

Tips for Green Leaders

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FREDERICK COUNTY



Gardening with Native Plants



Why Choose Native Plants?

– Teresa Gallion, M.G., *Wildlife Gardening Adventures*

From the streamside wetlands to the mountaintop forests, thousands of plant species contribute to the diverse ecosystems of Frederick County. They provide wildlife with food, shelter, and places to raise their young, and they keep our water clean. These diverse plant communities are the foundation of all ecosystems – including those in your yard.

Native plants established their habitats without being dispersed large distances by humans. We can use this definition to easily judge what is native. Plants that were growing in the continental United States before Europeans arrived are considered native. Because native plants have been part of their habitats for so long, they are naturally adapted to the local environment and are often more disease-, flood-, and drought-resistant than non-natives. You can reintroduce and conserve our native plant species by including them in your home gardens. You will be protecting our natural resources because your garden will require fewer chemicals, less water, and less maintenance. Planted in the proper location, natives are very low-maintenance.



Spring bloom of a native redbud

A little research can save you a lot of trouble. Think about the vast diversity of the mid-Atlantic region; coastal grasses would not survive in a woodland garden of the Catoctin Mountains.

Choose native plants that reflect the conditions of your specific area. A well drained, full sun location is perfect for the butterfly-attracting dense blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), while the moisture-tolerant cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) will do well along the edge of a pond.

Most nurseries carry some native plants, and some nurseries specialize in native plants. Some plants will be more readily available than others will. If you have a favorite that you can't obtain, be sure to ask your local nursery to consider adding it to their stock.

Native plants should not be removed from the wild unless an area is about to be developed. Even then, it is difficult to transplant wild collected plants and to duplicate their sod and other growth requirements in a home garden. Plants that are grown from seed or cuttings by nurseries have a much greater tolerance for garden conditions. Help to preserve natural areas by purchasing plants that have been grown, not collected.

Non-Native Plants

Non-native, invasive, or exotic plants introduced from other parts of the world have degraded many natural ecosystems. Some of these non-native plants were brought here intentionally for their medicinal, ornamental, or food value. Others hid in soil, crop seed, or ballast water. Although many non-native plants are considered beneficial and containable, it is difficult for most gardeners to know the risks of every ornamental plant. Some introduced plants have few or no natural measures of control or competition. Invasive plants spread rapidly and out-compete native vegetation, and few species of wildlife eat them. Ecosystems impacted by invasive, non-native plants have a reduced ability to clean our air and water, stabilize the soil, and provide wildlife habitat.

Common Invasive Species of Maryland:

Vines:

Mile-a-Minute (*Polygonum perfoliatum*)
Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)
Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)
English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

Shrubs:

Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*)

Grasses:

Japanese Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)
Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*)

Trees:

Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)
Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*)
Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)

Herbaceous plants:

Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)
Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)
Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)
Bull Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)

Tidbits

In 1994, President Clinton recognized the natural landscaping movement by issuing an Executive Memorandum that presented guidelines for the use of natural landscaping at federal facilities. The use of native plants around the Vice Presidential mansion is one example of how the government implemented this new mandate.



Use of pesticides may kill beneficial pollinators, like the monarch butterfly.

Pesticides are often wrongly applied at times when target insects are not vulnerable. Overuse and inappropriate use can kill beneficial insects and other wildlife; less than 10% of all insects are harmful to plants. Pesticides may also cause serious human health problems when handled improperly. You can decrease the use of chemicals by planting native plants, which are so well-adapted to their native ecosystems that they often do not require extra nutrients or protection from pests.

Planting drought-resistant plants in your yard reduces the amount of watering required to keep the plants healthy. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that a household can save 20-50% of their outdoor watering needs by converting to a water-efficient landscape through the use of drought-resistant plants and careful design. Many native plants are drought resistant. Consult a native plant guide to decide which plants to use.



Americans use 300 million gallons of gas each year to mow lawns.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Americans mow 31 million acres of lawn every year. It takes 300 million gallons of gas and 1 billion hours to complete the chore. And for this privilege they will spend \$17 billion on everything from pesticides (70 million pounds) to lawn tractors. Grass clippings consume an estimated 25 to 40% of landfill space during the course of the growing season in many U.S. suburban communities.

Resources:

Native Plants and Natural Landscaping:
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Bayscapes
allianceforthebay.org/library/publications/bayscapes/

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
www.wildflower.org/explore/

Maryland Native Plant Society
www.mdflora.org

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/bayscapes.htm
www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/chesapeake/

Wild Ones - Native Plants, Native Landscapes
www.for-wild.org

Audubon Society of Central Maryland
www.centralmdaudubon.org/index.htm

Invasive Species:
The Maryland Invasive Species Council
www.mdinvasivesp.org/index.html

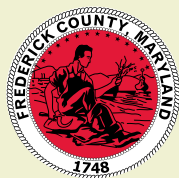
The Maryland Department of Natural Resources
www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/Plants_Wildlife/invintro.asp

The University of Maryland, Home and Garden
www.hgic.umd.edu/_media/documents/publications/hg88.pdf

Planting Native Programs:
Growing Native
www.potomac.org/site/growingnative/

Marylanders Plant Trees Program
www.trees.maryland.gov/

National Wildlife Federation Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program
www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/



The Tips for Green Leaders in Frederick County is a public outreach component of the Frederick County Office of Sustainability and Environmental Resources' Green Homes Challenge (GHC) and the Monocacy & Catoctin Watershed Alliance (MCWA). For more information about the GHC or MCWA, please visit: www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/GreenHomes or www.watershed-alliance.com/. Or, call the GHC Program Coordinator at 301.600.7414 or MCWA Coordinator at 301.600.1741.