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Tomorrow's Trees Today

Nut Buddies Gather Seeds to Help Create Future Forests

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"These will be the forests of tomorrow when our kids grow up," said Diane Lill of Silver Spring, looking at the little pile of acorns she and her 5-, 9- and 11-year-old kids collected over the weekend from their back yard.

Since 2001, nearly 30,000 kids, parents and teachers in the area have done the same. They're part of a small army of Nut Buddies, who have gathered up more than 94,000 pounds of acorns, walnuts and other hardwood tree seeds after they have fallen to the ground in Maryland, Virginia and the District.

The nut harvest is turned over to the Potomac Conservancy, a Silver Spring-based group. When the nuts -- which are really seeds of the trees -- have sprouted into baby trees, they are planted by volunteers (including scouts, school groups and other kids) along the streams and creeks that feed rain and spring water to the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay.

The young trees are tough, said Lill, a conservation biologist who runs the GreenKids environmental program with the Audubon Naturalist Society in Chevy Chase. Trees from these seeds have already shown they know how to live in our environment, she said. They like our sunshine and our rain patterns, and when they grow into big

oaks, walnuts, poplars and maples, they will help keep clean the water we need, she said.

"The problem is that Maryland and Virginia state nurseries don't have enough of these native trees," said Anne Sundermann of the conservancy's clean water Growing Native program.

Growing Native gives families, schools and other groups Nut Buddy playing cards that identify the nuts needed, she explained. There are numerous drop-off sites for the nuts at schools and other public places.

"It's easy to be a Nut Buddy," Sundermann said. "Every kid can help us make tomorrow greener and better."

-- **Raymond M. Lane**

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