

New Handbook Addresses Wildland Urban Interface Issues Virginia National Fire Plan – Community Assistance

“101 Things to Do with Your Yard Waste besides Lighting It on Fire,” is the nickname of the new *Advanced Master Gardeners Land Care Steward Handbook* made possible with National Fire Plan Community Assistance funds. Find it at: <http://www.advancedmastergardener.org/>

Debris burning is a significant source of unwanted fire starts in Virginia and around the country. *Land Care Stewards* provides good information on reducing, reusing and recycling yard waste. This in turn may reduce the number of debris fires and those that get away. The handbook also includes a specific unit, “Living at the Wildland-Urban Interface,” with “firewise” principles and practices.



Homeowner creates firebreak and gathers leaves for compost.

In fall 2002, the Commonwealth of Virginia banned open-air fires in response to extreme drought and high fire danger. The Shenandoah Valley Interagency Fire Prevention and Education Team looked to teach people about alternatives to burning. Under those and other conditions, composting and related activities were more “firewise” and environmentally friendly than burning or hauling yard waste to landfills. The Team also recognized that neighbors sometimes made better messengers than government employees. Accordingly, they reached out to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, better known as Virginia Tech. A horticulturalist there suggested a curriculum guide and resource book for advanced training of Master Gardeners who are community-based volunteers. Soon after, the National Park Service Northeast Region obtained funding through the National Fire Plan to support the development of the *Land Care Stewards Handbook*.

The editors were Francis J. Reilly, Jr. of the Reilly Group; and Sarah Lineberger and Sheri T. Dorn, both previous State Master Gardener Coordinators. Project directors were Dave Close, Virginia State Master Gardener Coordinator and Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture, now retired. Barb Stewart, Fire Education Specialist for the Northeast Region of the National Park Service was project monitor. Reviewers included staff from the USDA Forest Service, Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Prince William County.

An extension agent in Hanover County has already embraced Land Care Stewards and is working with citizens and government officials to reduce the amount of yard waste taken to the landfill. More people are discovering that they have a great new tool to help protect homes and communities from unwanted fires.

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