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**The Newsletter of the *Naturist Action Committee* and the *Naturist Education Foundation***

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# Gardening Naked

By Shannon Lewis

As any seasoned horticulturist can attest, gardening involves much more than putting a seed into the dirt, keeping it watered, and watching it grow. Serious agrarians insist on the importance of lore and ritual in gardening. *The Old Farmer's Almanac* stresses the importance of planting according to the moon phases. Rural grandmothers will swear that parsley must be planted in three sowings ("two for the devil and one for the gardener"), or that spicier peppers can be achieved if the gardener sows the seeds while angry.

Some even claim that nudity has a role in gardening and horticulture.

In the late 1800s, a group from Indiana purchased land in Crossville, Tennessee and established the Pomona Settlement to tend to the apple orchards of the former Pomona Fruit Ranch, which had been owned by John Wood Dodge, a respected artist whose paintings can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Pomona Settlement drew the attention of locals when it was learned that the women of the group would rise "early in the morning to dance nude in the apple orchards, hoping that the dance would assist the apple-growing process." It's not clear if the nude dancing helped with the apples, but two nudist campgrounds did emerge in Crossville, some years later. (1)

In a 1953 essay titled *Nakedness in Ozark Folk Belief*, folklorist Vance Randolph relays a story about a fisherman who, in the spring of 1920, told him that he had seen a man and woman in a field in Southwest Missouri, just before dawn, "both stark naked, chasing each other up and down like rabbits." When Randolph mentioned this to a friend who had lived in the area, the friend

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Get ready for the Annual **World Naked Gardening Day (WNGD)**! People across the globe are encouraged, on the **first Saturday of May**, to tend their portion of the world's garden unclothed as nature intended.

Gardening has a timeless quality, and anyone can do it: young and old, singles or groups, the fit and infirm, urban and rural. An elderly lady in a Manhattan apartment can plant new annuals in her window box. Families can rake leaves in their back yard. Freehikers can pull invasive weeds along their favorite stretch of trail. More daring groups can make rapid clothes-free sorties into public parks to do community-friendly work.



Dancing in the fields epitomizes the spirit of communion and back-to-basics living.

So what should you do? First of all, on the first Saturday of May, find an opportunity to get naked and do some gardening. Do so alone, with friends, with family, with

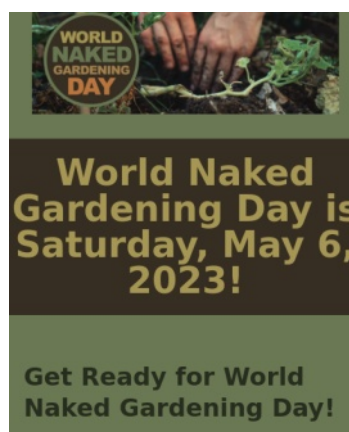
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NEWLY REVISED  
WEBSITE INCLUDES

- \* Overview
- \* WNGD History
- \* Nude Gardening Folklore
- \* List of Events

<http://wngd.info>



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replied, "Yes, I've heard of such doings, it's supposed to make the corn grow tall." After subsequently interviewing hundreds of old-timers in the region, Randolph concluded, "There is no doubt in my mind that many early settlers believed that newly cleared fields were benefited by some kind of nude skylarking. Many of them thought that certain crops grew better if the persons who sowed the seed were naked." Randolph soon uncovered a number of Ozarks crop rituals involving nudity, including one in which flax seed was sown by naked farmers chanting, "Up to my ass, and higher too!" (2)

Since then, naked gardening folklore has appeared in a variety of publications. A reader's letter published in the Spring, 1992 issue of *Garden Ideas & Outdoor Living* claimed that, "Turnips must be sewn on a summer night when the moon is full with the sower working stark naked in the bright moonlight." (3)

Even some noted contemporary horticulturists have suggested that there's a role for nudity in gardening. In 1967, a New York painter named Robert Dash moved to Sagaponack and began work on what would ultimately become *The Madoo Conservancy*. He spent his days at Madoo painting, writing poetry, and gardening. At certain symposiums, Dash would encourage his audience to consider the "microclimates" of their gardens, which he believed was essential for understanding the best spots to nurture different plants. According to Dash, there was one sure way to identify these microclimates: "Take your clothes off in midsummer and walk around your garden. Let the air be still, and let it be night. You will at once feel the different temperatures on your skin. These are the microclimates to be observed by your plants." (4)

Janet Draper, the Smithsonian horticulturist responsible for the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden tells gardeners that the ground temperature, not the air temperature, should be considered when deciding when to plant certain annuals. Her advice? Take the "bare bottom test." "Sow warm weather annuals when you can sit on the soil with your bare bottom comfortably." (5)

With so much history and folklore surrounding gardening and farming in the nude, it's only fitting that the activity should have its own dedicated day. In 2005, *Nude & Natural* magazine consulting editor Mark Storey and permaculturalist Jacob Gabriel



founded World Naked Gardening Day, as a project of Seattle's Body Freedom Collaborative, but the event quickly evolved from its Seattle roots. "No particular organization owns World Naked Gardening Day," Storey explained in a 2013 interview with the *New York Daily News*. "It could be a little old lady in downtown Chicago with a potted plant, or a group raking leaves at a nudist club." (6) The first annual World Naked Gardening Day took place on September 10, 2005, but the event has since moved to the first Saturday in May, and become an international happening.

