

PO Box 254 • Bristol, VT 05443 • 802-453-7728 • [info@familyforests.org](mailto:info@familyforests.org) • [www.familyforests.org](http://www.familyforests.org)

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# News from the Forest

## Workshops, workshops, workshops!

One of our primary goals at VFF is to provide education that supports our mission—to conserve the health of the forest community and, when appropriate, to promote the careful cultivation of local family forests for community benefit. So far in 2003, we've offered several workshops and have had tremendous response to them.

These workshops included Winter Tree Identification; Wood Identification; Game of Logging, Levels I and II; and Natural Communities Mapping (two workshops in two different natural community regions).



Ecologist Eric Sorenson checks soil pH with Natural Communities Mapping Workshop participants. May 1, 2003.

### WORKSHOPS IN THE HOPPER

Tentative workshop topics for the coming year include:

#### *The Silviculture of Ecological Forestry.*

Learn about VFF's 36 management practices, and how to use the appropriate tools (Biltmore stick, prism) to collect data to implement these practices (measuring stand density, snags, dens, large down wood, etc).

#### *Accessing the Family Forest.*

A well planned and constructed access road is critical to maintaining water quality in your forest. Learn how to create excellent access roads or improve the ones you have.

#### *Game of Logging I & II.*

In our spring offering of these outstanding training courses for chainsaw users, we had to turn away more than half of the people interested in participating. We will offer them again in the fall, and will put out the word, via e-mail and website, when we have scheduled them.

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter via e-mail, we'd love to save the paper and postage. Please e-mail us at [info@familyforests.org](mailto:info@familyforests.org) to be added to our e-newsletter list.

### *A Look inside Eric's Backpack*

Eric Sorenson led two outstanding natural communities mapping workshops for VFF in early May. Here are some of the books and tools Eric brings with him into the woods when looking at natural communities:

*Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*, by Lawrence Newcomb and Gordon Morrison (Illust.). Paperback, 1989. Great ID tool for wildflowers, flowering shrubs, and vines.

*Manual of Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*, by Henry A Gleason and Arthur Cronquist, 1991. Very hefty to tote along, but excellent.

*Illustrated Companion to Gleason and Cronquist's Manual: Illustrations of the Vascular Plants of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*, by Noel H Holmgren, Henry A. Gleason, Patricia K Holmgren (ed.), and Kathleen M. McCauley (ed.). 1991.

*Shrub Identification Book*, by George W. Symonds and A.W. Merwin, Paperback 1980.

*Tree Identification Book*, by George W. Symonds and Stephen V. Chelminski. Paperback, 1972.

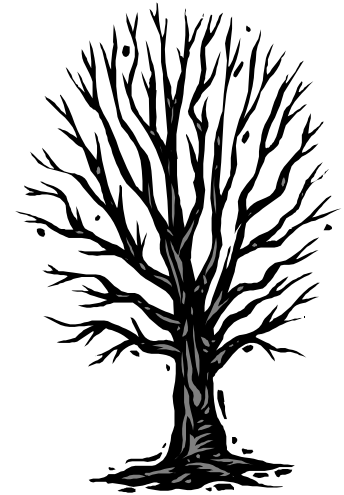
**Cornell University Soil pH Test Kit.** Standard (5.0-7.2) and Low range (3.8-6.2) kits are \$15; Wide range (3.8-8.2) kit is \$27. Order form: [www.css.cornell.edu/soiltest/pHKits.html](http://www.css.cornell.edu/soiltest/pHKits.html).

**Soil Auger.** Eric recommends the Eijkelkamp 1 Piece Edelman Auger-Combination Soils, available at forestry supply houses. [www.benmeadows.com](http://www.benmeadows.com) has this auger for \$92.50.

## Are Your Maple Trees Dying for a little Fertilizer?

While maple tree decline is not a new phenomena, the incidence and severity of maple decline have increased markedly in recent years. Stresses that can reduce maple tree vigor include drought, acid rain, heavy grazing, over-tapping, soil compaction from vehicles, and road salt.

Research in Canada indicates that roughly half of the sugar maples studied grew in soils deficient in potassium, and a portion of these were also deficient in calcium and magnesium. Acid precipitation seems to be a key culprit in these deficiencies, since, as soils acidify, critical minerals leach away. A maple tree weakened by these stressors is more vulnerable to insect defoliation, root rots, decays, and twig blights that can further weaken the tree.



### Assessing the health of your sugar maples:

1. **Stand back from the tree and look at the crown.** A healthy sugar maple bears branches full of leaves, right to the ends. Dead twigs around the outside of the crown indicate that the crown is shrinking, a condition known as dieback.
2. **Stand near the trunk and look upward.** In a healthy tree, the leaves block out almost all of the sky. If the crown is thin, the tree lacks vigor.
3. **Do the tree's leaves begin to change to fall colors early (late July, early August)?** Early fall coloration is a sign of tree decline.

### You can boost the health of your maple trees by applying fertilizer at least once, preferably twice, a year.

There are two ways to go about fertilizing. If you have a large sugarbush, you may want to have your soil tested to determine the specific deficiencies in your soil. You can then mix up a custom fertilizer to suit your maples' needs. That way, you'll avoid the expense of adding nutrients your maples don't need.

If, however, you'd like to fertilize a small sugarbush or the maples around your home, you can apply a general purpose maple fertilizer. Maple fertilizers contain no nitrogen, as this is rarely deficient in forest soils.

