



LIVING LOCAL

BLUEBIRD FARMS

Written by Chandler Joiner

Nancie Corbett always dreamed of growing the perfect tomato. “My first goal was to grow the most perfect, best tasting tomato. The kind you remember eating out of your yard as a kid and it was still warm from the sun.” While her tomatoes never quite lived up to her expectations, the vision for her business grew from this dream. If she could not grow the perfect tomato herself, she would find local growers who could, and support them. In 2013, Nancie took over what is now called Bluebird Farms, and began the journey of bringing together local farmers and consumers.

Bluebird Farms is a produce and plant shop found on Racetrack Road in Berlin, Maryland that supports local farmers and nurseries. The foundation of the shop’s success is Nancie’s passion for environmental stewardship. “I wanted the shop to be something beneficial to the natural environment. The eastern bluebird is a symbol. This bird could have been lost if people had not become aware of how to create safe nesting habitats. Bluebird Farms is a manifestation of this; people buy items that not only benefit their own personal growing spaces, but also encourage the environment and other important creatures to thrive.” Nancie began as a grower, and she shifted her goals to fit the needs of the community by creating a space where consumers can access local products from a variety of sellers, some who may otherwise be unable to sell their products.

While Nancie’s main goal is bringing together farmers and consumers, she continues to grow on the property as well. “I have had a you-cut flower garden here for six years, and each year, I expand it. It seems to be my forte. Last year, I planted seven different varieties of sunflowers, five different types of zinnias, milkweed, columbine, Angelonia’s, herbs, and several varieties of cosmos – which is my all-time favorite flower.” Nancie has such a wide variety of growth in her flower garden because she believes biodiversity is key to a successful farm or garden. “One crop in large expanse quickly depletes the soil because that one crop pulls the same nutrients out of the soil over and over again. If you plant smaller amounts of different varieties of crops, they pull various nutrients and the soil will be more productive. Diverse crops also attract a wider and larger number of pollinators.”



FARMER NANCIE CORBETT

Owner of Bluebird Farms

DID YOU KNOW?

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, is the variety of life on Earth. The number of species of plants, animals, and microorganisms, the diversity of genes in these species, and the different ecosystems on the planet, such as deserts, rainforests and coral reefs, are all part of a biologically diverse Earth.

Plant diversity is vital to long-term soil sustainability and food security. Before large scale agriculture began in the U.S., the landscape had abundant plant diversity where numerous species worked together as a community. Modern monoculture practices weaken soil health and put crops in danger of widespread failure because they limit naturally occurring healthy functions and expose plants to disease. When farmers can mimic “natural” landscapes, they will see significant improvement in rainfall infiltration, nutrient cycling, and pollinator diversity. Monoculture works against natural ecological processes, while diversity in plantings works with nature and increases sustainability. Nancie has already seen positive impacts from her diverse planting practices. “The soil becomes richer and more productive every year. I have noticed a longer growing cycle and am confident that three plantings could be done in one season. Every year plantings are easier to start.”



Growing a variety of plants is also important because it equals a variety of insects, and other pollinators, which is necessary to ensure one specific insect does not damage too many crops. Nancie understands the importance of a large and diverse number of pollinators, which is why she always experiments with multiple plants to decide what to grow in order to ensure the best variety. “There is no happier place for me then going into the flower garden in August and seeing all the bees and butterflies and various pollinators enjoying the plants I started months prior.” Along with her pollinator priorities, Nancie also helps protect the health of our watershed by using natural pest and weed control methods on her you-pick offerings. “I use a non-toxic mix of vinegar, dawn soap, water, and Epsom salts for weed control throughout the property and greenhouse.”

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Nancie Corbett

Among the initial challenges Nancie faced as a grower, tomato hornworm was at the top of her list. Throughout her battle with the “dreaded” hornworm, Nancie learned that, “the best thing to spray for hornworms is a neem oil, soap, and water mix - it is nontoxic for humans and wildlife, and will deter the hornworm. However, the best removal method is to just pick them off, which can be very labor intensive.” Nancie has learned many of these valuable lessons throughout her years of growing and selling, but she is always interested in expanding her horizons. “One thing I would love to get into is mushroom growing. If there is anyone out there who can help me with this, I would love to hear from them!”

Of all the methods Nancie utilizes, from natural control methods to composting fruit and vegetable waste, the number one thing Bluebird Farms does to protect our watershed is supporting other local farms and nurseries. Nancie Corbett has created a space where farmers, many who may not have the means to operate a farm stand or be members of a farmers market, are able to sell their products to local consumers. She is incredibly dedicated to our local environment and community. “I will be doing this until the day I die. This community has been so supportive, and it has been so amazing to meet so many wonderful and interesting people throughout this journey.”



Businesses and local farmers, like Nancie, that promote diverse growth and ample biodiversity are important for the protection and long-term health of our watershed. I am grateful for the conversations Nancie and I have had throughout quarantine. During this unprecedented time, it is important to support not only local farmers, but also the businesses that support these farmers and rely on their products. Just like many of the local farmers and small businesses in the area, Nancie is doing everything she can for the community during this time of immense precaution. She wants to be able to provide to those who are too vulnerable or too scared to leave their homes. "I would like everyone to know that we work very hard to accommodate everybody's wishes, and sometimes things are not possible, but it is not for a lack of trying. Please do not be afraid to call in for phone orders or with any questions."

Bluebird Farms is one of many local shops and farms that relies heavily on local community support for survival, particularly during trying times like these. I continue to encourage everyone to support those businesses around you that want the best for our community. Shopping at Bluebird Farms is one of many ways to live local.



Bluebird Farms is located at 11207 Racetrack Road, Berlin, MD 21811. They are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm.

The retail area is currently closed due to COVID-19 precautions; however, the greenhouse and outdoor property are open to customers. Everyone who visits the shop is asked to wear a mask and practice social distancing measures. Please visit their Facebook to view their daily offerings. They are still taking phone orders for produce and grocery items, please call 410-208-4475 between 10:00 am and 6:00 pm to schedule a pick up. For further inquiries, please visit their website at www.bluebirdfarms.net, or contact them via email at cosmosdale@hotmail.com.