



The South River Current

Promoting interest and collaboration for watershed stewardship



River Restoration

Biochar is a term applied to any organic material or “biomass” that has been burned or charred with limited oxygen, similar to the process of making commercial charcoal for backyard barbecues. Because biochar can absorb and hold onto water and certain types of chemicals, it has been added to agricultural soil to increase fertility while reducing the leaching of nutrients into groundwater. Biochar is also being used to help clear chemicals from polluted stormwater runoff. Multiple studies confirmed that biochar can immobilize and bind mercury, so the South River Science Team incorporated biochar in the newly designed riverbanks. To understand more about the potential benefits of biochar for the environment, read Chapter 4 of the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s 2019 report [here](#).

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At Constitution Park, the riverbank was reinforced using 12-inch-high, honeycomb-shaped grids filled with sand and biochar.

Did You Know?

- Biochar is created by a chemical process called pyrolysis, in which material is heated in the presence of limited oxygen.
- CSAs help the environment by reducing the need for farmers to transport and refrigerate their produce over long distances, decreasing carbon dioxide emissions!
- The York Imperial apple was known for its ability to retain freshness and for its lopsided shape. The latter-mentioned characteristic likely led to its demise when grocers began choosing apple varieties based on their appearance.

York Imperial Apple



Connections

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a form of crop sharing that connects consumers directly to nearby farms. Consumers become CSA members by paying an agreed amount at the beginning of the growing season (in a lump sum or installments) in exchange for a regular supply of crops throughout the growing season. Within the South River Watershed, CSA opportunities are available with fruit and vegetable farms, poultry, and livestock farms, and even [fresh flowers farms](#) that offer a bouquet subscription. It only takes a few minutes of internet searching to explore the growing list of local farms involved. [Localharvest.org](#) is a great place to start. Click on “CSA” and then enter your city or zip code for a list of local participants.



Take a Walk Back

Augusta County is known as Virginia’s leader in sheep, beef cattle, and hay production, but it wasn’t always that way. Starting 120 years ago, the County was known locally and nationally as an apple producer. Over a dozen varieties of apples were sold from this area—York Imperial, Rome, Albemarle Pippin, and Smokehouse, to name a few. Each variety was grown for a specific purpose, ranging from cooking, drying, and cider-making to just munching right off the tree. In the early 20th century, apples from Augusta County were even being shipped by railroad as far north as Baltimore. The Virginia apple industry peaked in the 1930s, but by 1977 was almost gone. The exact reason for the decline is unknown, but it is likely connected to the growth of the modern supermarket. As produce became easier to ship nationwide, grocers could be choosier in what varieties they added to their market displays. The glossy, ruby-red shine of the Red Delicious boosted its popularity in stores and less visually appealing apples fell by the wayside. Local orchard land was repurposed into small lots for new homes, with streets named after the apples. For more information on the apple orchard boom in Augusta County, click [here](#).



The Current is a publication of the South River Science Team (www.southernriverstewards.org). To be added or deleted from our distribution list, contact KB at kbaldino@writingunlimitedllc.com