



Buzz, Body & Bites

A newsletter for actively aging adults
Virginia Cooperative Extension Family & Consumer Sciences
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A Day in the Life of a Master Naturalist Volunteer

Spending time outdoors in nature has positive effects on physical and mental health. Volunteering also has these positive effects. How would you like to combine these two activities—spending time outdoors with a purpose? The Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) program offers opportunities for individuals to learn about Virginia’s natural resources and give back by being part of an active volunteer corps involved in conservation. Virginia Master Naturalists have contributed more than 1.8 million hours of service since the program launched in 2005.

Virginia Master Naturalists start by completing a 40+ hour training course with one of 30 local chapters of the program. They learn about nature and natural resource management, and they make connections to people, places, and projects in their communities to prepare for volunteer service. That service includes education and outreach, science, stewardship, and chapter leadership. The service may be through any of the seven agencies (including Virginia Cooperative Extension) that sponsor the program, or through one of the hundreds of other local program partners.

VMN volunteers’ stewardship includes projects like litter cleanups and habitat restoration, primarily on public lands. Volunteers have improved more than 500 parks, natural areas, and other green spaces in Virginia. They help manage invasive plant species so that native trees and wildflowers can flourish. They build and maintain trails so that Virginians can access the many areas our state has to observe nature.

The volunteers participate in dozens of nature-based citizen and community science studies, helping natural resource managers gain the information they need for decision-making. VMN volunteers collect data on weather, birds, butterflies, bees, stream health, invasive species like the spotted lanternfly, and more.

VMN volunteers share their knowledge about and enthusiasm for nature by leading nature walks, giving presentations on nature topics, providing environmental education opportunities for youth, and developing educational materials, such as trail signs and brochures. Each year, they reach hundreds of thousands of people through their programs.

By participating in a local VMN chapter, volunteers make social connections with other people who are also interested in spending time in nature. As one volunteer put it, “Master Naturalist volunteering is a pleasure in that we are contributing to the health of our habitat and at the same time, spending joyful hours with other very caring friends.”

Being a VMN volunteer is a big commitment, but it is a rewarding one! Visit the VMN website to [look for the chapter nearest you](#). Most chapters offer the basic training course once a year.

By Michelle D. Prysby, Director, Virginia Master Naturalist Program

Things you probably don’t know about your Halloween Pumpkin

- Pumpkins are fruits and belong to the same family as cucumbers and melons - the Cucurbitaceae family.

- Every part of the pumpkin is edible - skin, leaves, flowers, pulp, seeds, and stems. You just have to find the right recipe.
- There are over 45 different varieties of pumpkins - fat ones, skinny ones, orange, red, and green ones.
- 1.5 billion pounds of pumpkin are produced every year in the U.S.! Almost all of these are ready for picking in a single month - October.
- Pumpkins are an excellent source of vitamin A and beta-carotene, which have strong antioxidant properties.
- Pumpkins originated in North America some 8000 years ago.
- The tradition of carving Jack-O'-Lanterns comes from Irish immigrants and their legend of "Stingy Jack".
- More information: www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/10-things-you-probably-didnt-know-about-pumpkins.

Pumpkin Pie Oatmeal

A twist on your traditional breakfast oatmeal. Perfect for fall, and a good recipe for nutrient-rich pumpkin. Source: <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu/?s=pumpkin+pie+oatmeal>.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup steel-cut oats
- 2 ½ cups water
- 1 ½ cups unsweetened almond milk
- 1 cup pumpkin puree - see notes on how to make your own pumpkin puree
- 3 Tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Instructions:

1. Add all the ingredients into slow cooker and mix well. Cook on low for 6-8 hours. If you have a programmable slow cooker, set it to cook on low for 7 hours and then switch to warm.
2. After cooking, give the mixture a good stir as the oats will settle to the bottom. Portion into a bowl and serve.
3. Optional: Top with pecans, maple syrup or brown sugar, and milk.

Achieving the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends that older adults get at least 2 or more days a week of muscle-strengthening activities that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, arms, and shoulders). Safety is of utmost importance when incorporating strength training into your physical activity routine. Here are a few safety tips to consider:

- Focus on form, not weight - Poor form can prompt injuries and slow gains.
- Tempo-slower, smooth, more focused movement is beneficial. Practice counting to three when lowering weights
- Breathe-Exhale as you work against gravity. Inhale as you release.
- Take a break - give your body time to repair. Allow at least 48 hours between sessions for muscles to recover.
- Mirror sides - always do the same exercises and number of repetitions on both the right and left side.

Resources

Strength training basics - www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/older_adults/index.htm#Strengthening

Six tips for safe strength training - www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/six-tips-for-safe-strength-training

Virginia Master Naturalists - www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/

Editors: April Payne, MS; Carlin Rafie, PhD, RD; Aisha Salazar, M.S.

Peer reviewers: Jane Henderson, MEd; Susan Prillaman, MS; Kimberly Booker, MS.

Subscribe at: buzzbodybites-g@vt.edu

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