This year, World Naked Gardening Day will be celebrated on Saturday, May 6. If you have a private garden spot, it's the perfect opportunity to spend a little time enjoying the spring day. If you're the adventurous sort, you might consider getting up early and dancing nude in your apple orchard, or grab your loved one and run naked around your freshly-plowed cornfield like a "pair of rabbits." Perhaps take a moment that evening to strip down and locate the "microclimates" in your backyard, or find yourself an empty plot of dirt and try the "bare bottom test." If you're feeling particularly enthusiastic, revive the old "Up to my ass, and higher too!" chant of the Ozark farmers as you work. It's not clear if these activities will produce bigger fruit and more colorful flowers, but they're almost certain to add a little *joie de vivre* to your gardening.

You can also check for events in your area at <http://WNGD.INFO>

1. Allison Barrell, "Bring Your Own Towel: Nudism, The Federal Courts and Timberline Lodge," *Rural Life and Culture in the Upper Cumberland* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 324.
2. Randolph, Vance, "Nakedness in Ozark Folk Belief," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 66, No. 262 (Oct. - Dec., 1953), 333-339
3. *Garden Ideas & Outdoor Living*, (Spring, 1992)
4. Seebohm, Caroline and Sykes, Christopher, *Private Landscapes*, (Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1992)
5. <https://washingtongardener.blogspot.com/2010/03/bare-bottom-test.html>
6. Taylor, Victoria, "World Naked Gardening Day encourages no-pants planting," *New York Daily News*, (May 04, 2013)



# Walter Green, 1962 - 2023

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of a long-time advocate of naturism. From the obituary: "Walter M. "Chip" Green, III, age 60 died suddenly on Friday, January 20, 2023, in Odenton, MD."

"Chip was a 1980 graduate of Francis Scott Key High School. He served in the US Army from 1980 to 1984, with one tour of duty in Germany which he enjoyed immensely. Chip was a "Jack of all Trades," and was talented with electronics and computers. He was also a caretaker for an elderly gentleman. He loved reading science fiction novels, comic books, watching Doctor Who and was a self-proclaimed "Trekker". He was a formidable trivia player. Chip had a great sense of humor and was a practical joker."

Only two years ago, in March 2021, this newsletter featured an

interview with Walter and his success with MARNA. He describes the process of forming the non-landed club and obtaining venue space for social nude use.

If you're reading this, and are frustrated by the lack of social nude recreation opportunities in your area, you should seriously consider forming a club. Walter's experience demonstrates it's feasible. His interview is worth another look, and that's why it's being re-printed again below.



Please consider making a donation to Walter's family.

"This GoFundMe is to help out Walter's mother and family. Walter passed suddenly and without life insurance. "

<https://gf.me/u/37ddx6>

## Nude Swims with MARNA

### An Interview with Walter Green

By Bill Schroer, NAC Chair

Interview from February 1, 2021

Renting a public swimming pool for a nude swim event is a method for allowing nudist group members to swim during the off season or, if the group doesn't have its own pool, the opportunity to swim nude anytime of the year. If the event is open to the public, it is also a demonstrated way of successfully introducing non-nudists to the benefits of social nudism. While it is sometimes difficult to rent or lease a pool on an ongoing basis, the effort has paid off for a number of nudist organizations and supporters of naturism. Both landed and non-landed nudist organizations around the country, as well as some proactive nudist organizers, sponsor these events.

One such organizer and club is Walter M Green III, President and Founder of MARNA (Maryland Area Nudist Association). Under Walter's leadership MARNA has recently re-

started their public nude swims after having lost their swim venue several years ago. I recently spent some time talking with Walter about MARNA, the re-starting of their public nude swims and the impact on membership and introducing people to naturism.

Walter initiated the MARNA group as an online forum back in the mid-90s. "I wanted to start this club because there was no place for single naturists like me to go. Most nudist resorts didn't want me as a member....because I was single." He began his forum for single naturists, and as membership grew...the club evolved into a club where members would meet. Walter formalized the organization as an AANR (American Association for Nude Recreation) non-landed club (meaning there was no physical place owned by the group to meet or recreate). The group looked for opportunities to meet and socialize as

well as enjoy some activity. A nude swim event at a public pool became an idea supported by the group members.

In the early 2000s MARNA found a public pool willing to host the nude swim events. And, while MARNA was created by and for singles, couples and families were and are welcome to attend the nude swims and other activities. As Walter emphasized "Everything we do is a family event." (Those under 18 who wished to attend had to be accompanied by a parent or guardian. )

MARNA swims attracted 30-40 people on a monthly basis and continued until about 2010 when the facility was sold and the new owners did not make the pool available to MARNA.

