



Shady/Moist

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.



Visit

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for a larger list of native plants, native plant nurseries, garden templates and more!

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Cooperating Partners:



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Backyard Best Bets

Christmas fern

This evergreen fern is easy to grow in all soil types. It is a host plant for some butterfly larvae.



Black-gum

The black-gum explodes in the fall with vivid, red foliage and abundant blue fruit—making it an outstanding ornamental selection. The tree is picturesque in the winter when stark horizontal branches reach in every direction.



Spicebush

Bearing scarlet berries at summer's end, this fragrant shrub releases the scent of allspice when its leaves and twigs are crushed. It is a vital host plant to butterflies in the swallowtail family.



Highbush blueberry

Gobs of delicious fruit—larger than that of its lowbush cousin—are the reward for planting highbush blueberry, prized by people and wildlife. In late spring, the plant is adorned with small, bell-shaped white flowers.



Maidenhair fern

This plant is great for clumping in cool, shady spots in woodland gardens or rock gardens. It has a distinctive, delicate texture.



River birch

Peeling bark—light on one side, cinnamon brown on the other—is a striking feature of this tree, well-suited for moist areas but tolerant of drier conditions. It is often available in multi-trunk forms.



Wild geranium

The first flowers appear as early as April on this long-blooming, adaptable perennial. It spreads well in the garden and is a good source of nectar.



Jacob's ladder

This is an attractive, small plant for a shade garden. Pale blue flowers are complemented by ladder-like foliage. It was historically used in herbal medicines.

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										 Backyard Best Bet	 Ground Cover
Red maple <i>Acer rubrum</i>	40-100'	Mar-Apr	red flowers	■									■	
Sugar maple <i>Acer saccharum</i>	60-100'	Apr-May	yellow flowers	■					■				■	
River birch <i>Betula nigra</i>	60-80'	Apr-May	brown catkins										■	■
Alternate-leaved (Pagoda) dogwood <i>Cornus alternifolia</i>	15-25'	May-Jun	white flowers	■									■	
Black-gum <i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	30-75'	Apr-May	dark blue fruit	■	■								■	■
Pin oak <i>Quercus palustris</i>	60-70'	Apr-May		■									■	
Shrubs	Size	Bloom Period	Bloom/Fruit										 Backyard Best Bet	 Ground Cover
Smooth alder <i>Alnus serrulata</i>	6-10'	Mar-Apr	yellow catkins										■	
Black chokeberry <i>Photinia (Aronia) melanocarpa</i>	3-6'	Apr-May	dark blue berries		■								■	
Buttonbush <i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	6-15'	Jun-Sep	creamy white flowers					■						
Silky dogwood <i>Cornus amomum</i>	6-12'	May-Jun	bluish berries		■								■	
Wild hydrangea <i>Hydrangea arborescens</i>	3-6'	Jun-Aug	white flowers											
Winterberry <i>Ilex verticillata</i>	6-10'	May-Jun	red berries		■								■	
Mountain laurel <i>Kalmia latifolia</i>	12-20'	May-Jul	white to pink flowers							■				
Spicebush <i>Lindera benzoin</i>	6-12'	Mar-May	bright yellow flowers								■	■	■	
Ninebark <i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>	5-10'	May-Jul	pink to white flowers			■								
Rosebay <i>Rhododendron maximum</i>	10-30'	Jun-Jul	rose pink flowers							■				
Black willow <i>Salix nigra</i>	30-50'	Apr-May	yellow catkins										■	
Silky willow <i>Salix sericea</i>	<12'	May	yellow catkins											
Highbush blueberry <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>	6-12'	May-Jun	dark blue fruit	■					■				■	■
Maple-leaved viburnum <i>Viburnum acerifolium</i>	4-6'	May-Jun	white flowers	■					■					
Arrow-wood <i>Virburnum recognitum</i>	3-15'	May-Jun	white flowers		■								■	
Ferns	Size	Bloom Period	Bloom/Fruit										 Backyard Best Bet	 Ground Cover
Maidenhair fern <i>Adiantum pedatum</i>	1-2'				■									■
Evergreen shield fern <i>Dryopteris marginalis</i>	1-3'									■				
Interrupted fern <i>Osmunda claytoniana</i>	2-4'													
Christmas fern <i>Polystichum achrostichoides</i>	1-2'									■			■	

Ferns (continued)	Size	Bloom Period	Bloom/Fruit										 Backyard Best Bet	 Ground Cover
Ostrich fern <i>Metteucia struthiopteris</i>	2'-3'								■					
Royal fern <i>Osmunda regalis</i>	1'-2'													
Cinnamon fern <i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>	1'-2'			■				■						
Lady fern <i>Athyrium filix -femina</i>	2'-3'								■					
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		■			■						
Jack-in-the-pulpit <i>Arisaema triphyllum</i>	1-3'	Apr-Jun	green-purple flowers		■									
Wild ginger <i>Asarum canadense</i>	< 1'	Apr-May	maroon flowers							■	■			■
White wood aster <i>Eurybia (Aster) divaricatus</i>	1-3'	Jul-Oct	white flowers		■			■				■		
Marsh marigold <i>Caltha palustris</i>	1-2'	Apr-Jun	bright yellow flowers											
Blue cohosh <i>Caulophyllum thalictroides</i>	1-2.5'	Apr-Jun	green-yellow flowers											
Black cohosh <i>Actea racemosa</i>	3-8'	Jun-Sep	white flowers					■						
Turtlehead <i>Chelone glabra</i>	1-3'	Jul-Sep	white-pink flowers					■						
Dutchman's breeches <i>Dicentra cucullaria</i>	< 1'	Apr-May	white to cream					■						
Wild geranium <i>Geranium maculatum</i>	1-2'	Apr-Jul	lavender-pink flowers					■				■		
Sneezeweed <i>Helenium autumnale</i>	2-6'	Aug-Oct	yellow flowers											
Alumroot <i>Heuchera americana</i>	1-2'	May-Aug	greenish flowers				■			■				
Cardinal flower <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	2-5'	Jul-Sep	scarlet flowers		■			■						
Great blue lobelia <i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>	1-4'	Jul-Oct	blue flowers		■			■						
Virginia bluebells <i>Mertensia virginica</i>	1-2.5'	Mar-Jun	pink-blue flowers					■						
Wild blue phlox <i>Phlox divaricata</i>	1-2'	May-Jun	lilac flowers					■			■			
Wild sweet William <i>Phlox maculata</i>	1-3'	Jun-Sep	purple flowers					■			■			
Garden phlox <i>Phlox paniculata</i>	2-5'	Jul-Oct	pink flowers								■			
Jacob's ladder <i>Polemonium reptans</i>	1-2'	Apr-Jun	blue flowers										■	
Great Solomon's seal <i>Polygonatum commutatum (biflorum, canaliculatum)</i>	3-6'	Apr-Jun	white-green flowers		■									
Golden ragwort <i>Packera aurea (Senecio aureus)</i>	1-2'	Apr-Jul	yellow flowers											
Tall meadow-rue <i>Thalictrum pubescens (polygamum)</i>	2-9'	May-Jun	white flowers											
Foamflower <i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>	< 1'	Apr-Jul	white flowers											■