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## Naturalist Donna Long is long on knowledge of nature

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(<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Donna.jpg>)

*Donna is on a crusade to spread the word about the importance of preserving the environment for ourselves and for future generations.*

**by Tamara Anderson**

Donna Long, whose day job is as a library director at a local private high school, is also a certified Pennsylvania Master Naturalist with a passion for balanced ecological living in Philadelphia and beyond. She believes that education and a new global outlook on ecology and the environment is absolutely crucial for the survival of our children, families and communities.

"Living in the Delaware Valley," she explained, "I eat food grown in its soil, drink water from the Schuylkill and live in a house built of Wissahickon field stone. This land gives me my life; I owe it. I wanted to know and understand where I live. I wanted to know its flat places and hills and its rivers and small streams. I became a Pennsylvania Master Naturalist for these very reasons. Attending the program workshops and field trips knit together the bits and pieces of knowledge I knew about the place I call home. And I share what I've learned with others. Being a Master Naturalist helps me to give back to the land."

Spending time with Donna, you cannot help but be convinced that we must treat Mother Nature with love and respect. Ms. Long's love of nature is a direct result of being exposed to farming on both her maternal and paternal sides of the family. Her mother's family hails from Sumter, South Carolina, and her father grew up on a tobacco farm in Caswell, North Carolina. Both farms are still in the family; one was purchased after the Civil War. Her parents met in Philadelphia and raised her and her younger brother in West Oak Lane, where she still lives.

An excitement percolates to the surface when Donna, who requested that her age be withheld, begins sharing her wealth of knowledge regarding the natural riches located in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties. She graduated from Philadelphia High School for Girls in 1982, earned a B.A. in Art History from Temple University, a Masters in Library Science from Rutgers University and a Masters of Education from Arcadia University in Glenside.

"Philadelphia is about water," she explained, as a result of Benjamin Franklin's placing in his will money specifically for the improvement of water. Our city has one of the oldest and most efficient water filtration systems in the country. Donna's research and observation even discovered a family of beavers and river otters in the Schuylkill River. She applauds our city government and specifically former Governor Rendell for their continual support of the watershed and the planting of native plants to support balance in our ecosystem. But she insists that we must take the issue of climate change and nature more seriously. "If even the military believes that it is a number one concern, then we should believe them and pay attention."

The demographics of those concerned with nature are changing and shifting to acknowledge the ongoing participation of minority populations, she points out. "Conservationists had a hand in taking land from indigenous people and keeping them out," she said.

A symptom of imbalance in the local environment is the "decline in the butterfly population in Philadelphia because of the presence of non-native plants." Gardens should always include more native plants that work in harmony with insects, larger animals and the overall ecosystem.

Her concern for the environment led Donna to become a member of the first class in 2010 of Pennsylvania Master Naturalists ([panaturalist.org](http://panaturalist.org) (<http://panaturalist.org>)). It is a challenging and rigorous program that includes 55 hours of combined classroom and field study, 30 approved volunteer hours and eight advanced/continuing education courses. The courses are held at the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education on its 340 acres in upper Roxborough, which are protected by a land trust. Scientists and environmentalists from local universities are instructors. The center provides many programs about the local environment. Information about future classes and workshops taught by Donna Long can be found on her blog.

The blog/website, [www.donnalong.com](http://www.donnalong.com) (<http://www.donnalong.com>), is a virtual encyclopedia of information about nature and an incentive for all of us to become more proactive in local, "down to earth" ways. Here is a typically informative item Donna placed on her blog/website on July 31 about Summer Phlox: "Last week we finished our fourth heat wave here in Philly, and the Summer Phlox bloomed thorough it all. It's a gorgeous hot pink through high heat and humidity.

"Summer Phlox (*Phlox Paniculata*) gives a gorgeous punch of color right when my garden can look dry and stressed-out from the high heat and humidity. Summer Phlox is a plant indigenous to Philadelphia and eastern North America. It is often found in fertile bottomlands and meadows, from New York south to Georgia. It grows in compact neat clumps and doesn't run and spread."

Her entry on Aug. 2 was all about "Summer into Fall Blooming Native Plants for Philadelphia," providing useful advice for any gardener: "In late summer, native plant sales are held at environmental centers and nurseries across the country. After a season of bloom, sometimes I notice that I don't have enough blooms during particular times. I created several lists of blooming native plants for each season. For those of you who need more plants that bloom in these last days of summer into fall, here is a list of flowering plants indigenous to the eastern and mid-Atlantic areas of North America." A long alphabetical list of shrubs, plants and vines follows along with descriptive, planting and watering information.

You can follow Donna on her blog, [www.donnalong.com](http://www.donnalong.com) (<http://www.donnalong.com>).

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