud MCDOT's educational efforts to save native trees. However, we request that the language in the Vine Cutting Program be changed to advise that cutting be restricted to non-native invasive vines, and ideally to acknowledge the ecological value of native vines. If you wish to express your views about this new program, call MCDOT's Director's office at: (240) 777-7170 or go to tinyurl.com/3322yssr to contact your Montgomery County Council members.

Thank you to John Parrish for his valuable input.



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