



NATIVE PLANT PRIMER

What are Native Plants?

Native plants are species that existed in the southeastern Pennsylvania area before man's activities introduced plants from different areas of the Americas and of the world. The EPA defines native plants *as those that have evolved over thousands of years in a particular region.*

Over the past several hundred years, plant enthusiasts have imported plants from other climates and continents, both intentionally and unintentionally. Non-native cultivars and alien plants have been propagated for aesthetic, cultural or environmental reasons. Some of these plants introduced to our area have proven to be invasive, have pushed out native plants, and disturbed the balance of our ecosystem, including waterways, animals, insects, and plants.

In less serious cases, non-native plants simply use extra resources such as sun, water, or soil nutrients, and thereby make it hard for native plants to compete. This leads to less species biodiversity in meadows, woodlands, and wetlands. Some alien plants simply need extra maintenance such as heavy mulching, annual pruning, staking, or heavy fertilization in order to thrive in our area.

In contrast, most property owners would prefer plants that are largely self-sustaining in their environment. This saves water, time, and money for homeowners and all plant caregivers.

Native plants have evolved as good citizens in our communities-that is they coexist and thrive among Chester County animals, birds, and microorganisms. When an exotic or alien plant species outgrows the native plants, it results in a less diversified habitat and creates an aesthetically displeasing impact. If you ever stumbled on the edge of a wooded area and found it impassable and full of vines such as bittersweet or multiflora rosa, this condition was caused by alien species.

In the past, much of our eight-acre property on [Yellow Springs Farm LLC](#) was pasture for cow grazing. When the dairy farm business was closed some 50 years ago, no work was done to reestablish the native species that were



present prior to the dairy farm. Over the past half-century or so, nature took its course, and many aliens invaded. Some invasive alien plants, such as Autumn Olive and Norway Maples, were introduced by former occupants who did not understand the long-term impact of their plant selection. There are some native species on our property; about 20% of the species catalogued here are natives, but unfortunately, most of plants, trees and shrubs present on the property are aliens. It will take us a good 10-20 years to reclaim the natural habitat on the farm. Please note we will never harvest the native plants we sell from our property, or any other natural area. Plants sold at Yellow Spring Farm are all grown from seeds or propagation from cuttings that preserve the source plants.

Why would I want to have native plants on my property?

Native plants are important to our environment. Because they are adapted to our specific area/region, they are generally hearty plants that require little maintenance. We all know how busy our lives are. Native plants can save us time, money and effort compared to supporting a traditional garden.

For example, if you decide to plant a native meadow instead of typical suburban lawn, you would be required to mow only once or twice a year compared to weekly cutting.

The [Binky Lee Preserve](#), part of the Natural Lands Trust, on Pikeland Road in Chester Springs, is currently converting some of its acreage to a meadow. The process is a fascinating one and in three to four years, this field will become a beautiful, colorful habitat that supports a diverse ecosystem of plants and animals.

There are also native plant species that are drought tolerant and deer resistant, important attributes given the weather conditions of the last several years. When all the homespun and chemical deer repellents have failed, the best solution is simply use plants that deer do not find appetizing. As native plants have survived here with deer for centuries, as deer as also Chester County natives, they have proven less attractive to deer. Although some native plant species may cost more than traditional garden plants, the payoff down the line is significant.



For bird watchers, native plants can also be a good food source. For example, the Viburnum, a woody native of Eastern Pennsylvania, produces autumn berries popular with birds.

Are there Native Plants that are unique to Chester County?

Yes, but be careful. Just because a plant is labeled as a native plant does not mean it is local to the Chester County area. It could be native to North America, but not necessarily suitable for the region in which we live. It is always best to double check with the nursery or grower to find out if it is native to this area.

What are a few examples of plants native to our area?

A few of the most well-recognized local native plants include sedge grasses, goldenrod and blue geranium. You might be sorry to know that Posion Ivy is native to our area, but we will never sell that native at Yellow Springs Farm.

How can I learn more about Native Plants for our area?

There are many internet sites, books and associations that specialize in native plant education and propagation. For example, we would recommend the [Pennsylvania Native Plant Society](#). This will serve as a good source of information and will give you a chance to meet people with experience in natives. Of course, we are happy to help and provide advice as well. Please request a calendar of our future seminars and educational events at Yellow Spring Farm.