

Sunny/Dry



Bring Home the Natives

More than just pretty plants

Why should I care about native plants?

Native plants create beautiful landscapes that provide native wildlife with the best habitat and food they need to survive. Native plants also help to protect watersheds and maintain the unique natural heritage of an area.

In Pennsylvania, our native plants lend a sense of place that is recognized and enjoyed by citizens and visitors from all over the world. If our native plants continue to be replaced with species from other places, Pennsylvania will lose the natural beauty and resources that define the state.

Not only do native plants provide benefits to the environment as a whole, they also provide value to you and your backyard. Because Pennsylvania's native plants are meant to grow here, they thrive with less maintenance in the right conditions, thereby reducing the need to water and fertilize them. They also serve as pollinators and attract wildlife.

What is a native plant?

A **native plant** is one that occurred within the state before settlement by Europeans. Native plants include ferns and clubmosses; grasses, sedges, rushes, and their kin; flowering perennials; annuals, which only live one year; biennials, which have a two-year life cycle; and, of course, the woody trees, shrubs, and vines that covered "Penn's Woods" when the first settlers arrived. More than 2,100 native plant species make up the botanical diversity of Pennsylvania.

A "growing" problem

While new plants are coming into Pennsylvania, native plants are being lost to habitat destruction, invasive plants, and introduced pests and diseases. By 2000, five percent of Pennsylvania's native plant species had been eliminated and another 25 percent were in danger of becoming extinct. The good news is that action can be taken to protect and enhance the remaining diversity of these beautiful and often useful plant species.

An **introduced or non-native plant** is one that has been brought into the state and become established. At the turn of the 21st century, about 1,300 species of non-native plants existed in Pennsylvania. That is 37 percent of Pennsylvania's total plant flora (about 3,400 species), and more introduced plants are identified every year.

An **invasive plant** is a species that has become a weed pest—one that grows aggressively, spreads, and displaces other plants. Although some native plants are aggressive on disturbed areas, most invasive plants are introduced from other regions, leaving behind the pests, diseases, predators, and other natural controls that usually keep them in check.

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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Cooperating Partners:



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Backyard Best Bets



Eastern white pine

The dense, soft, flexible needles of this evergreen conifer provide cover and nesting habitat for wildlife. Old growth specimens have attained heights of 150' or more.



Sassafras

The roots, leaves, twigs, and fruits of this small to medium-sized tree have a spicy fragrance. The oil contained in the plant is used to make a well-known tea.



New Jersey tea

Easy to grow and drought tolerant, this compact shrub is covered by cylindrical clusters of creamy white blooms in summer. Hummingbirds are common visitors, eating tiny insects that pollinate the flowers.



Mountain laurel

This hardy, evergreen shrub erupts in May and June with attractive, star-shaped white flowers, accented in pink. It is Pennsylvania's state flower.



Little bluestem

Although it has a blue tint in the spring, this fine-leaved, warm season, bunch-type grass takes on its more predominant reddish color in the fall. It is tolerant of poor soils and adds interesting texture to the winter landscape. Found in 45 of the 50 states, it is the most abundant of all native grasses.



Common milkweed

Recognizable for its signature seed pods, this widely-dispersed perennial displays fragrant pink flowers in summer. It is a very important host plant for the monarch butterfly.



Sundrops

Looking for a long-blooming perennial that spreads? The bright yellow flowers called sun drops are an excellent choice. They're even drought tolerant.



Black-eyed Susan

This popular wildflower excels as a meadow plant. The daisy-like, yellow-rayed flowers bloom for long periods and are widely-available.

DCNR's Backyard Best Bets were chosen based on their hardiness potential in any soil condition, availability in the nursery trade, wildlife and habitat benefit, and viability in the overall ecosystem.

