



BUILDING A GREENER LIFESTYLE FOR FREDERICK COUNTY

Gardening with Native Plants

NATIVE PLANTS -Teresa Gallion, M.G., Wildlife Gardening Adventures

Here in Frederick County, from the forests to the valleys, streams and rivers, fields and meadows, plant communities are made up of hundreds of species carpeting wild places. These plant communities transform energy from the sun and nutrients from the soil into food for themselves and wildlife. They provide wildlife with cover and places to raise their young, as well as keeping water sources clean. These diverse plant communities are the foundation of all ecosystems—including your yard.

True natives established their homes purely by natural means—humans had no part. Using this definition, we can generally judge what is native by time: plants that were growing here before Europeans arrived are considered native. You can reintroduce and conserve our native plant species by including them in your home garden. Native plants are naturally adapted to the local environment and are often more disease and water fluctuation resistant than non-natives. You will be protecting our natural resources because your garden will require fewer chemicals, less water, and less maintenance.

Native plants and animals coevolved, meaning that they have spent thousands of years becoming dependent on one another. As a useful part of the food web, native plants far outperform exotic plants that have characterized landscaping for much of the past century.



A native plant garden can provide beauty, a connection with the natural world, and environmental benefits.

Native plants can be a wonderful addition to your garden design. Planted in the proper location, natives are considered low-maintenance. A little research can save you a lot of trouble. Think about how diverse the mid-Atlantic region is. You wouldn't expect to plant grasses native to the Chesapeake Bay area in a woodland garden in the Catoctin Mountains and be successful. Plant for where your garden is. A well drained, full sun location is perfect for the butterfly attracting *Liatris spicata* while the moisture tolerant Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) will do well along the edge of a pond. There are so many beautiful, hardy, wildlife-friendly possibilities for home gardeners.

Most nurseries carry some native plants, and some nurseries specialize and carry a greater selection. 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 or exotic plants introduced from other parts of the world or other parts of the country 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 do not escape into the natural environment, it is difficult for most gardeners to know the risks of every ornamental plant. Some of these introduced plants are invasive, meaning that there are few or no naturally occurring measures such as insects or competitors to control them. Invasive plants can spread rapidly and smother or out-compete native vegetation. Ecosystems impacted by invasive, non-native plants have a reduced ability to clean our air and water, stabilize the soil, buffer floods, and provide wildlife food and shelter.

A widely preferred definition of a weed is that it is a plant that is out of place. Looking at it that way, a dandelion in your lawn is certainly a weed, but so is a rosebush in a cornfield. Federal and local government agencies have identified weeds of horticultural importance. Johnson grass, Multiflora rose, 4 kinds of thistle and Shattercane are recognized as noxious weeds. These plants are pests. They grow so quickly and take over ground where they spread that they are referred to as 'invasive.' These are weeds and should not be encouraged. Many exotic plants that have been imported to this area such as Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) and English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) take over environments that native plants once occupied. When native species are crowded out, the loss impacts other plants and animals. But don't let the word 'weed' in a plant name mislead you. Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*) and New York ironweed (*Veronia noveboracensis*) are wonderful blooms for your butterfly garden.

RESOURCES:

- Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay - Bayscapes
www.acb-online.org/project.cfm?vid=85
410-377-6270
"Bayscapes are environmentally-sound landscapes benefiting people, wildlife, and the Chesapeake Bay."
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
www.wildflower.org
Great internet resource, including a native plant database that is searchable by state with links to images, articles, and regional fact sheets.
- Maryland Native Plant Society
www.mdflora.org
Dedicated to Protecting, Conserving, and Restoring Maryland's Native Plants and Habitats.
- Montgomery County Maryland Department of Environmental Protection – Natural Landscaping Webpage
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc/services/dep/Landscape/natural.html
Webpage has a lot of good information and links.
- National Wildlife Federation Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program
www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/
- US Fish and Wildlife Service Chesapeake Bay Field Office
www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/bayscapes.htm
- Wild Ones - Native Plants, Native Landscapes
www.for-wild.org
877-FYI-WILD
- Wildlife Gardening Adventures Native Garden Consultants
Jim and Teresa Gallion, 301-898-0678

TIDBITS



Photo Courtesy of Wildlife Gardening Adventures

Monarch Butterfly on *Laitris*

inappropriate use often kill beneficial insects and other wildlife. Less than 10% of all insects are harmful to plants. Pesticides have the potential to cause serious human health problems when not handled properly or applied according to the label directions. By eliminating or minimizing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, these pollutants will not run-off into streams, lakes and bays. This improves the quality of the water and the resident aquatic life.

Some people believe that trees in urban areas can hide would-be criminals, thus increasing the likelihood of crime. But a series of scientific studies by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign demonstrates that the opposite may be true. Residents living in 'greener' surroundings actually report lower levels of fear, fewer incivilities, and less violent behavior. There were also fewer crimes reported in these areas. Reasons why green spaces may inhibit crime include: vegetation alleviates mental fatigue, one of the precursors to violent behavior; green spaces are used more, deterring potential criminals through fear of being watched; and greenery promotes a sense of community, leading residents to feel safe and be more civil toward one another.

Source: *Human-Environment Research Laboratory, University of Illinois, www.herl.uiuc.edu*

According to the US 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 US suburban communities.

The lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not reserved for scientists but are available to anyone who will place himself under the influence of earth, sea and sky, and their amazing life.

-Rachel Carson, from *The Sense of Wonder, 1956*



Community Commons



The Building a Greener Lifestyle series is a public outreach component of the Frederick County WRAS (Watershed Restoration Action Strategy), an alliance of diverse stakeholders interested in improving water quality and wildlife habitat in the Monocacy and Catoctin Watersheds. Community Commons coordinated the series to empower citizens to take action in their own homes and yards towards improving water quality. More information about the WRAS can be found at www.co.frederick.md.us/cleanstreams or by calling 301.694.1741. Community Commons can be reached at 301.662.3000 or at www.communitycommons.org.