



Patriotic Gardens: Native Plants

Reviewed and revised by Edward Olsen, Consumer Horticulture Specialist; Laurie Fox, Horticulture Associate; Kris Criscione, Nursery Production Specialist; School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech; and Patricia Lust, Virginia Extension Master Gardener, Goochland-Powhatan Unit

A Statewide Garden Theme

Virginia Cooperative Extension developed five America's Anniversary Garden™ publications in 2007 to help individuals, communities, and groups mark America's 400th Anniversary with a signature garden planting. The signature gardens have red, white, and blue color schemes. In 2026, the publications were reviewed and revised to help individuals, communities, and groups mark America's Semiquincentennial. These publications are useful for creating patriotic-themed gardens.

What Are Native Plants?

Native plants are those that are indigenous to a region and possess traits that make them uniquely adapted to local conditions. They have evolved, adapting to factors specific to their region, such as climate, moisture, soils, and interactions with other plants, animals, and insects. They tend to be hardier and better able to resist drought, insects, and disease if used in locations that approximate their native environments. Native plants are also well suited for the current trend in “low-maintenance” gardening and landscaping.

Native vs. Non-native Species

Non-natives are species that have been introduced to an area and have not evolved and naturally adapted to the specific ecological conditions of a region. Some non-native or alien species have difficulty thriving without extra maintenance such as irrigation, fertilization, and pest control. Other non-native species can get out of control, creating an unhealthy monoculture with little space left for native species. Non-native species that grow in this manner are called “invasive species.” Unlike some plants introduced from other areas, native species are not considered invasive, but could be aggressive.

Plant Natives: A Celebration of America's Natural Heritage

Utilizing native plants in the landscape is a way to respect the natural heritage and cultural interests. Some plants played significant roles in Native American culture or in European exploration and settlement. English colonists brought seeds, bulbs, and roots of their favorite plants, so their gardens became a blend of Old-World favorites and native plants they found in the New World. Native species such as dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) were documented by early 18th-century plantmen and noted for their beauty and interest, not unlike their appeal to gardeners today.



Figure 1: Fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*)

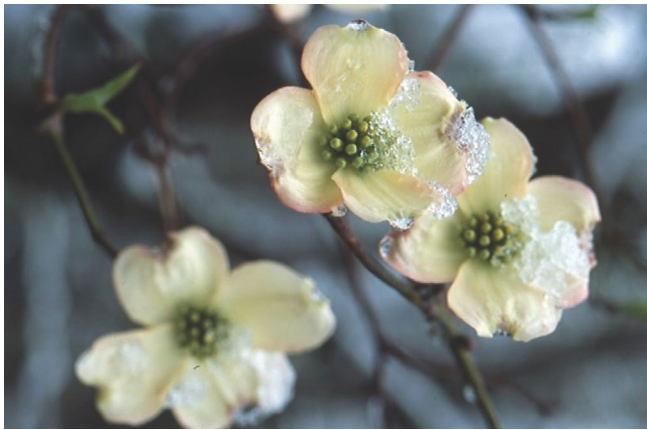


Figure 2: Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)

Native Plants for Wildlife

Native butterflies, hummingbirds, songbirds, beneficial insects (especially native bees), and small mammals are accustomed to the food and habitat provided by plants native to a region. Native plants provide familiar sources of food and shelter, especially important in urban and suburban settings as natural habitats are replaced with development. Native plants have qualities and adaptive traits that make them aesthetically pleasing, practical, and ecologically valuable for landscaping. Even small gardens and container plantings can attract wildlife. A variety of native plants will attract different wildlife species and contribute to a healthy ecosystem.



Figure 3: Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea Virginia*)

Locating Native Plants

The native plant suggestions chosen for the Patriotic Gardens publication exhibit the signature red, white, and blue color scheme. Although numerous websites and specialty nurseries cater to native plant enthusiasts, the recommended selections were chosen for their availability at local garden centers, nurseries, specialty growers, and retailers of plants that offer nursery-propagated species. Regional native plant guides and other resources can be found at the Plant Virginia Natives website listed in the resources section.

