

# Pennsylvania Native Plants for the Perennial Garden

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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 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.

### Note

*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. Featured species: Chrysogonum virginianum.*



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## Planting and Care

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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

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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.



## Source

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

Botanical Name	Common Name	Height	Color	Bloom time	Comments
<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	Columbine	1-2'	Red & yellow	April- 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 angustifolius</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>Liatriis spicata</i>	Marsh blazing star, Gayfeather	3-4'	Purple	July-September	Moist to wet. Sun. Attracts Gayfeather 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.
<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

Suggested Native Plants for Pennsylvania Perennial Gardens

Botanical Name	Common Name	Height	Comments
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Switchgrass	3-6'	Wet to dry. Sun
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem	3-6'	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.

## Grasses

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