**VFF can place a bulk order for organic maple tree fertilizer from North Country Organics in Bradford, Vermont ([www.ncorganics.com](http://www.ncorganics.com)).** The custom mixture of phosphate rock, dolomite, calcium limestone flour, and sulfate of potash will cost approximately \$15.00 per 50/lb bag (see application directions below to assess how much you'll need). **If you're interested in ordering some, please contact us and let us know how much you'd like. If we have enough interest, we'll go ahead and place an order (They require a one-ton minimum order for a custom mix).**

### How to Apply Fertilizer to your Maple Trees\*:

1. Use 2 to 4 lbs. of fertilizer per inch of tree diameter (A VFF Biltmore stick is the perfect tool measuring tree diameter—yours, at cost, for \$10!). Two light applications (2 lbs./inch of tree diameter)—one in early spring and one late in the summer—are better than one heavy application.
2. The roots of a sugar maple extend roughly the same distance from the trunk underground as the branches do overhead. Spread the appropriate amount of fertilizer onto the ground throughout the circle made by the tree's drip line.
3. Prune dead branches as well to stimulate renewed, vigorous shoot growth. Pruning is best done in the early spring, prior to bud-break, to promote healing of the pruning cuts.

The success of treatment to declining maples depends on early detection of maple decline, the health of the tree prior to treatment, and its ability to respond to treatment.

\*You can use this fertilizer on other trees as well.



### Help Collect Seeds for Conservation of Vermont's Waterways!

The Intervale Foundation's Vermont Riparian Propagation and Education Project is working with landowners and conservation groups to grow locally sourced native trees and shrubs to be planted along rivers and streams in Vermont. Some of the species being grown include: maples, oaks, ashes, elm, birches, shagbark hickory, elderberry, serviceberries, viburnums, and dogwoods. If you would like to help collect seeds, or would allow someone to collect seeds on your property, please contact Simon Hurd at the Intervale Foundation at (802) 660-0440 or [simon@intervale.org](mailto:simon@intervale.org).

## Marketing Excellent Stewardship: Creating a Business to Sell Family Forest® Products

VFF's first project to create an inventory of Family Forest® brand forest products is well along in the planning stages. Until now, VFF landowners who have sold their trees through VFF have done so as part of the several high-profile, custom projects that the VFF Foundation has participated in to research and demonstration economically viable methods of local wood manufacturing.

That research is complete, and we're ready to launch a commercial entity to manage and market Family Forest® brand products. Through a series of meetings and discussions during the winter, a core group of interested landowners has emerged with a shared interest in creating flooring, wainscot paneling, and lumber following a summer harvest.

The inventory project also kicked off the formation of an ad hoc committee—comprised of landowners, VFF staff, and a member of the VFF board of directors—that has been exploring issues and working out principles and

If you'd like more information or a copy of our flooring and lumber inventory project proposal, please contact Netaka White at the VFF office.

guidelines for the use and licensing of the Family Forest® brand.

As a stable supply of VFF forest products becomes more available, a wide range of products could begin appearing in markets around the state bearing the Family Forest® trademark and capturing the story of community-based and community-supported forestry. Landowners, processors, and artisans can begin to envision not only flooring and lumber, but also moldings, maple syrup, trellis and arbor kits, cutting boards, wooden toys and even charcoal and wild-crafted mushrooms all produced and marketed with the health of the forest foremost in mind.

One of the primary tasks ahead for the VFF sales and marketing team will be to continue to build on the name recognition and sell the benefits of local value-added products from sustainably managed forests.

We welcome you to attend meetings, participate, or request updates from the licensing committee at any time.

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### Certification Update

When a customer buys Family Forest® brand products, they know that the products came from carefully monitored, ecologically managed forests. We verify that market claim through independent, third-party certification by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) of all forestlands in VFF's certified pool.

#### *It's Audit Time!*

If you are currently in VFF's pool of certified forests, but your management plan does not meet the VFF template, you'll need to update it to remain certified.

VFF Director of Forestry, Laura French, will be sending certified landowners detailed information about the current status of their management plans and exactly what, if anything, they need to do to update those plans.

Any landowner wishing to sell their forest products under the Family Forest® brand (see the Licensing article above) will need to meet the current VFF template. For many landowners, this will simply require adding information about native habitat, water quality, and access to their existing plan. You may choose to have a consulting forester make these updates, or you may wish to do them yourself. Depending on the level of interest, Laura will offer a workshop to demonstrate the techniques for gathering and compiling the data needed.

Keep an eye out for certification materials in the mail and please respond promptly to them. *We'll keep you posted!*

### Phasing in Annual Certification Fees

Independent certification costs money—a lot of money. FSC certification currently costs VFF roughly \$3200 annually. FSC is well aware that high certification costs deter people from certifying their forestlands, and they are hard at work developing lower-cost certification alternatives. VFF is in the midst of negotiating with them to find the least expensive way to stay certified.

During our first year of operation, VFF charged landowners a fee for certification, but in the four years since then, VFF has absorbed all certification costs.

As we move toward launching a landowner-driven business to market Family Forest® brand products, we are also moving toward having landowners pick up the costs of the certification that substantiates this brand.

We will phase in a certification fee over the next three years. The initial cost will be \$.25/forested acre, with a base fee of \$25.00. For example, a 60-acre forest would cost \$25 to certify. A 250-acre parcel would cost \$62.50 in annual fees. During 2004 and 2005, fees would gradually increase until FSC certification costs are covered by the certified forest pool. When current negotiations with FSC are complete, we'll let you know what these projected certification fees will be.