

At The North Carolina Arboretum, the Blue Ridge Naturalist curriculum offers classes, field studies, walks and workshops designed to provide residents and visitors in Western North Carolina with an opportunity to learn about the natural history and heritage of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Students may select individual classes or may enroll in the Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate of Merit program to gain in-depth knowledge of the natural history of the region.

This program offers opportunities to:

- Have fun exploring the natural world while learning about the biodiversity and ecology of the mountains from regional naturalists
- Foster an understanding of the environment and the current status of mountain habitats
- Participate in volunteer opportunities related to Certificate of Merit projects.

Requirements for a Blue Ridge Naturalist Certificate of Merit

1. Completion of the following core classes, each of which range from 12 to 24 class hours:

- Ecology
- Geology/Meteorology
- Water Systems of the Blue Ridge
- Botany Basics
- Animals of the Blue Ridge
- Tree Identification
- Wildflower/native plants (one season, another season may be taken as elective)
- Beginner Birding
- Insects (minimal emphasis on butterflies)
- Reptiles and Amphibians

2. Completion of elective class(s) for a total of 16 class hours:

- Forest types of the Blue Ridge
- Astronomy
- Butterflies
- Wilderness first aide
- Mushrooms
- Ferns
- Orienteering/map reading
- Wildflowers/native plants (a different season than the core class taken)
- Interpretation

To obtain credit towards the BRN Certificate of Merit students must attend 75% of all sessions in each class and pass a take home or in-class test with 75% accuracy.

3. Final Project:

After completion of core classes, the participant will meet with the Adult Education Program Manager and/or members of the BRN Advisory Team to confer on the student's final project. Completion of the project is required to earn the certificate and it is suggested, but not mandatory, that the project be completed within one year of completing the required course work. It is recommended that the project:

- Utilize knowledge gained in the BRN classes
- Contain a service component which benefits the greater community, the overall mission of the NC Arboretum and the BRN program
- Require at least 40 hours of student time

The class work and final project will total approximately 250 hours of student time. Current members of the BRN Advisory Team will be available to serve as consultants and mentors as students move through the Certificate of Merit curriculum. Please note that this Certificate is awarded in recognition that participants have completed a comprehensive program of study on the natural world of the Blue Ridge. It does not meet requirements towards a degree of any kind.

If you have additional questions or are interested in gaining a Certificate of Merit, please contact Margaret Kosco at mkosco@ncarboretum.org.

