

The South River Current



Promoting interest and collaboration for watershed stewardship



Biochar Compost. [Photo by Zack Dowell](#)

Watershed Restoration: The Dirt on Dirt

What's new in the world of dirt these days? Biochar. Biochar looks a lot like charcoal and is produced by heating organic debris like wood chips, manure, or leaves in the presence of little to no oxygen. Unlike charcoal, which is often used for cooking, biochar can be mixed with soil to improve soil quality. Research shows that adding biochar to soil helps the soil retain its nutrients longer. It also helps maintain stable soil carbon levels, holds water like a sponge, naturally aerates the soil, and adsorbs (yes, ad- not ab-sorbs) excess toxic chemicals. (Click [here](#) for article on the use of biochar in riverbank remediation on the South River.) Because of these attributes, adding biochar to soil can cut down on agricultural expenses over time by decreasing the frequency of fertilizer application and watering. Although this approach is new to the modern agricultural industry, scientists theorize that the practice of

incorporating charred matter into soil is centuries old. Biochar is suspected to have been first used thousands of years ago in the Amazon Basin where extensive regions of dark, highly fertile soil were discovered. Today, local Watershed residents can find biochar for purchase at [SWVA Biochar](#) in Floyd County. For more information about the practical applications of biochar, click [here](#).



Did You Know?

- [The Waynesboro Farmers Market](#) is open! Stop by 101 Short Street any Saturday between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. from May to September.
 - Producing and burying biochar removes carbon from the atmosphere which helps reduce climate change.
 - Today's combine harvester still uses the basic features from McCormick's revolutionary 1831 invention.
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Connections: A Fellowship For Fresh Food Lovers

You may not be a farmer, but do you fancy a backyard garden? Or maybe you just love food. Anyone with an appetite for any of the above is sure to enjoy a workshop at Allegheny Mountain Institute (AMI). AMI was established to cultivate healthy communities through food and education. They offer a tuition-free, experiential Fellowship that empowers individuals to become leaders in and advocates for a food system that is socially, environmentally, and economically beneficial to all. They help schools, hospitals, and organizations to integrate farming, nutritious vegetables, and related education into their food systems and outreach initiatives while participating in regional collaborations. The AMI Farm at Augusta Health in Fishersville holds regular workshops that include tours, talks, and farm-fresh tastings. You can attend on your own or wrangle together a group of students or friends to attend. To expand your knowledge of gardening and sustainable growing habits, glance through AMI's [list of events](#) and reserve your spot. To sample their farm-fresh goodies, visit the farm stand at 315 Mule Academy Road, Fishersville, VA, on Thursdays from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. from April to November. Eighty percent of the produce grown on the AMI Farm at Augusta Health proudly supports the Augusta Health cafeteria, integration initiatives, and community benefit outreach programs.



Take a Walk Back: A Famous Cyrus Has Local Roots

No, it's not Miley or Billy Ray. Cyrus was actually this famous person's first name. Cyrus Hall McCormick grew up around these parts back in the early 1800s. As the son of a local farmer, blacksmith, and inventor, McCormick was determined to build and market a horse-drawn grain reaper. He created the first successful version at age 22. Six years later, he made some design improvements and began selling the invention to area farmers. Sales took off in the 1840s when he branched out into the Midwest prairie states. When his patent expired in 1848, McCormick beat out competing manufacturers through mass production, advertising, public demonstrations, and product warranties. At the London Great Exhibition of 1851, his reaper took the grand prize; he won the Grand Medal of Honour in Paris just four years later. In 1902, the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company merged with other businesses and became International Harvester Company where McCormick's son, Cyrus Jr., was president. By the end of his lifetime, McCormick was world renowned, but his roots would forever remain at Walnut Grove, his family farm in Steel's Tavern, Augusta County, Virginia. McCormick is listed as a gambler-style innovator in the [PBS "Who Made America?" archives](#) along with John Wanamaker, Levi Strauss, and Walt Disney. Not too shabby for a guy from a small Virginia town! Perhaps it's true that your dreams are only limited by the amount of effort you are willing to expend to achieve them.

For upcoming events go to the [South River Watershed Coalition Events Page](#).

Add me to the distribution list!



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Our mailing address is:
510-D West Broad Street
Waynesboro, VA 22980