Site Assessment, Planning, and Design

A benefit of designing with native plants is their ability to grow under a wide variety of conditions. Assess your site for sun, shade, soil type, and drainage. Understand the minimum and maximum light and moisture requirements for each species, and be sure to group them according to their cultural requirements. You can integrate a few of the suggested native plants into an existing **Patriot Garden** design or choose to plant an all-native design. Natives will add a naturalistic design element to your landscape and can be added in stages. Also, assess your weed population before planting. Eliminating weeds before planting is easier and less time consuming than trying to control them in a newly planted site.



Figure 4: Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)

Soil Preparation

Native plants are adapted to a variety of native soils. If you choose a plant that is adapted to your existing soil, little or no soil amendment is needed. If your original topsoil has been removed, either purchase similar topsoil or add some amendments to improve the subsoil. Simulate your own native soils by incorporating minimal amounts of manure and organic matter, such as composted leaves.

Care and Maintenance

It may take one or two growing seasons for your native plant garden to become established. Irrigation is critical, especially for the first 4-6 weeks after planting. Gardens need about one inch of water per week. This can be measured with a rain gauge or any straight-sided container. Plan how you will irrigate your garden when there is no rainfall. Pruning may be needed if plants grow too fast or too large, or if they are damaged by storms. If possible, do not prune dead flower heads and seed pods in the fall, as they provide food for wildlife over the winter and can add winter interest to the garden. Native plants typically require very little or no fertilization once established in our native soils. If you add fertilizer, use a slow-release product with lower amounts of nutrients.



Figure 5: Wild Stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*)

Other Publications in the Series

[Patriotic Gardens: How to Plant a Red, White and Blue Garden, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-210](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-210/426-210.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-210/426-210.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Developing A Statewide Corridor and Entrance Enhancement Program, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-211](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-211/426-211.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-211/426-211.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Bulbs for a Red, White, and Blue Spring Garden, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-220](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-220/426-220.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-220/426-220.html)

[Patriotic Gardens: Red, White, and Blue in Fall and Winter Gardens, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-228](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-228/428-228.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-228/428-228.html)

Additional Resources

[Annuals: Culture and Maintenance, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-200](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-200/426-200.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-200/426-200.html)

[Perennials: Culture, Maintenance and Propagation, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 426-203](https://ext.vt.edu/426/426-203/426-203.html), (ext.vt.edu/426/426-203/426-203.html)

[Tree and Shrub Planting Guidelines, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 430-295](https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-295/430-295.html), (pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-295/430-295.html)

Diekelmann, John, and Schuster, Robert, *Natural Landscaping: Designing with Native Plant Communities*, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2002, ISBN 0-299-17324-0.

[Digital Atlas of the Flora of Virginia](http://vaplantatlas.org/) (vaplantatlas.org/) shows which plants grow in your geographic area.

DuPont, Elizabeth N., *Landscaping with Native Plants in the Middle-Atlantic Region*, 2nd edition, Brandywine Conservancy, 2004. ISBN 13-978-0940540064.

[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](http://wildflower.org/) (wildflower.org)

[Mt. Cuba Center](http://mtcubacenter.org/) (mtcubacenter.org/) - native plant research reports.

[Native Plants for Conservation, Restoration, and Landscaping](http://dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/nativeplants) (dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/nativeplants) Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

[Plant Virginia Natives](http://plantvirginianatives.org/) (plantvirginianatives.org/) regional Virginia guides, links to regional native plant campaigns and many other resources.

