

Plant Virginia Natives



Native Plant Garden Planning Worksheet

STEP 1: Determine Your Focus.

What are your priorities in gardening with native plants? All the following reasons are worthwhile, but you will be happiest with a garden that accomplishes your most important goals.

- Support habitat/wildlife (in general)
 - Support pollinators?
 - Attract birds?
 - Reduce use of fertilizers and pesticides and/or need for irrigation
 - Reduce size of lawn
 - Reduce stormwater runoff/address drainage issue
 - Appeal to people as well as wildlife.
- I tend to like these styles:

- Formal
- Cottage
- Informal
- Naturalistic

Important: *If you live in a community with an HOA or Community Association that requires prior approval of changes to exteriors (including visible landscaping), be sure to review your community's rules. If required, be sure to submit your plans to obtain community approval before you install your garden. Fortunately, more HOAs and Community Associations are beginning to recognize the value of landscaping with native plants; however, homeowners risk opposition and potential fines or even an order to remove their plantings if they have not followed the procedures required by the contracts they signed*

STEP 2: Get to know your site.

For *each area* where you intend to plant:

1. Describe the location of the proposed garden bed:

2. How many hours of sunlight does the area receive each day?

- Full Sun: (6 or more hours)
- Part Shade (2 to 6 hours)
- Full Shade (2 hours or less)

3. Is the area relatively flat (level), sloping, or a mix? Where there is a slope, how steep is it?

- Level/Nearly Level (to 1.1°)
- Very Gentle (1.1° to 3°)
- Gentle (3° to 5°)
- Moderate (5° to 8.5°)
- Strong (8.5° to 16.5°)
- Very Strong (16.5° to 24°)
- Extreme (24° to 35°)
- Steep (35° to 45°)
- Very Steep (> 45°)

Notes: _____

4. What is the soil's dominant texture? (If you obtain a soil analysis, note the results in the box.)

- Sandy
- Silty
- Clay
- Loam

Routine Test (Soil pH ____ ; P ____ ; K ____ ; Ca ____ ; Mg ____ ; Zn ____ ; Mn ____ ; Cu ____ ; Fe ____ ; B ____ ; and estimated CEC ____). Additional (Optional) Tests: % Organic Matter ____ Soluble Salts ____.
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5. What is the soil's dominant structure?

- Loose clods, crumbly
- Hard-packed/compacted

6. What is the soil's usual moisture level?

- Dry (no signs of moisture)
- Moist (looks and feels damp)
- Wet (saturated)

7. What are the sources for supplemental watering? Considerations include the distance of the bed from the water source, effective watering techniques, protection of young plants, water-conserving options, limiting the proliferation of mosquitoes, and your own convenience.

- Spigot/Garden Hose
- Soaker Hose(s)
- Sprinkler(s) (attached to hose or built-in)
- Rain Barrel(s)
- Gutter Extensions
- Other: _____

8. After a moderate rain, how quickly does water drain from the area?

- Water seeps into the ground/does not create puddles or ponding
- Water pools/ponds but drains within an hour or so once the rain ends
- Water pools/ponds and drains slowly (hours or days...)

STEP 3: Start developing a Wish List.

1. What invasive plants will need to be removed from the area?

2. What native trees or shrubs do you want to keep?

3. What other plants do you want to retain (e.g., existing native perennials)?

4. **Visit local gardens that feature native plants or look online for plantings you find appealing.** Start a “Native Plant Wish List” of plants you like and include notes about what appeals to you about them. A simple list can help you keep track of where you found inspiration. Your early notes need not be comprehensive; as you narrow down your Wish list to serious candidates, you can add details (addressed in **STEP 5**) that will help you fit the right plants to the right place.

Native Plant Wish List		
Garden Visited (or Online/Magazine/Blog Source)	Garden Type (e.g., Sun, Shade, Pollinator, Water-Wise)	URL/Site Address (for future reference as desired)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
Plants I Liked: (include botanical name if known)	What I Liked About Them: (e.g., height, color, leaf shape, host plant, bloom time)	
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		

10.	
11.	
12.	
Native Plants I Have Already and Want to Keep in this Garden:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

STEP 4: Consider other important factors.

1. Will you retain space in this area as lawn for entertainment/recreation purposes? If so, you will want to consider how you will define the separation of the lawn area from the native plantings (e.g., to contain foot traffic or pets), and how best to protect plantings designed to attract pollinators or birds from chemical treatments that may be used on the lawn.

- Not retaining lawn in this area
- Retaining lawn but will not be using fertilizers/pesticides in this area
- Other _____

Notes: _____

2. Will you change physical features of the property as part of this project (e.g., install a deck, patio, or pathways with hardscape elements, regrade soil, or incorporate a new water feature like an artificial pond, or create a rain garden or bioswale to address a drainage issue?

