

What are Native Plants? And Why are they Important?



What are Native Plants?

A native plant is one that occurs naturally in the place where it evolved. That means it got there without any human intervention; humans didn't introduce it either accidentally, or on purpose. Many people say they are plants that were here before Europeans got here in the 15th century.

Why Should I Plant Natives?

- Save Water & Low Maintenance:**
 Once established in the right place, many native plants need minimal irrigation beyond normal rainfall. Low maintenance landscaping methods are a natural fit with native plants that are already adapted to the local environment.
- Wildlife Viewing:**
 Native plants, birds, butterflies, beneficial insects, and interesting critters are "made for each other." Research shows that native wildlife prefers native plants.
- Support Local Ecology and develop a Sense of Place:**
 As development replaces natural habitats, planting gardens, parks, and roadsides with Delaware natives can provide a "bridge" to nearby remaining wild lands. Spring wild flowers are pollinated by and provide nectar to tiny flies. These flies become food for early spring birds. The timing is orchestrated perfectly. It is not a coincidence that the local native plants have seeds and berries ready just when the birds need them. Bird droppings are the best way to get their seed dispersed. Plants and animals that have evolved together depend upon each other for survival.

Native Alternatives to Invasive Exotic Plants

Autumn Olive	Winterberry, American Beautyberry, Spicebush
Bradford Pear	Redbud, Yellowwood
Burning Bush	Blueberries, Virginia Sweetspire
Common reed (Phragmites)	Smooth cordgrass
Japanese Barberry	Winterberry, Sparkleberries
Japanese honeysuckle	Native honeysuckle with many varieties and colors
Japanese knotweed	Virginia sweetspire, Sweet Pepperbush
Mile a minute	Native honeysuckles, Dutchman's pipevine
Multiflora Rose	Swamp Rose, Pasture Rose
Norway maple	Red maple
Oriental bittersweet	Virginia creeper
Privet	Winterberry, American Beautyberry, Spicebush
Rose of Sharon	Native hibiscus
Sweet Autumn clematis	Native clematis
Wineberry	Huckleberry, elderberry, blueberry

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SOME LOCAL NATIVE PLANTS – there are many more, just ask!

Perennials				
Turtlehead	Part shade	Moist soil	12 – 18”	White or pink flowers in summer
Butterfly Milkweed	Sun	Average to dry soil	12 – 24”	Orange flowers, Monarchs
Joe Pye weeds	Sun	Average to moist soil	12 – 48”	Many kinds, rose to pink to purple
Seaside goldenrod	Sun	Dry to average soil	36 – 60”	Yellow flowers summer, salt tolerant
Swamp Milkweed	Sun	Moist to wet soil	24 – 48”	Pink flowers, loved by Monarchs
Shrubs				
Red chokeberry	Part shade	Average soil	4 – 6’	Nice green leaves, beautiful fall color, great berries
Virginia Willow, Itea	Part sun	Average to moist soil, tolerant of flooding	2 – 4’	Different varieties, beautiful cream flowers, fall color
Inkberry	Part to full shade	Average to wet soil	3 – 5’	Evergreen, black berries, reliable
Sweet Pepperbush	Part to full shade	Average to moist soil, tolerant of flooding	2 - 5’	Different varieties, white or pink flowers summer, beautiful and fragrant
Bayberries	Sun	Average to dry soil	3 – 6’	Different types, some evergreen, fragrant berries, salt tolerant
Blueberries	Sun to part shade	Average, acidic soil	3 – 6’	Beautiful flowers, delicious fruit, great fall color
Groundsel Tree	Sun to part sun	average to wet soil	4 – 6’	Beautiful silvery flowers autumn, salt tolerant
Trees				
Persimmon	Part shade	Average soil	30 – 50’	Yellow, orange to mauve fall color; butterfly larval plant
Loblolly Pine	Sun	Average soil, tolerant of flooding	50 – 90’	Dark green needles; rapid growth; seed eaten by birds, soft texture
Fringetree	Sun to part shade	Average soil	10 – 25’	Magnificent early summer flowers, male and female trees
Serviceberry	Sun to part shade	Average soil	10 – 15’	Beautiful early spring flowers, edible berries