[Restore the Wild – Virginia Native Pollinator Seed Packets](http://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/habitat/seed-packets/) (dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/habitat/seed-packets/), Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

[Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation - Invasive Plant Species List](http://dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invsppdflist) (dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invsppdflist)

[Virginia Native Plant Society](http://vnps.org) (vnps.org)

[Virginia Native Seed Pilot Project](http://cliftoninstitute.org/restoration/virginia-native-seed-pilot-project/) (cliftoninstitute.org/restoration/virginia-native-seed-pilot-project/), Clifton Institute

Acknowledgments

The 2026 team would like to acknowledge the authors and reviewers of the original 2007 publication.

Authors: Leanne DuBois, Extension Horticulture Agent, James City County; Joyce Latimer, Extension Horticulturist, Virginia Tech; Bonnie Appleton, Extension Horticulturist, Hampton Roads AREC; David Close, Master Gardener Coordinator, Virginia Tech.

Reviewers: Harold Jerrell, Extension agent, Lee County; Dan Goerlich, district program leader, Central District Office; and Greg Eaton, Extension specialist, Blacksburg.

Special thanks to the Virginia Native Plant Society, especially to Denise Green and Helen Hamilton of the John Clayton Chapter for the original 2007 plant list recommendations and editing.

Photos by Harold Jerrell, Extension agent, Lee County, and Bonnie Appleton, Extension horticulturist, Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Virginia Beach.

Original project supported by funding from Jamestown 2007.



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Table 1: Red, White, and Blue Native Trees For Virginia Gardens - All Regions.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Bloom Period	Height	Dry/ Wet Soils ¹	Light ²	Color
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>	April-May	10'-20'	W-D	LS-SU	White blooms, red fall foliage, red fruit
Fringetree	<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	May-June	12'-20'	W-D	LS-SU	White blooms, blue fruit
Flowering Dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>	April-May	15'-30'	M	LS-SU	White blooms, red fruit
American Holly	<i>Ilex opaca</i>	May-June	15'-40'	M	SU-LS	White flowers, red fruit
Black Gum	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	April-June	30'-60'	M-W	SU-LS	White blooms, red fall foliage, blue fruit
Sourwood	<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	June-July	15'-30'	M-D	SU-LS	White blooms, red fall foliage
Eastern Red Cedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	No bloom	15'-35'	M-D	SU-LS	White flowers, red fruit
Sweetbay	<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>	May-June	10'-60'	M-W	SU-PS	White flowers, red fruit

¹Soil: D=dry; M=moist; W=wet

²Light: LS=light shade; PS=part sun; SH=shade; SU=sun

Table 2: Red, White, and Blue Native Shrubs For Virginia Gardens - All Regions.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Bloom Period	Height	Dry/ Wet Soils ¹	Light ²	Color
Red Chokeberry	<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	March-May	5'-10'	W-D	SU-PS	White blooms, red fall foliage
Buttonbush	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	July-August	6'-12'	M-W	SU-SH	White blooms
Wintergreen	<i>Gaultheria procumbens</i>	June-August	6'-12'	M-W	SU-PS	Red fruit, evergreen
Winterberry	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	June-July	6'-10'	M-W	SU-LS	White blooms, red fruit
Virginia Sweetspire	<i>Itea virginica</i>	April-June	3'-6'	W-D	SU-LS	White blooms, red fall foliage
Common Elderberry	<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	May-June	6'-12'	M-W	PS-SH	White blooms
Arrowwood	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	May-June	6'-12'	M-D	SU-LS	White blooms
Witherod	<i>Viburnum nudum</i>	April-May	6'-12'	W-D	SU-LS	White blooms, red fall foliage, red and blue fruit
Highbush Blueberry	<i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>	March-May	3'-10'	W-D	SU-LS	Red fall foliage, blue fruit

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Table 3: Red, White, and Blue Native Vines For Virginia Gardens – All Regions.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Bloom Period	Height	Dry/ Wet Soils ¹	Light ²	Color
Virgin's-bower	<i>Clematis virginiana</i>	July-September	5'-18'	M-D	SU-LS	White Blooms
Trumpet Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera Sempervirens</i>	April-October	4'-15'	M	SU-PS	Red blooms, red fruit
Virginia Creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	Inconspicuous blooms	4'-40'	W-D	SU-SH	Red fall foliage, blue fruit
Passionvine	<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	June-July	6'-10'	W-D	SU-PS	Blue blooms