- Yes
- No

Notes: _____

3. Additional considerations:

- Required setbacks from public street (consult city or county rules)
- Locations of underground utilities (electrical, water, cable). For all excavation work anywhere in Virginia, call 811 or 1-800-552-7001, or go to <https://va811.com/contact-us/>).
- Other: _____

4. What site preparation is needed before you are ready to plant?

- Removal of invasive plants.** Depending on your site, you may have to remove one or more invasive species to protect your new plantings. Helpful information about removal of invasive plants can be found at: [Refer back to landing page?]

Plant	Removal Method	Notes

- Planned Soil amendments (if needed based on soil analysis).**

- Planned resolution of drainage issues (as needed).**

- Removal of turf or other plantings via:**

- Manual Methods (e.g., Bushhogging, Sod removal)

- Smothering (be sure to allow adequate time)

- Solarization (be sure to allow adequate time)

- Use of Herbicides

- Protection of the site (and new plantings) from traffic (human or animal) and/or from contamination (e.g., from pesticide sprays drifting from other yards).**

5. What is your target budget? Consider the size of the garden project; how much you will do yourself versus hiring help (consulting and/or labor); hardscape or other features you may wish to include (or plan to add over time); and any permits that may be needed if construction is involved. Your budget may also affect the way you acquire plants (e.g., by growing plants from seed, obtaining plugs, purchasing mature plants, or using a mix of approaches).

6. What is your time frame? Because native plants often are available seasonally, the planning should be completed well before the project to allow time for site prep and then installation of new plants. This might mean completing planning a season or two before installation (e.g., plan in winter, prep and plant in spring,

or plan in spring, prep over summer, plant in fall?). Some gardens may be easy/quick to do, others may take months.

7. Other factors important to you:

8. Potential Resources/Contacts:

- Sources of Native Plants (e.g., Native Plant Nurseries, Native Plant Sales/Swaps):

- Landscape Designers:

- State/County Resources (e.g., SWCD, VCAP):

- Other:

STEP 5: Develop a targeted list of plants you would like to use.

1. **Consult the plant profiles in the guide for your region -** <https://www.plantvirginiannatives.org/virginia-regional-native-plant-campaigns-guides> .
2. **Based on the plant profiles in the guide, expand and refine your “Native Plant Wish List.”** Focus on plants you like that closely match—and therefore will likely thrive in—the conditions where you will be planting and that meet your specified bloom times or other desired parameters.

If existing native trees, shrubs, or perennials will be part of the new garden’s layout, don’t forget to include them (see **Step 3**).

3. **As you expand your Wish List, be sure to note important additional details for each plant (e.g., mature plant size; overall shape, or growth habit; bloom colors; bloom times; potential for spreading; and more).** The downloadable Native Plant Wish List includes prompts to help you add these details.

STEP 6: Visualize and refine your plan.

Use the grid provided to sketch out one or more ways you might fit your chosen plants into the space you have selected for your garden. (To try multiple ideas, use tracing paper or make copies of the grid as desired.)

1. **The planning grid is scaled at 1 in. = 1 ft.** You can adjust the scale if desired. If you change the scale, be sure to note the scale you are using to help you be consistent.
2. **Using the information from STEP 2 of this worksheet, circle the icons on the grid.** The icons are there as quick reminders of the site conditions and the seasons in which you want blooms.
3. **Compare the plants on your completed Native Plant Wish List against the site conditions circled on the planning grid.** This is a chance to double-check your list. The plants you group together should have similar needs for sun, soil, and moisture that also match the conditions of your location. Think about how the plants you have chosen might look together.

Tip: Successful native plant gardens need not include every possible plant. Smaller gardens can be lovely for people and beneficial to wildlife when they build small groups—say 5 or 7 each—of a few well-chosen plants. Moreover, people new to native plant gardening often find it easier to start small, enjoy some success, and then expand by adding to (or adding new) beds over time. If you find you want to simplify your Wish List, you can rank the candidate plants from “Must have” to “Can wait.”)

4. **Draw circles on the grid to represent each plant at its full size.** If you wish, use colored markers, pens, or pencils to suggest or fill in the circles to indicate bloom colors.

Tip: Positioning your plants in *drifts* (putting multiple plants of the same type together) often provides a more coordinated, intentional look, and also can help pollinators find the plants they need when they are foraging.

5. **As helpful, add notes (from the plant profiles developed on your Native Plant Wish List) to the grid as reminders of plant heights, widths, and bloom times.**
6. **Play with it!** Try several variations. The art does not have to be exact or fancy.

Tip: Pollinators don't care, but for appearance and easier maintenance, people often prefer arrangements with smaller plants at the front or sides and taller plants grouped at the center or back.

STEP 7: When you have settled on a design you like, keep a copy handy for reference.

Use your design as a communication tool for consulting with a landscape designer or bring it with you when you go shopping for native plants to help you remember and communicate exactly what you are looking for.