

Pennsylvania Native Plants for the Perennial Garden

Herbaceous (non-woody) perennial plants add year-round interest to any landscape and are a popular choice of plants among gardeners. Though thousands of perennials are available, native perennials have a special role in the garden.

Why Natives?

By definition, a native Pennsylvania plant is one that grew in Pennsylvania before the European settlers arrived, as opposed to exotic plants which came from other countries after that time period. Natives have many advantages. Because they evolved here, they are well-adapted to our climate and are generally easy to care for once they are established. Many native perennials like less fertile soil and require the addition of little or no fertilizer. Perhaps the most compelling reason to choose natives is to preserve Pennsylvania's biodiversity. Development is rapidly reducing natural areas that shelter a wealth of our native plants; the landscapes that replace the natural areas consist mostly of lawns and exotic plants. Recent research from Dr. Doug Tallamy of the University of Delaware has determined that 90 percent of our native insects are specialists that feed on three or fewer families of plants. The insects rely on native plant hosts and cannot eat the exotic plants that have become common in our yards. A reduction of native insects means that birds have fewer insects to feed to their young, and that will lead to a reduction of bird species. In the next fifty years, what we plant in our yards will determine the kind of wildlife that can live in Pennsylvania. By planting natives, gardeners can help retain our natural history and the beauty and diversity of Penn's Woods.

Choosing Native Perennials

Though native plants have the home advantage, matching their needs to the growing site is still very important. The soil around many of our home sites is

not the rich topsoil that was there 300 years ago. Topsoil is often removed prior to home construction and may not be replaced afterwards.

Determine your soil type—do you have heavy clay or silty loam? Is it high or low in organic matter? Does it tend to dry out quickly after a rainfall or does it hold moisture?

Other factors must also be considered. Is the site in sun or shade? How much room does the site allow for perennials to grow to their maximum size without crowding? Combining plants that grow well in the same natural habitats will help create healthy, vigorous plantings. If you do some homework and place plants in the proper environment, you will be rewarded with gardens that thrive with less care.



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Planting and Care

Spring, early summer, and fall are the best times to establish native perennials. Test your soil before planting and, if needed, amend the nutrients according to the soil test results. Remember that many natives do not require the addition of fertilizer and may do poorly in highly-fertilized soil. Plants that require moist soil high in organic matter will do well if compost is added. Cultivate the soil to a depth of eight to ten inches and incorporate any soil amendments.

When planting, placing the plant in a hole at the same depth as when it was in the container is important. If the plant is root-bound, make sure you free the root system by gently pulling it apart. Once the backfill soil is added, water the plant thoroughly. Additional water may be needed during the growing season until plants are well established. If planted in the proper environment, many natives need little or no additional water once established. In fact, many meadow species may become leggy if the soil is too moist. A two inch mulch layer of shredded leaves, shredded bark, or compost will help conserve water. However, be sure to keep the mulch away from the plant stems.

Buying Native Perennials

Do NOT collect from the wild! Collecting plants from the wild causes the depletion of native species and disruption of the ecosystem. Be sure to purchase plants from a reputable source and purchase only *nursery propagated* native plants. Visit your favorite nursery or seek out native plant nurseries and sales sponsored by conservation societies. Native plants are becoming increasingly popular and easier to find. Your local Penn State Extension office can help.



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Source

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Mid-Atlantic Recommended Native Plant Species List, 2001

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Suggested Native Plants for Pennsylvania Perennial Gardens

