

Alba Tirado

A true native plant hero who has given away more than 1,000 native plants (mostly native ecotypes!) Alba started humbly with no prior gardening experience, a yard full of non-natives, and some pesky invasives. Having lived through a severe drought as a teen, she was motivated to do something different in her yard. She learned about the Montgomery County Rainscapes program and about the same time heard Doug Tallamy speak about the interconnectedness of our yards and nature.

Twelve years and many garden hours later, Alba has transformed her landscape into a thriving ecosystem filled with mostly native ecotype species. *"I dug up my entire front lawn (start small they all said, ha, ha, ha) in an effort to sequester as much water as quickly as possible."* Now her yard is a year-round haven for Bluebirds, Chickadees, Cardinals, Carolina Wrens, Robins,



A monarch that Alba raised from an egg and released, stops by to say "Thanks Alba, for everything".

White-throated Sparrows, Tufted Titmice, abundant pollinators, and an occasional opossum. To manage stormwater, Alba installed a 350-gallon cistern, eleven 55-gallon rain barrels, and a 1,000-gallon pond, connected by a series of pipes and berms to direct the water.

Alba has become an accomplished gardener and land manager. She shares plants from her garden with her friends, neighbors, and anyone else who shows an interest, including letter carriers, delivery folks, and trash collectors. She is a regular

and prolific contributor to plant swaps held by the Wild Ones, Brookside Garden's Greenscapes, and school programs, and is an active Montgomery County Weed Warrior.

"I love that my garden is a Native Plant ambassador—folks stop by to read signs scattered throughout; children stop by to study and count the bees and insects, and occasionally strangers tell me that my garden was instrumental in their ridding their yard of lawn and planting natives."

Liz McDowell

Liz grew up in Philadelphia where her only "green space" was a small neighborhood park. She moved to Frostburg in 1979 to study cave-dwelling bats at the Appalachian Laboratory. After earning an MS in wildlife management, she chose the mountains of Maryland as her home. It was here that she discovered nature and a passion to share it with others. Today her educational outreach efforts emphasize the critical impact that individuals can have on regional biodiversity by planting appropriate native species and by removing exotic invasive species.

Liz worked as a naturalist and resource biologist for the MD Department of Natural Resources, an environmental specialist for the MD Department of the Environment, and a science teacher at Northern Garrett High School. In 2002, realizing that "life's too short" and missing her time outdoors, she and her husband, Ron Boyer, started a nature company—offering ecotours and outdoor classes—and a native plant nursery specialized in propagating



Liz McDowell at the native plant demonstration garden, New Germany State Park. Photo by MNPS member JoAnn Kociolek.

local ecotypes. Their business is now closed, and they've shifted to other projects such as organizing volunteers to remove invasive plants at Bear Pen Wildlands, strengthening the native plant community, and educating others.

In 2006, along with Judith Gaydos and Cheryl Lough, Liz started the Western Mountains MNPS Chapter, with a focus on the Allegheny Plateau and Ridge & Valley of the central Appalachians. In 2014, Liz organized the first annual Mountain Maryland Native Plant Festival to celebrate the connection between native plants, people, and wildlife (see p. 22 and mdflora.org). With seemingly boundless energy, Liz, Linda Harris (Mountain Laurel Garden Club), and Ashley Bodkins (University of Maryland Extension) organized

"The Power of Native Plants", a symposium held in April at Garrett College!

We're so grateful that Liz has chosen to spend her time connecting with people to promote the use of native plants and the preservation of native habitats in Maryland's mountains.

We hope Liz's and Alba's remarkable commitment to the environment and their actions inspire and bolster your ecowarrior efforts. Consider leading a field trip or recruiting someone else as a leader. If you are interested in getting more involved with MNPS, please reach out to info@mdflora.org, we'd love to hear from you!