

Sustainability and Native Plants Featured at New Visitor Center

THE THOMAS JEFFERSON Visitor Center and Smith Education Center is a transformative experience for visitors to Jefferson's "little mountain." The goal of the landscaping, designed by Michael Vergason Associates of Alexandria, Virginia, and installed by Charlottesville's Ivy Nursery, is to restore the natural forest that was removed for the construction of the Center. The plantings, mostly of modern cultivars of North American native species, are densely arranged in order to blend the building into the native Monticello woodlands and to create an immediate effect.

The plantings consist of about 170 large trees (2" caliper and above), 500 whips for re-foresting naturalized areas, 2,500 remarkably mature shrubs, and over 13,000 groundcovers (ferns, wildflowers, perennials). An automatic irrigation system, with 24 zones and some 400 sprinkler heads, was installed to sustain the plantings through the initial growing seasons.

The Courtyard planting of four large honey locust trees, under-planted with bands of dwarf flowering shrubs and herbaceous groundcovers, is an effort to recall the functional rows of the Monticello Vegetable Garden. The Courtyard is a virtual "green roof," the plantings grown in specially prepared beds on top of the invisible basement, which contains the physical infrastructure for the Visitor Center.

The Halsey Water Garden introduces the welcome sound of running water into the Courtyard. It will be planted with aquatic plants such as lotus flowers, sedges, and cat-tails, and will also be home to the bluegill sunfish. A sub-surface floor ensures that wayward children will not be harmed.

The Green Roof atop the Museum Shop is planted with North American native grasses, the cool-season broom sedge and the warm-season buffalo grass, over-seeded in the winter with annual ryegrass. These grasses grow in a unique growing medium of coarse gravel, lightweight in order to both support the structural integrity of the roof and to provide adequate drainage of rainwater. Rainfall of over 1" will drain into the Greenway



*Landscape design by
Michael Vergason Associates.*



Planting a large honey locust in the courtyard.

creek bed, along with run-off from the mountaintop and other Visitor Center buildings.

The Greenway provides a landscape connection to the African-American Burial Ground.

Naturalized plantings of native trees,

shrubs, and groundcovers will combine with the existing forest land to provide a natural buffer to the 400-car parking lot. Rainwater will be channeled along the heavily landscaped streambed, which is laid off with oak logs to create step pools: another “green” feature of the landscape that harnesses heavy rainfalls into a sustainable and attractive erosion control and water management system.

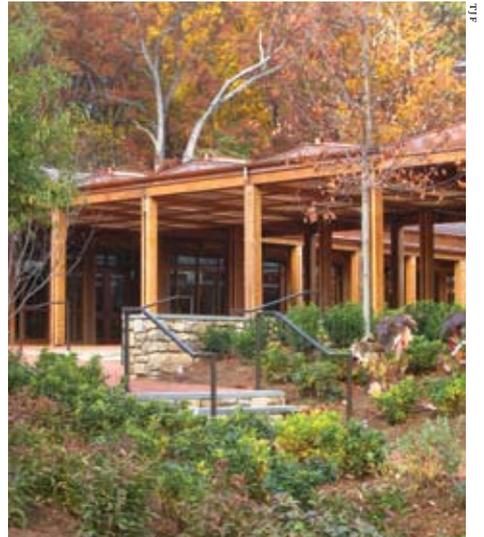
The landscape includes about 40 species of trees, over 50 species and varieties of flowering native shrubs, and 75 kinds of groundcovers: ferns, perennials, and low-growing woody plants. The diversity of the plantings showcases a botanical garden collection that represents the finest productions of the native, North American forest. In addition, low-lying and peripheral areas are sowed with native and perennial grasses to create meadows and further the naturalistic effect of the design.

The landscape is planted for all-season color, and it will provide numerous interpretive possibilities about the native plants of Jefferson’s Virginia. Abundant evergreens such as holly, bayberry, inkberry, mountain laurel, bearberry, and rhododendron provide winter interest. The red and yellow-veined native dogwoods, the cinnamon-barked oak leaf hydrangea, and the scarlet fruit of deciduous holly, chokeberry, and wild rose hips will brighten the winter months, and the colorful persistent foliage of deciduous shrubs like low-bush

