

A close-up photograph of a bumblebee with black and yellow stripes, perched on a vibrant orange flower. The background is filled with green foliage and other flowers, creating a natural, outdoor setting.

WHAT'S THE BUZZ ABOUT NATIVE PLANTS?

*An introduction to practices that benefit
bees, butterflies, birds, and the planet!*



*South Central
Pennsylvania*

Connecting people and native plants for a healthy planet

What is a native plant and how is it different from plants in my garden?

Native plants are plants that have grown in our locale or ecoregion for thousands of years and benefit our local insects, birds, and other wildlife that have evolved with them. This evolution has created complex relationships between native plants and native wildlife that are the basis of a healthy, thriving environment.

Many of the plants available in garden centers and big box stores for our home landscapes are non-natives. They come from distant locations, such as the western US, Europe, and Asia and are unable to support and maintain our local insect and bird populations.

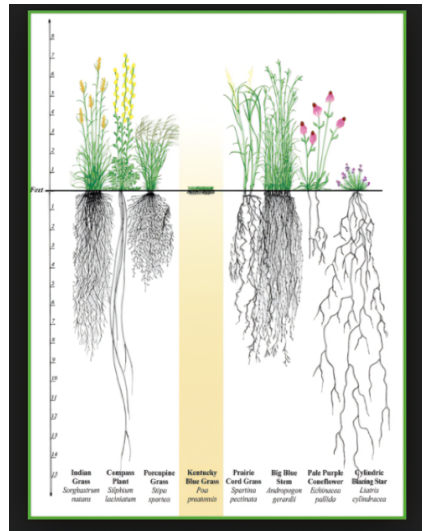
The example that many are familiar with is the Monarch Butterfly whose caterpillars can only feed on one type of plant, native milkweeds. This is true for many other insects, as well, like the 400 species of bees native to Pennsylvania. Many native bees are specialized to local flora, while others are important pollinators for our vegetable gardens, food crops and orchards.



A native plant garden filled with trees, shrubs, flowering plants, ferns, and grasses is beautiful to humans as well as the bees and butterflies!

As noted author on the subject Douglas Tallamy states, we all need to take responsibility where we live to restore the natural world in our own backyards. By modifying your garden, whether it be reducing your lawn, a garden re-do or one plant at a time, you can make a difference. Research has shown that a yard with 70% native plants can reverse the decline of bird species. Make this your target as you learn and go native!

Do you have a part of your lawn that is not used for recreation or doesn't seem to be thriving? Or perhaps a wet area that might be adapted to a raingarden? Those are all great places to start to convert to some native plants. As you can see in the chart to the right, turfgrass, like Kentucky Bluegrass used in lawns, has very shallow roots compared to most native plants. Native plants' deep roots help to absorb heavy rains, reducing stormwater runoff. They also help to store carbon underground, helping to combat climate change.



It takes 6,000-9,000 caterpillars for a pair of chickadees to raise one family of chicks. Those caterpillars can only feed on native plants. A host plant is the native plant that provides food for the young of a specific species. Oaks, cherries, and willows each host 300-500 types of butterfly and moth caterpillars! High bush blueberries host more than 200, while goldenrods host more than 100 and provide vital nectar for late season insects, such as Monarch butterflies preparing to migrate. Even the common violet is the sole host plant for fritillary butterflies.



This Fritillary Butterfly, getting nectar from a coneflower, needs violets on which to lay its eggs.



Monarch caterpillar on host plant milkweed

So let's get you started

- What trees, shrubs, and perennials already in your yard are native, non-native, or perhaps even invasive? Use an app like plantsnap or iNaturalist to identify what you have or ask a knowledgeable friend to help you. The PA DCNR website can provide information on invasive plants in Pennsylvania.
- Check your conditions: dry or moist, sunny or shady?
- How much space do you have - can you include trees and shrubs or some tall perennials or do you need more "tame" plants or even just containers. There are native plants and designs for every setting, from an apartment balcony, to an urban townhouse, to a suburban neighborhood, to a 10-acre farmette.
- What is your budget - do you want the instant satisfaction of larger plants or should you start with small "plugs" or grow some yourself from seed?

Insects not only need their special host plants to feed their young, but pollen and nectar plants for food from early spring to late fall.

Insects love them;
deer don't!

