



# Dragonfly Garden

The Dragonfly Garden is planted with rows of **Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)** in the shape of a dragonfly. The head of the dragonfly includes a ring of river rocks, painted with creative designs by J. Albert Adams Academy students. Virginia Sweetspires are some of the most brilliant shrubs of the spring and fall garden. Native from New Jersey to eastern Texas, they thrive throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Virginia Sweetspires are very versatile shrubs—they thrive in moist soil, and will adapt to dry conditions if given plenty of water during their first year while becoming established. These beautiful native shrubs grow well in either sun or partial shade, although they are most attractive where they receive at least six hours of sun.

## 10 Fun Facts About Dragonflies

(Excerpted from an article by Sarah Zielinski, science writer for Smithsonian.com)

1. Dragonflies were some of the first winged insects to evolve, some 300 million years ago. Modern dragonflies have wingspans of only two to five inches, but fossil dragonflies have been found with wingspans of up to two feet.
2. Some scientists theorize that high oxygen levels during the Paleozoic era allowed dragonflies to grow to monster size.
3. There are more than 5,000 known species of dragonflies, all of which (along with damselflies) belong to the order Odonata, which means “toothed one” in Greek and refers to the dragonfly’s serrated teeth.
4. In their larval stage, which can last up to two years, dragonflies are aquatic and eat just about anything—tadpoles, mosquitoes, fish, other insect larvae and even each other.
5. At the end of its larval stage, the dragonfly crawls out of the water; and then its exoskeleton cracks open and releases the insect’s abdomen, which had been packed in like a telescope. Its four wings come out, and they dry and harden over the next several hours to days.
6. Dragonflies are expert fliers. They can fly straight up and down, hover like a helicopter and even mate mid-air. If they can’t fly, they’ll starve because they only eat prey they catch while flying.
7. Dragonflies catch their insect prey by grabbing it with their feet. They’re so efficient in their hunting that, in one Harvard University study, the dragonflies caught 90 to 95 percent of the prey released into their enclosure. A single adult dragonfly can eat 30 to hundreds of mosquitoes per day and are a great control on the mosquito population.
8. The flight of the dragonfly is so special that it has inspired engineers who dream of making robots that fly like dragonflies.
9. Some adult dragonflies live for only a few weeks while others live up to a year.
10. Nearly all of the dragonfly’s head is eye, so they have incredible vision that encompasses almost every angle except right behind them.