A new facility which included a

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pool and fitness facility was discovered in Elkridge, Maryland...not as convenient but still within the Baltimore metro area. After holding the swim events successfully for several years, difficulties evolved including having to rent the pool from one group and the fitness facility from another group. From there the pool was closed and MARNA shifted to conducting nude yoga sessions in the fitness facility. This continued until some users of the facility became unhappy the facility wasn't available on the days MARNA reserved the space....and also that the facility was being rented to nudists. While the owner was very comfortable with MARNA and their events, pressure from other users of the facility resulted in MARNA losing access to the facility.

After several years of searching, Walter and his group found a new facility in November of 2020 in nearby Jessup, Maryland. Walter wants to hold events twice monthly but the Covid-19 issue has impacted his plans to hold events as frequently as some members might like. Still, the fact the swims are occurring at all in a Covid-19 environment is a testament to Walter and his team's determination: "We ask people to social distance and wear masks when not in the pool, but it isn't practical to require masks in the pool....". The swim events are still drawing about 15-20 individuals per event, reflecting some loss of participation due to Covid.



"Anyone looking for the opportunity to participate in nude recreation may want to do what Walter did...start your own, build it and they will come. MARNA is a model that may be replicated across the country....and I hope will be!"



While capacity is higher than the 15-20 guests currently attending, the State has restricted the capacity for any more due to the Covid-19 issue. Walter hopes once the Covid-19 problem is past he can expand the number of people able to attend.

Guests include members of MARNA and also includes non-member singles or couples and/or members of the community including families with children. The MARNA swim events do not have any restrictions on race, age, ethnicity or sexual orientation. And, Walter is resistant to restrict attendance on the basis of gender: "I don't want to put a restriction on single males...and so far we've had a pretty good overall mix, so I haven't had the need to do so." Walter noted this particular pool offered some unique benefits: "While some nude swim events have challenges relating to obtaining non-nudist lifeguards willing to work a nude event, that is not an issue at this facility as the pool is 3-4 feet deep throughout making it a very safe environment for swimmers of all abilities."

MARNA events are held now on Sundays....although the swims have been held on a Saturday, and Walter would like to mix up the dates. "Some members/guests can't attend on Sunday". The swim events normally run

for about 3 hours usually starting at 5 PM. Walter and the VP of MARNA along with a couple of volunteers, staff the events to make sure all the safety and behavior standards are followed. "We have occasionally had people who came to our swims for the wrong reason or who made comments to women that were inappropriate, and we had to ask them to leave. While we welcome everyone, anyone that doesn't behave responsibly will be asked to leave."

In addition to the swimming pool, this new facility has additional rooms available, and Walter initiated nude yoga classes (for a separate fee) as part of the mix of activities available.

Additional activities sponsored in the past by MARNA also include bowling. Walter notes the bowling events are not as popular as swimming, but he hopes to restart the bowling events as well. "The swimming events are the driver...as participation picks up in the pool we'll develop more interest in getting another bowling event going."

Walter works to promote the events both inside and outside of MARNA. "We promote the swim events through the MARNA website, Facebook, Meetup and of course through member word of mouth." While Walter would like to continue the swim events throughout the year he admits it is difficult to get people to come to an indoor facility to swim in the summer. The organization is looking for an outdoor pool to shift the swims outside during the summer but hasn't found an acceptable facility to date.

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Walter and VP's initiative and determination to create a singles nudist venue has resulted in some very positive outcomes:

- ▶ The existence of a non-landed AANR club in the Baltimore, MD metro area
- ▶ The creation and continued availability of monthly nude swim events open to MARNA members and the public
- ▶ The development of different nudist activities beyond swimming (i.e. yoga and bowling) which allow for a greater variety of nude friendly activities for both MARNA members and non-nudists interested in exploring nude recreation

### Lessons Learned

Reviewing my interview with Walter, I'm struck by what one person can accomplish (along with VP and other MARNA members) in the form of creating opportunities for nudists and for non-nudists to experience first hand the nudist approach to recreational activities. Walter's success is especially noteworthy as MARNA has no clubhouse or facility but manages to grow members, have fun events at different venues and build a sense of "community" all while operating "in a cloud". Additional takeaways from this interview include:

- ▶ There is interest in social nudism among the general public. Given an opportunity to explore the nudist experience many non-nudists may be persuaded to try it out.
- ▶ While renting a public pool for a nudist event may be (or

more likely "will be" a challenge) Walter's persistence paid off, and he has continued to find venues for his swims to be held.

- ▶ Interest goes beyond swimming. Nude yoga, bowling, card parties, billiard sessions and more may all be successfully incorporated into a holistic offering of nudist recreational activities offered by a club or organizer. The demand is there.

Overall, Walter Green's vision of a nudist club that admits everyone and offers a "family friendly" nudist experience through a range of nudist recreational activities is a both a success and a work in progress. Walter has plans for the future to expand and develop even more opportunities for nude recreation through his club. Anyone looking for the opportunity to participate in nude recreation may want to do what Walter did...start your own, build it and they will come. MARNA is a model that may be replicated across the country....and I hope will be!



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