Mountain Mints will
delight you with the
variety of insects on
them in summer.



Serviceberry is a small tree/large shrub that provides food for insects very early in spring and berries for birds in summer.



Native asters and goldenrods are essential for late season pollinators into fall.

And a few more tips on how to grow natives

- While some native plants may bloom the first year, others may take a while to get going, as they spend some time establishing their deep roots before working on above ground performance.
- Patience will be rewarded with a garden that needs no added compost or fertilizers, no herbicides or pesticides, and no watering except in drought conditions once the plants get established.
- Native plants grow in closely spaced communities, so you will want your plants to grow into a tightly woven tapestry, not spaced far apart and mulched heavily. Low growing choices will provide “green mulch”.
- Try to buy straight native species local to your ecoregion, rather than cultivars which have a name in quotes after the species name, such as Echinacea “Cheyenne Spirit”. Cultivars often are bred with changes to flower structure or leaf color that makes them unpalatable to the local insects you want to support.
- Plan your garden intentionally so that neighbors understand your new gardening style. Place shorter plants in the front, taller ones in the back of the garden. Keep a neat defined border. Consider a sign to let others know you are growing for wildlife as well as human enjoyment.



What else do you need to provide for your wildlife to thrive?

Provide habitat to support biodiversity. Leave the leaves where they fall and leave the stems and seed heads until spring. These provide shelter and hiding places for insects and food for birds over winter. Place a shallow dish of water out with sticks and rocks for watering. A log pile or brush pile make great nesting and hiding places for wildlife.

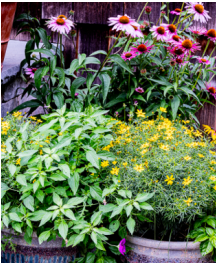


Whether your space is large or small, there is room for some native plants to add diversity to your garden and vital resources for pollinators and more.

Wild Ones' member garden before...



...and after



Patio planters with native plants for sun and shade



If you want to design and install on your own, here are some resources to help you:

nativeplantfinder.nwf.org
(National Wildlife Federation)
provides information on native plants local to your zip code.

gardenforwildlife.com by NWF:
lets you shop for native plants for your locale

wildones.org
provides garden plans for various regions

PA DCNR
dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/WildPlants/LandscapingwithNativePlants/Nativegardentemplates/

myhomepark.com
provides garden designs and plants for your zip code

If you want help with design and installation, here are some local landscape designers to work with you:

gardenthoughtfully.com

greengardnerdesigns.com

ruthconsolidesign.com

soilandink.co

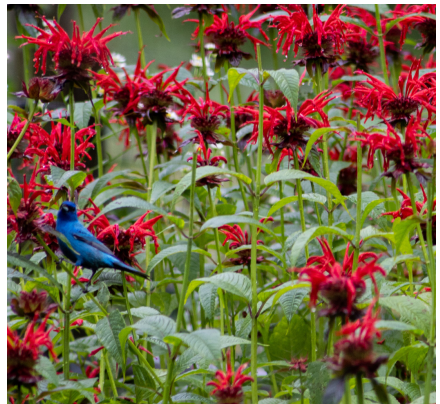
If you want to shop locally and be guaranteed that the plants you buy are native and free from insecticides, here are some ideas.

Native nurseries:

calyxnativenursery.com
diakon.org/wilderness-greenhouse
edgeofthewoodsnursery.com
gonativetrees.com
heartwoodnurseryinc.com
hungryhookfarm.com
perennialgardens.name
Tall Trees Native Nursery, LLC
thenativeniche.com

Plant Sales and Seed Shares:

southcentralpa.wildones.org
manada.org
appalachianaudubon.org
your local Penn State Master Gardeners group
<https://extension.psu.edu/>
(your county)



Looking to learn more?

Here are some great places to start:

southcentralpa.wildones.org and wildones.org
homegrownnationalpark.org

nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/About/Native-Plants/keystone-plants-by-ecoregion
wildflower.org

OSU- Pollinator Habitat 101 free webinar series
Books by Doug Tallamy, Heather Holmes,
and Nancy Lawson



Photo: Wild Ones Member



Join your local Wild Ones Chapter

to learn with locals interested in native plants, from beginners to long time native gardeners. Field trips, educational events, plant sales, and more.

southcentralpa.wildones.org