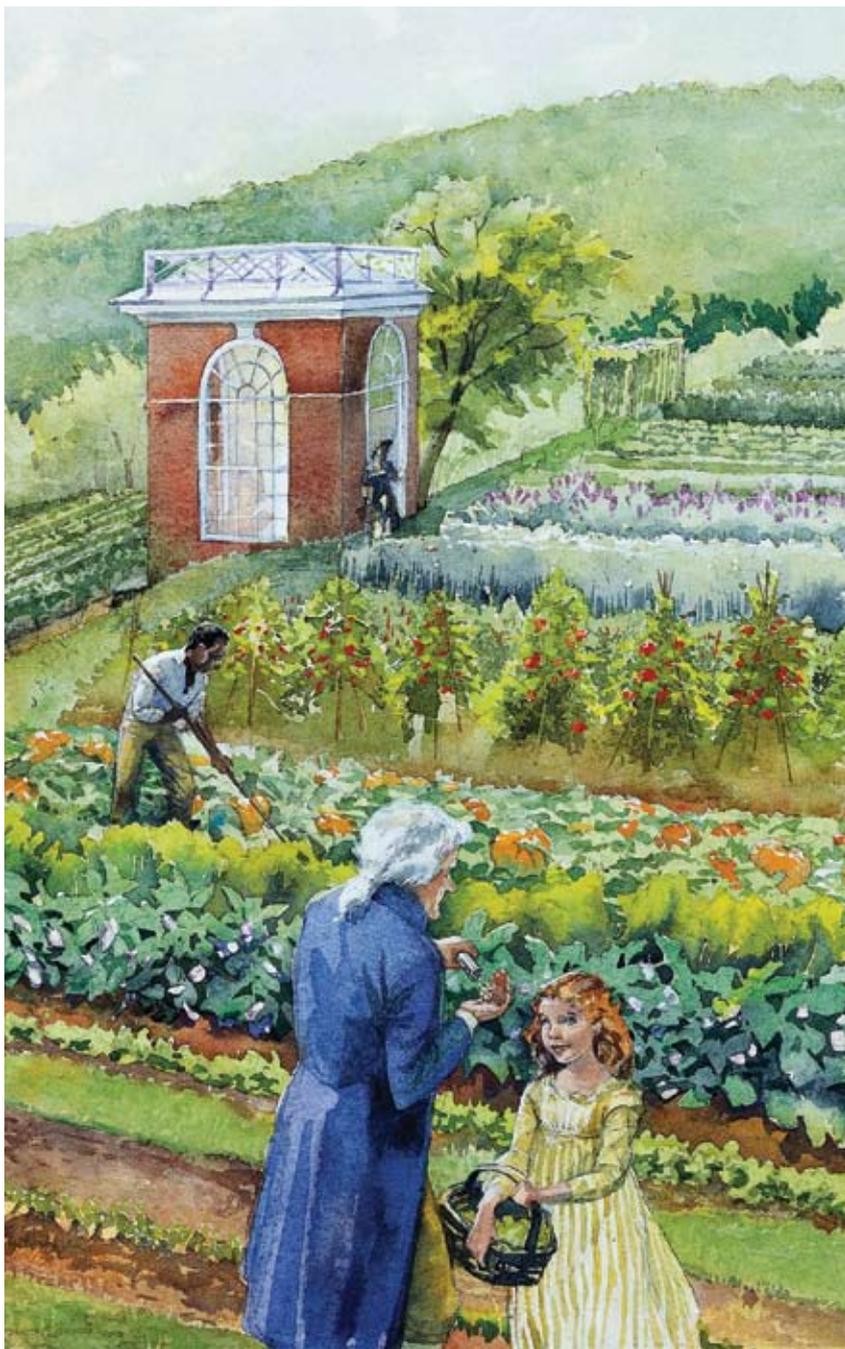
blueberry, sweet pepper bush, Virginia willow, and *Fothergilla* will last well through December. Spring wildflowers, from *Jeffersonia* to Virginia blue bells, from phlox, spring beauty, and Solomon’s seal, will enliven the landscape in March and April, accompanied by understory tree species like dogwood, redbud, and serviceberry, plus spring-flowering shrubs like mountain laurel, spicebush, and wild azalea.

The summer landscape will offer a pleasing contrast of foliage and flowers, and the diverse plantings will present a lively palette of texture and color. Summer flowering plants include shrubs like sweet pepper bush, rhododendron, and hydrangea, plus meadow perennials like cardinal flower, Joe-pye weed, and goldenrod. Some ten species of native fern will counter the summer heat by providing lush nests of green foliage. The glory of the Visitor Center landscape will culminate in autumn, when the North American plants will blend into a multi-hued canvas of color.

Peter J. Hatch, Director
Monticello Gardens and Grounds



Native plant landscaping leads to the entrance of the new Visitor Center.



Artist G.B. McIntosh imagines Jefferson planting seeds in the Vegetable Garden during his retirement.