Spring is coming even in this “time of the virus” and many people are thinking about gardening. On March 10th, Homewood Friends Meeting hosted a workshop entitled “Introduction to Wildlife Gardening” and presented by staff from the Patterson Park Audubon Center. It was a great audience of about 27 people, mostly from surrounding neighborhoods, and highly engaged with the presentation. The workshop focused on how to achieve four goals for wildlife habitat gardens:

1. Reducing the lawn and paved surface in one’s yard to no more than 50%. For many folks this may be an aspirational goal to work toward attaining over a few years, not all at once.
2. Planting to support layers of plants including the over-story, understory, shrub, and ground layers. Each layer has distinct – although sometimes overlapping – birds, mammals, insects, and other vertebrates and invertebrates.
3. Planting densely with fewer species but in patches, avoiding a common mistake of creating a plant zoo, i.e., a few specimens of many different species. Give the pollinators a break and cluster the food sources!
4. Choosing plants that will allow the garden to have four seasons of interest with flowers, foliage, berries, etc.

The task of remaking one’s yard or garden into a wildlife friendly habitat does seem daunting, but the presenters emphasized the practice of doing a focused project each year and not trying to have a one season reformation. And there are lots of online resources to assist in plant selection and gardening strategies. Do a Google search for “native plants for the Chesapeake Bay region” and/or “Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center” that has a Chesapeake collection of native plants.

A follow up workshop entitled “Bird-Friendly Garden Design” builds on the introductory workshop and digs deeper into gardening strategies for layering plants, considering a succession of plants, and choosing complementary plants. This workshop was scheduled for March 23rd at the Roland Park Library and will be rescheduled when life returns to a state of normalcy.

For further information, check out the Patterson Park Audubon Center’s website at: https://patterson.audubon.org. Want to be certified as a bird-friendly yard/garden/patio? See the requirements on the home page. Free for Baltimore City residents! It is $30 for other folks to get certified.

Want to ease into native plant gardening by getting some dirt under your fingernails? Look for an announcement about the Homewood Garden Club having a work morning/afternoon to clean up the winter and prepare for spring. Gary Gillespie is the contact person at garygillespie80@gmail.com.