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## Mending Nettleton Preserve One Apple Tree At A Time

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By KENDRA BOBOWICK

Reaching his arms around the trunk of a tree to feed orange ribbon through his fingers, Newtown Forest Association (NFA) Treasurer Guy Peterson this week marked the tree for removal. "It's a shame, the blight," he said. Stepping back to look toward the upper branches he noted the deadwood jutting into the sky from within a high-reaching nest of brambles. Not only disease, but invasive species are threatening an apple orchard at the Nettleton Preserve off Castle Hill Road, where the trees are nearly swallowed from sight by encroaching vines.

As elm and ash tree disease has "overaccelerated deadfall," of compromised branches and limbs, Mr Peterson also indicated, "These trees are choked." Blocking sunlight and impeding growth are thick tendrils of invasive plants that grow faster and leaf-out more quickly than native trees and shrubs.

For the past few years and "in the spirit of Earth Day," the NFA members and volunteers have led a cleanup to clear the brush and deteriorating trees, which they will do again this year on the weekend of May 1, following the prior week's April 24 Earth Day celebration at Newtown Middle School. (See related story.)

The NFA welcomes members, residents, scouts, or "anyone willing" to participate in the Everyday Is Earth Day Trail Clean Up and Preserve Restoration day on the first Saturday of May. Posted in a recent release, Mr Peterson writes, "You can and will make a difference."

Join volunteers at the Old Castle Drive site off Castle Hill Road at 10 am to begin pruning overhanging limbs from trails, repair trail areas, remove invasive plants, mulch existing plantings, and remove fallen debris. The NFA will supply water bottles and basic first aid supplies. Limited yard tools will be available. Mr Peterson asks that participants with tools to bring their own hand-held clippers, shears, loppers, saws, rakes or wheel barrows. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Groups larger than four members should call in advance at 203-270-3650 or email [nfagoodneighbor@newtownforestassociation.org](mailto:nfagoodneighbor@newtownforestassociation.org).

### Nettleton Preserve

Tugging at a low-hanging apple blossom and peering at the buds on the limbs, Mr Peterson said, "This will be beautiful here in a couple weeks. All these trees will flower and bloom." As his organization's efforts to reduce overgrowth in past years have freed much of the orchard, residents driving up Castle Hill will be able to see the blossoms brightening the meadow. "It's a little enclave; there is a lot of beauty hidden here," he said.



[Enlarge Image](#)

**Newtown Forest Association Treasurer Guy Peterson ties a ribbon around a tree choked by invasive vines at the Nettleton Preserve on the corner of Castle Hill and Old Castle Hill Roads overlooking a scenic view of Newtown's Main Street near the flagpole and Newtown Meeting House. In the spirit of Earth Day, the Newtown Forest Association welcomes supporters and volunteers for a trail and site cleanup on May 1, to both improve the more than 25-acre property and to highlight one of Newtown's enclaves of natural habitat and open space. —Bee Photo, Bobowick**



[Enlarge image](#)

**Daffodils line a footpath leading downhill from a bench on Old Castle Hill Road and into an apple orchard previously buried by invasive vines and choked almost completely by overgrowth. The Newtown Forest Association members and its volunteers have worked in past years to save the old apple trees and clear the orchard to both boost the grove's health and restore the property for residents to enjoy.**

Until a few years ago, "I never even knew there was an orchard there," Mr Peterson said. The trees "are not the healthiest," but recent efforts have freed some of them from encroaching species. "They were choked, but now I hope they have a chance to survive." He also welcomes help from experts who might know how to help the trees bare fruit.

Stepping through the orchard, he passed brush piles where cleared limbs and debris were heaped together. He does not have the right tools and equipment to remove or reduce the rubbish, which for now can serve as shelter and habitat for small wildlife, but anticipates the piles will "return to the soil," or will be mulched, he said.

Above the orchard is a meadow where the grasses are permitted to grow long and are cut only several times in a season. "The meadow grasses are a dying habitat," he said. Ground-nesting birds, for example, or butterflies rely on them.

Volunteers and scouts will not be doing any new plantings on May, but they will maintain recent native plantings, mulch existing plantings, or mulch and "clean up what doesn't belong."

Regarding the trees he marked with orange tape, he said that this year they will hire someone to remove and chip some of the trees. The May 1 event is a continuation of past Earth Day projects.