

REFUGE



on the

RIVER

*AT THIS FARM IN
TIDEWATER VIRGINIA,
PEOPLE, PLANTS,
BIRDS, AND BUTTERFLIES
LIVE IN HARMONY*

I was admiring Sue Wellford's butterfly bushes and Russian sage when an osprey flew by my face. As I watched it glide silently over a cornfield down to the Rappahannock River, the thought occurred to me that her garden speaks of much more than simply pretty flowers.

The garden is a slice of Kendale Farm, which has been in the Wellford family since the 1880s. Corn, soybeans, and sweet barley grow on several thousand acres. A little more than a decade ago, Sue and her husband, Harrison, decided to enlarge the farmhouse built by his great-grandfather and also give it a series of gardens. Creating a home that fit the land and preserved the natural environment was paramount. As Harrison says, "The whole idea was to make this a happy habitat for both humans and animals."

They succeeded. So seamless is the home's addition, conceived by architect David Neumann, that you can't tell where the old house stops and the new one begins. As for the gardens, they nestle gently into their agrarian surroundings. Large sweeps of flowers and ornamental



Blossoms of pink butterfly bushes and purple blazing stars supply nectar for butterflies. "The house and garden were designed to complement the fields," says owner Harrison Wellford.

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LEAD SOMEWHERE.”*

—SUE WELLFORD



grasses honor the aesthetic of nearby meadows and fields.

Sue vividly recalls the day her vision for the garden crystallized. She attended a lecture on naturalistic landscapes given by James van Sweden, cofounder of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, a Washington, D.C., landscape architecture firm that pioneered the look. “It was a total ‘Aha!’ moment,” she says. “I realized it was the only logical kind of garden you could have on that knoll overlooking the fields and river. A formal garden would have looked artificial.”

Eric Groft of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates came up with the overall design. The garden is most structured next to the house and gradually becomes less so as you approach the meadows and fields. Rather than showcasing individual plants, the garden relies on masses of perennials and grasses chosen for seasonal combinations of color, texture, and form.

“When you squint your eyes and view this garden, it looks like a painting,” Sue observes. “There’s a brushstroke of yellow here and purple over there and something pale in the distance—and it’s always changing.”

Undulating gravel walks and footpaths that are mown through grassy meadows wander past daylilies, roses, water lilies, lotuses (Harrison’s passion), sunflowers, and multitudinous wildflowers. “It’s a quarter mile to the river, so this is a garden you walk through,” Sue says. “There’s no confinement. All the curves lead somewhere.”

Wildlife abounds because Kendale Farm supplies four critical ingredients: food, water, shelter, and a place to raise young. Adult butterflies seeking nectar



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY M. HARRISON

Landscape architect Eric Groft, a University of Virginia graduate, modeled the serpentine walk after one at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. Sweeps of ornamental grasses and perennials tie the garden to the landscape and river.

CREATE YOUR OWN WILDLIFE REFUGE

The National Wildlife Federation has helped give rise to more than 155,000 wildlife habitats nationwide in home, school, and community gardens.

To become a Certified Wildlife Habitat, a site must provide:

- Food for wildlife
- Clean water
- Places that offer protection from the weather and predators
- Places to raise young

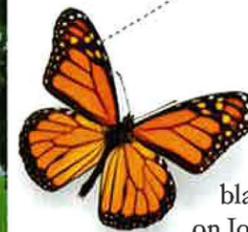
It should also conserve water and soil, control nonnative species, and not use chemical fertilizers or pesticides. To learn more, visit nwf.org.



ATTRACT BIRDS & BUTTERFLIES TO YOUR YARD

These common flowers supply food from nectar (N), leaves (L), or seeds (S).

- Bee balm: N, L
- Blazing star (*Liatris* sp.): N
- Butterfly bush: N
- Coreopsis: N, S
- Hardy hibiscus: N, L
- Joe-Pye weed: N, L
- Purple coneflower: N, S
- Queen Anne's lace: N, L
- Russian sage: N
- Showy sedum: N
- Sunflower: N, S
- Verbena bonariensis: N



swarm butterfly bushes, sedums, bee balms, and blazing stars. Their larvae feast on Joe-Pye weed, hibiscus, and milkweed. Frogs perform a booming chorus in the lily-and-lotus pond. Ospreys and great blue herons seize the chance to snatch their breakfasts from the river and the pond too. Bobwhite quail and clouds of goldfinches dine on seeds of coreopsis and other flowers. An old cedar hums with a hive that honeybees built in a cavity years ago. Bald eagle nests crown the river's trees.

No insecticides are ever used in the garden.

It would be easy to confine Kendale Farm to family get-togethers, but Harrison and Sue also use it to spread the message of conservation to a wider audience.

Their involvement with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation brings out schoolchildren to explore nearby inlets and marshes in sailboats and canoes. And with guidance from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, they've set aside the property as a scenic easement, limiting future development.

I'm a garden guy, so you might think my biggest rush from

visiting a place like this would come from the flowers, but you'd be wrong. What thrills me most is knowing that, within the vast megalopolis that stretches along the Atlantic seaboard, there are still islands of serenity where wildlife and gardens coexist to the benefit of all.

"Sometimes, after everybody's gone to bed and turned out the lights, I'll just sit out on the front steps," says Sue. No voice or vehicle interrupts the music of crickets and frogs. Nature owns the night. 

1. CUTTING GARDEN
A Williamsburg-inspired cutting garden is the one area with a highly structured look.

2. FISH POND
Water lilies and lotuses bloom in the pond. Colorful hibiscus decorate the edge.

3. WILDLIFE BLOOMS
Blue Russian sage, red roses, and yellow rosinweed are magnets for butterflies and bees.

4. PORCH VIEW
The back porch provides an amazing panoramic view of the garden, the farm fields, and the river beyond, inviting you to relax and sit awhile.