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## Virginia Zoo and Gunston Hall Turnip the Competition, Invite Public to Join

Norfolk, Va. – The Virginia Zoo and Gunston Hall are taking part in a “Sprout Bout” -- a turnip-growing competition. Over the next two months, the cultural institutions will see who can grow the largest turnip and will track their progress on Instagram with #sproutbout. The public is encouraged to follow along and join by planting their own turnips at home.

Turnips are fast, easy growing, and an underrated vegetable! They often outcompete weeds and their deep roots help loosen and aerate the soil. During the colonial era, turnips were a reliable storage crop that proved tasty well into the winter. Today, Gunston Hall is using turnips to condition the soil of their newly restored riverside garden. Turnips are grown at the Zoo for the animals, as a supplement to their diet or enrichment items. The two horticulture teams think this “Sprout Bout” is a fun way to test their abilities to grow the vegetable in slightly different climates.

“I’m excited for this new partnership that creates a unique learning experience for the public,” said Brian Francis, Curator of Horticulture at the Virginia Zoo. “In times like these, we need reasons to step away from the screen and this gives your green thumb an opportunity to grow,” Francis added.

“I am excited to be partnering with the Virginia Zoo. This project highlights what our forebearers knew about turnips. It was clear even in the 1700s that turnips were really reliable and versatile--they could feed people, animals, and restore soils,” said Ryan Dostal, the horticulturist of Gunston Hall. “I just hope our soils are up to the challenge. I saw what the Virginia Zoo grew in 2019, five pounds and nine ounces is impressive--we’ve got our work cut out for us,” he added.

Instructions on planting turnips can be found at <https://gunstonhall.org/sprout-bout/>.

### **About the Virginia Zoo**

The Virginia Zoo, located in Norfolk, Virginia, is home to more than 700 exceptional animals representing over 100 fascinating species. Founded in 1901 and residing on 53 beautifully landscaped acres, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to saving and protecting the world’s wildlife by inspiring a passion for nature and taking conservation action at home and around the world. The Virginia Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is recognized as a global leader in education, recreation, science, wildlife conservation, and animal care and welfare. For more than a century, the Zoo has connected adults, families and school children with the natural world and its wildlife. To learn more, visit [www.virginiazoo.org](http://www.virginiazoo.org).

### **About Gunston Hall**

Gunston Hall is the 18th-century historic home of George Mason, located in Lorton, Virginia on Mason Neck. On the property

you'll find Mason's 1750s Georgian-style mansion, a newly restored one-acre riverside garden, reproduction outbuildings such as a kitchen, schoolhouse, laundry, and dairy, and walking trails set along the Potomac River. The site also includes the Mason-family burial ground and an archaeology facility. Most recently, archaeological evidence has uncovered dwellings of the enslaved community during Mason's time. With the discovery of this site, Gunston Hall has prioritized the further investigation to better understand and interpret this area in its entirety. The mission of Gunston Hall is to stimulate the exploration and understanding of principles expressed by George Mason in the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights.

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