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Key for Symbols



Attracts Birds



Nectar Plant



Deer Resistant



Drought Resistant



Edible



Colorful Fall Leaves



Attracts Wildlife



Evergreen



Fragrant

























Durable Plants





















Ground Cover



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Trees	Size	Bloom Period	Bloom/Fruit											
Red maple <i>Acer rubrum</i>	40-100'	Mar-Apr	red flowers	■								■		
Sugar maple <i>Acer saccharum</i>	60-100'	Apr-May	yellow flowers	■					■			■		
Downy serviceberry <i>Amelanchier arborea</i>	20-30'	Mar-May	white flowers	■					■			■		
Allegheny serviceberry <i>Amelanchier laevis</i>	25'	Mar-May	white flowers		■									
Common hackberry <i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	30-70'	Apr-May	purple brown fruit		■	■								
Redbud <i>Cercis canadensis</i>	20-35'	Apr-May	pinkish flowers		■			■						
Persimmon <i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	30-75'	Jun	yellow-orange fruit						■					
Eastern red cedar <i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	30-45'		sky blue berries		■				■			■		
Black-gum <i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	30-75'	Apr-May	dark blue fruit	■	■							■		
Eastern white pine <i>Pinus strobus</i>	60-90'		light brown cone		■							■	■	
Quaking aspen <i>Populus tremuloides</i>	40-60'	Mar-Apr	silvery-gray catkins	■								■		
White oak <i>Quercus alba</i>	60-100'	Mar-May	acorn fruit									■		
Chestnut oak <i>Quercus prinus (montana)</i>	50-75'	May-Jun	acorn fruit	■								■		
Red oak <i>Quercus rubra</i>	60-80'	Apr-May	acorn fruit	■								■		
Sassafras <i>Sassafras albidum</i>	30-50'	Apr-May	dark blue fruit	■								■	■	
Shrubs	Size	Bloom Period	Bloom/Fruit											
Red chokeberry <i>Photinia pyrifolia (Aronia arbutifolia)</i>	5-10'	Mar-May	red berries	■	■							■		
Black chokeberry <i>Photinia (Aronia) melanocarpa</i>	3-6'	Apr-May	dark blue berries		■							■		
New Jersey tea <i>Ceanothus americanus</i>	<3'	May-Sep	creamy white flowers			■							■	
Sweetfern <i>Comptonia peregrina</i>	3'								■	■				
Mountain laurel <i>Kalmia latifolia</i>	12-20'	May-Jul	white to pink flowers						■				■	
Pinxter-flower <i>Rhododendron periclymenoides</i>	6-12'	Apr-May	pink to white flowers							■				
Staghorn sumac <i>Rhus hirta (typhina)</i>	8-18'	Jun-Jul	red, fuzzy cone-like fruit	■	■									
Lowbush blueberry <i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>	1-2'	May-Jun	blue to black berry	■					■			■		
Highbush blueberry <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>	6-12'	May-Jun	dark blue fruit	■	■				■			■		
Southern arrow-wood <i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	6-12'	May-Jun	bluish-black berry									■		
Blackhaw <i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>	8-15'	Apr-May	bluish-black berry						■					

Grasses	Size	Bloom Period	Bloom/Fruit											Backyard Best Bet	Ground Cover
Big bluestem <i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	2-6.5'	Jun-Sep		■										■	
Little bluestem <i>Schizachyrium scoparium (A. scoparius)</i>	1-5.5'	Aug-Oct												■	■
Purple lovegrass <i>Eragrostis spectabilis</i>	2'	Aug	purple flowers												
Switch grass <i>Panicum virgatum</i>	3-6'	Jul-Oct			■										
Indian grass <i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	2.5-8'	Aug-Sep												■	
Perennials/Vines	Size	Bloom Period	Bloom/Fruit											Backyard Best Bet	Ground Cover
Wild columbine <i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	1-3'	Apr-Jun	red-yellow flowers		■			■							
Common milkweed <i>Asclepias syriaca</i>	2-6'	Jun-Aug	pale purple flowers					■			■	■	■		
Butterfly weed <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	1-3'	May-Sep	orange flowers					■				■			
White snakeroot <i>Ageratina altissima (Eupatorium rugosum)</i>	2-3'	Jul-Oct	white flowers					■							
Trumpet creeper vine <i>Campsis radicans</i>	20-35'	Jul-Sep	orange-red flowers		■			■							
Oxeye sunflower <i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>	1-5'	Jul-Sep	yellow flowers		■			■							
Bee-balm (Wild bergamot) <i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	2-5'	Jul-Aug	pink to purple flowers		■			■			■				
Sundrops <i>Oenothera perennis</i>	1-2'	Jun-Aug	yellow flowers			■								■	
Virginia creeper vine <i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	25-35'		bluish-black berry	■										■	■
Beard-tongue <i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	2-5'	May-Jul	white flowers					■							
Black-eyed Susan <i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	2-3'	May-Sep	yellow, black eye flowers											■	
False Solomon's seal <i>Smilacina racemosa</i>	1-2'	May-Jul	white flowers					■							
Wrinkle-leaf goldenrod <i>Solidago rugosa</i>	2-6'	Jul-Nov	yellow flowers					■							

Tips for reducing invasive plant introductions and growth

- Avoid using known invasive plants
- Minimize landscape disturbance
- Protect healthy native plant communities
- Use organic fertilizers wisely
- Create a land management plan for maintenance over time
- Scout for invasive plants regularly
- Remove invasive plants when they are present in low numbers or when they are confined to a small area before they become a problem
- Dispose of removed invasive plants wisely
- Replace invasive plants with native or non-invasive species
- Clean equipment before using it elsewhere to minimize the spread of invasives from one area to another
- Ask for fill materials free of invasive plants

How can I help?

- Learn more about native plants
- Landscape with native plants
- Buy nursery-propagated native plants
- Practice responsible landscaping techniques
- Protect your property against invasive plants
- Do not remove native plants from the wild
- Protect native plant communities and minimize habitat destruction

