

**For Immediate Release:
June 5, 2021**

**George Mason University Arboretum earns internationally recognized accreditation by
ArbNet**



Magnolia x soulangeana, Saucer Magnolia at Mason's Fairfax Campus
Photo by Evan Cantwell/Creative Services

(Fairfax, VA) Showcasing a collection of more than 100 native and non-native trees and shrubs, the [George Mason University Arboretum](#) earned [Level II accreditation](#) from ArbNet, the only international accreditation program specific to arboreta. The Arboretum is now featured as an accredited arboretum in the [Morton Register of Arboreta](#), an international database of the world's arboreta and gardens dedicated to woody plants.

The Arboretum's diverse collection is located across multiple George Mason University campus sites, including the Fairfax Campus, the Point of View International Retreat and Conference Center, the Potomac Science Center, and the Science and Technology Campus. Visitors can enjoy the Arboretum in person or online using the [interactive Arboretum map](#), which showcases each specimen.

Work on the Arboretum began in 2015 as a collaborative project among students and faculty in the Department of Biology in Mason's [College of Science](#). Andrea Weeks, associate professor and director of the [Ted R. Bradley Herbarium](#), created the Arboretum to educate the Mason community about the biological diversity on campus. The Arboretum emphasizes the value of trees and shrubs as integral components of the rich campus ecosystem and demonstrates the connection between human health and the health of nature.

"I always envisioned the Arboretum as a space for everyone to learn and a space for all of us to protect," said Weeks. The Arboretum's recent accreditation represents a commitment to the long-term growth of the project, Weeks said, and provides Weeks

and a diverse team with a “framework for maintaining professional standards and managing this type of infrastructure.”

To earn ArbNet accreditation, the Arboretum shared a clearly articulated mission, a well-developed governance structure, a detailed collections policy, practical plans for ongoing management, and opportunities for formal and informal education. Each tree and woody plant in the Arboretum is represented in the Ted R. Bradley Herbarium with a scientific voucher and contributes to a vast collection of more than 80,000 specimens, [the third-largest collection in Virginia](#).

The [Office of Sustainability's Patriot Green Fund](#) (PGF) is a long-time financial supporter of the Arboretum. Sarah D'Alexander, the program manager for the PGF, said that the ArbNet accreditation positions the Arboretum “as the rarest kind of PGF project because it's both a sustainable infrastructure project and a research project.” D'Alexander added: “Usually, PGF projects are one or the other, but the Arboretum is the perfect project to fund given its potential for tremendous impact.”

The Arboretum expands learning opportunities for Mason's campus sites to function as living labs and will see ongoing integration with academic courses. Weeks' plant ecology course will continue to measure the circumference of the Arboretum's trees and their canopies to determine their growth and carbon drawdown impacts. Associate Professor Cindy Smith's environmental science course will continue to explore how insect diversity is affected by different types of trees. Both researchers hope the Arboretum will unearth ongoing research while also creating new opportunities.

The ArbNet accreditation is also a timely response to the needs of the Mason community. A recent survey of Mason undergraduates found increasing green spaces was students' most frequently cited environmental priority.

Mason is also currently updating its campus Master Plan process. Erich Miller, International Society of Arboriculture Board Certified Master Arborist and grounds program manager for Facilities, views the Arboretum as both a “response to student needs” and a way to “integrate the preservation of natural spaces” into the university's Master Plan.

The Arboretum's ArbNet accreditation highlights Mason's long-time and ongoing commitment to sustainability and creates an educational and experiential resource for years to come.

“Building awareness around the importance of plant diversity for human well-being is a critical step in protecting our environment,” said Weeks, “and the Arboretum is a wonderful way to help people develop these connections at their own pace.”

Details about the George Mason University Arboretum are available on the [Plants Map virtual collection](#) and on the [College of Science's dedicated webpage](#).

The George Mason University Arboretum is made possible by the dedicated work of the committee that prepared and submitted the accreditation request to ArbNet. The

team comprised faculty, staff, and an undergraduate student: [Andrea Weeks](#), associate professor, [College of Science](#), and director of the [Ted R. Bradley Herbarium](#); [Cindy Smith](#), associate professor, [College of Science](#); Erich Miller, [International Society of Arboriculture Board Certified Master Arborist](#) #MA-6102A and grounds program manager, [Facilities](#); [Sarah D'Alexander](#), program manager for the [Patriot Green Fund, Office of Sustainability](#); [Ben Auger](#), program manager for education and outreach, [Office of Sustainability](#); [Doni Nolan](#), program manager for the [Greenhouse and Gardens Program, Office of Sustainability](#); and Katherina Wilkins, a Mason undergraduate student.

George Mason University

George Mason University is Virginia's largest public research university. Located near Washington, D.C., Mason enrolls 39,000 students from 130 countries and all 50 states. Mason has grown rapidly over the past half century and is recognized for its innovation and entrepreneurship, remarkable diversity, and commitment to accessibility. <https://www2.gmu.edu/>

About ArbNet

ArbNet is an interactive, collaborative, international community of arboreta. ArbNet facilitates the sharing of knowledge, experience, and other resources to help arboreta meet their institutional goals and works to raise professional standards through the ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program. The accreditation program, sponsored and coordinated by [The Morton Arboretum](#) in Lisle, Illinois, in cooperation with [American Public Gardens Association](#) and [Botanic Gardens Conservation International](#), is the only global initiative to officially recognize arboreta based on a set of professional standards. The program offers four levels of accreditation, recognizing arboreta of various degrees of development, capacity and professionalism. Standards include planning, governance, public access, programming and tree science, planting and conservation. More information is available at www.arbnet.org.

###

For more information, please visit:
[George Mason University Arboretum](#)
[Interactive Arboretum Map](#)
[Ted R. Bradley Herbarium](#)
[The Morton Register of Arboreta](#)

Press Contact:

Ben Auger
Office of Sustainability, George Mason University
Sustainability Program Manager for Education and Outreach
bauger@gmu.edu
703-903-5301