Botanical Name	Common Name	Height/Color/Bloom time	Comments
<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	Columbine	1-2', Red & yellow April to June	Moist to dry. Partial shade to sun. Self seeds.
<i>Asarum canadense</i>	Wild ginger	4-8", Maroon, April-May	Moist shade. Ground cover. Inconspicuous flowers
<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Butterfly weed	1-2', Orange, June-July	Dry. Sun. Attracts butterflies.
<i>Aster divaricatus</i>	White wood aster	2', White, August-October	Moist to dry. Shade to partial shade.
<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>	New England aster	Up to 6', Lavender-pink, August to frost	Wet to dry. Sun to partial sun.
<i>Aster oblongifolius</i>	Aromatic aster	12-20", Pink-lavender, September-October	Dry. Sun. Attracts butterflies.
<i>Baptisia australis</i>	Blue wild indigo	2-4', Blue/purple, April -June	Moist to dry. Sun. Shrubby.
<i>Chelone glabra</i>	Turtlehead	1-4', White, July-August	Moist to wet. Partial shade.
<i>Chrysogonum virginianum</i>	Green-and-gold	6-12", Yellow, April-October	Moist to dry. Sun to partial shade. Ground cover
<i>Cimicifuga racemosa</i>	Bugbane, Black cohosh	3-8', White, July-August	Moist to dry. Partial sun
<i>Coreopsis tripteris</i>	Tall coreopsis	3-9', Yellow, July-Sept.	Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun. Use for back of the border
<i>Dicentra eximia</i>	Wild bleeding heart	1-2', Pink, April-September	Moist to dry. Partial shade
<i>Eupatorium fistulosum</i>	Joe-pye weed	2-7'. Pinkish-lavender, July-Sept.	Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade. Attracts butterflies
<i>Geranium maculatum</i>	Wild geranium, Cranesbill	1-3', Pink, April to July	Moist to dry. Shade to partial shade.
<i>Helenium autumnale</i>	Common sneezeweed	2-5', Yellow, August-September	Wet to moist. Sun.to partial sun
<i>Helianthus simulans</i>	Narrow-leaved sunflower, Swamp sunflower	3-8', Yellow, August-September	Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade.
<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>	Ox-eye sunflower, False sunflower	3-4', Yellow, June-August	Wet to dry. Sun
<i>Heuchera americana</i>	Alumroot	1.5-3', Cream, May-June	Moist to dry. Shade to sun. Ground cover
<i>Iris cristata</i>	Dwarf crested iris	4-12", Blue/violet, April-May	Moist to dry. Partial shade to part sun. Ground cover
<i>Liatris spicata</i>	Marsh blazing star, Gayfeather	3-4', Purple, July-September	Moist to wet. Sun. Attracts butterflies.
<i>Lilium michiganense</i>	Turk's cap lily,Michigan lily	2-5', Orange, July-August	Wet to moist. Sun to shade
<i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>	Great blue lobelia	2-3', Blue/lavender, July-October	Wet to moist. Partial sun
<i>Mertensia virginica</i>	Virginia bluebells	1-2', Blue, April-June	Wet to moist. Shade to partial sun
<i>Monarda didyma</i>	Beebalm, Oswego tea	2-3', Red, July-August	Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade.
<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Wild bergamot, Horsemint, Beebalm	2-5', Lavender, July-August	Moist to dry. Sun to partial shade
<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	Beardtongue	2-5', White, June-July	Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun
<i>Phlox paniculata</i>	Summer phlox,Perennial phlox	3-4', Pink to lavender, June-August	Moist, Sun to partial sun.

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<i>Polemonium reptans</i>	Jacob's ladder, Greek valerian	10-15", Pink, April-May	Moist. Shade
<i>Polygonatum biflorum</i>	Solomon's seal	1-5', White, May-June	Moist to dry. Shade
<i>Pycnanthemum tenuifolium</i>	Slender mountain mint	2-3', White, August-September	Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun. Attracts beneficials
<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>	Black-eye Susan, Orange coneflower	1-3', Yellow, July-October	Moist to dry. Sun
<i>Senecio aureus</i>	Golden ragwort	1', Yellow, June-August	Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade. Ground cover
<i>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</i>	Narrow-leaved blue-eyed grass	1-1.5', Blue, May-July	Wet to moist. Sun to partial sun. Ground cover
<i>Smilacina racemosa</i>	False solomon's seal, False spikenard	1-3', White, May	Moist to dry. Shade to sun
<i>Solidago speciosa</i>	Showy goldenrod	1-5', Yellow, August-September	Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun
<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>	Foam flower	8-12", White, April-July	Moist. Shade
<i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i>	New York ironweed	5-8', Reddish purple, August-September	Wet to moist. Sun
<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i>	Culver's root	2-6', White, July-September	Moist. Sun to partial shade

Grasses

Botanical Name	Common Name	Height/Color/Bloom time	Comments
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Switchgrass	3-6'	Wet to dry. Sun
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem	1-3'	Moist to dry. Sun. Good fall color
<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Indiangrass	3-8'	Wet to dry. Sun. Good fall color
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	Prairie Dropseed	1-2', "Weeping" form	Moist to dry. Sun. Attractive form year round.

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Visit Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences on the Web: www.cas.psu.edu.

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