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Table 4: Red, White, and Blue Native Perennials For Virginia Gardens – All Regions.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Bloom Period	Height	Dry/ Wet Soils ¹	Light ²	Color
Common Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	April-August	1'-3'	W-D	SU	White blooms
Black Cohosh	<i>Actaea racemosa</i>	June-August	4'-7'	M	SH	White blooms
Columbine	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	April-July	1'-2'	M	PS	Red blooms
Goat's Beard	<i>Aruncus dioicus</i>	April-June	3'-6'	M-D	PS-SH	White blooms
Whorled Milkweed	<i>Asclepias verticillata</i>	June-September	1'-2'	M-D	SU	White blooms
Tall Bellflower	<i>Campanulastrum americanum</i>	June-August	3'-6'	M	PS	Blue flower
Blue Mistflower	<i>Conoclinium coelestinum</i>	July-October	2'-3'	M	PS	Blue flower
Scarlet Rose Mallo	<i>Hibiscus coccineus</i>	June-September	6'-8'	M-W	LS-SU	Red blooms
Common Rose Mallow	<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>	July-August	4'-7'	W-D	SU	White and red blooms
Blue Flag	<i>Iris virginica</i>	May-June	2'-3'	M-W	SU-PS	Blue blooms
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	July-October	3'-4'	W	SU-SH	Red blooms
Great Blue Lobelia	<i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>	July-September	2'-4'	M-W	SU-SH	Blue blooms
Sundial Lupine	<i>Lupinus perennis</i>	April-June	1'-2'	M-W	PS-SH	Blue blooms
Virginia Bluebells	<i>Mertensia virginica</i>	March-May	1'-2'	M-W	PS-SH	Blue blooms
Scarlet Beebalm	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	May-September	2'-4'	M-W	SU	Red blooms
Wild Quinine	<i>Parthenium integrifolium</i>	June-Sept	3'-4'	M-D	SU	White blooms
Wild Blue Phlox	<i>Phlox divaricate</i>	March-May	10"-14"	M	PS-SH	Blue blooms
Jacob's Ladder	<i>Polemonium reptans</i>	March-May	10"-15"	M	PS-LS	Blue blooms
Hyssop Skullcap	<i>Scutellaria integrifolia</i>	May-July	15"-20"	M	PS-LS	Blue blooms

Common Name (continued)	Botanical Name	Bloom Period	Height	Dry/Wet Soils ¹	Light ²	Color
Wild Stonecrop	<i>Sedum ternatum</i>	April-June	6"	M	SU-PS	White blooms
Blue-eyed Grass	<i>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</i>	April-June	10"-15"	M	SU-PS	Blue blooms
Calico Aster	<i>Symphotrichum laterifolium</i>	September-October	2'-3'	M-D	SU	White blooms
Smooth Aster	<i>Symphotrichum laeve</i>	September-October	2'-3'	M-D	SU-PS	Blue blooms
Meadow Rue	<i>Thalictrum pubescens</i>	June-August	1'-6'	M-W	SU-SH	White blooms
Blue Vervain	<i>Verbena hastata</i>	June-October	2'4'	M-W	SU-PS	Blue blooms
Common Blue Violet	<i>Viola sororia</i>	March-May	6"-10"	M-W	SU-PS	Blue blooms

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Table 5: Red, White, and Blue Native Ornamental Grasses For Virginia Gardens – All Regions.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Bloom Period	Height	Dry/Wet Soils ¹	Light ²	Color
Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	July-October	3'	M-W	SU	'Shenandoah' red blooms, foliage; 'Dallas Blues', blue foliage
Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	August-October	2'	D-M	SU	Blue foliage, red fall foliage

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Produced by Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, 2026

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VT/0126/426-223 (SPES-768P)