

Designing your Garden

Start small: It is more economical and manageable to incrementally introduce native plants into your landscaping. This bit-by-bit method also grants the gardener more time to get to know each plant better and adapt as necessary. There is always time to expand and grow your garden, so take it slow!

Plant multiples of the same plant together: This clumped look mimics the natural growing pattern of native plants in the wild and is attractive to the eye!

Plant in layers with varying heights: Aesthetically, gardens with a variety of low-lying and tall-growing plants are more attractive than a flatter arrangement of plants. Plus, a robust layer of low-growing plants can reduce or even eliminate the need for mulch by forming a natural barrier to weeds.

Consider the needs of native insects: Since many insects have developed specialized relationships with native plants, the plants you select will have a profound impact on which insects you attract to your yard. To cultivate a prosperous wildlife habitat, you'll need plants that produce nectar for adults, forage for insect larvae, and shelter for both!

Understanding your yard's conditions: "Right plant, right place." Site your native plant in a spot that provides the conditions it prefers – consider the soil type (sand, clay, or loam), moisture (wet or dry), and light conditions (sun or shade).

Check out additional gardens!



Maintenance

It will take about three years for your native garden to fully develop and establish itself! So be patient and give your natives a little extra TLC until they've reached maturity.

Newly planted flowers and shrubs need a lot of water: Once established, native plants won't require much supplemental watering, but be sure to be generous with your watering regime in the first 1-3 years.

Mulch your native beds to suppress weeds: Cover exposed soil with mulch as soon as possible after planting to depress weed pressure. Once the native plants have established themselves, especially the low-lying ground cover perennials, minimal mulching will be required, if at all!

Leave your plants be in the fall: As native plants die back in the fall, their decaying leaf matter will help naturally fertilize the soil, seed heads will reseed the garden bed, or leaf litter will provide shelter and foraging habitat for wildlife. Save yourself some time and let the leaves lie!

Become a Champion of Nature!

There are many ways to support Berks Nature and protect the future of nature in our community...

- ✿ Make a charitable donation online at berksnature.org/ways-to-give
- ✿ Text 'NATURE' to 20222 to make an automatic \$20 donation to Berks Nature right now! Please note, your one-time donation will be added to your mobile phone bill.
- ✿ Make a gift of real estate or a charitable distribution through your IRA by calling or emailing Tami Shimp at 610-372-4992 x110 or tami.shimp@berksnature.org
- ✿ Honor a loved one with a tribute or memorial gift.

Obedient plant



The **State of the Environment in Berks program** evaluates specific indicators and trends in five environmental categories: Air, Energy, Land, Waste and Water. The data has been evaluated for more than ten years in Berks County through this program. The entire collection of State of the Environment publications can be viewed on the Berks Nature website at: <https://berksnature.org/education/state-of-the-environment/>



Learn more about native plants from Doug Tallamy, author of *Nature's Best Hope*.



Become a **Berks Nature** Champion of Nature today!
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In Times of Trouble, Nature Has Healed Us...Now It's Our Turn to Heal Nature



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Over the last century, the United States has lost an alarming 150 million acres of wildlife habitat and farmland to urban sprawl. We have the power to disrupt this pattern of destruction and protect these sensitive habitats in the landscaping decisions we make at home. Anyone can grow nature at home by gardening with native plants.

Native plants are those plant species that occur naturally in a region in which they evolved. Because of this intimate history of co-evolution between the local climate, plants, and animals, native plants are the ecological basis upon which all life depends.


Gardening with native plants, restores the ancient food webs upon which our entire ecosystem relies. Pennsylvania's wildlife has evolved in concert with the native plant community and thus many of these animals, especially our plant-eating insects, have specialized to feed on this specific suite of plants. These same insects can't use exotic, non-native plants as effectively and struggle to survive in these unfamiliar landscapes. Without these insects, local birds, who rely heavily on bugs to feed their young, cannot survive either. But growing native plants preserves the intricately entwined braid of life that connects us all.

Native plants increase food security by supporting a diverse array of pollinators. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, pollinators are responsible for every three bites of food we eat. Native insect pollinators can be efficient, even superior pollinators for many crop systems, but they need native plants to survive.



Landscaping with native plants is low-cost and low-maintenance. Since native plants have evolved under our local climate and geology, they are well adapted to these natural conditions. Once established, these plants require little to no pruning, deadheading, watering, or fertilizing saving you time and money.

Message from Kim Murphy

The State of the Environment has always focused on encouraging people to learn about the environment and make positive, informed decisions to benefit the natural world around us. This year, we invite you to immerse yourself in Berks County's native flower gardens and pull from these stories inspiration and resources to introduce native plants into your world.



To experience AR content by using the "Scan Here" icons, download the Berks Nature app for free for both Android and iOS devices





Wild ginger



Sue's Garden



Beebalm

Size: 0.1 acre

Native species highlights: Oakleaf hydrangea, bee balm, maidenhair fern, mountain mint, and snowberry. "If you build it, they will come" – Sue's favorite season in her garden is mid-July when the monarch butterflies arrive. Sue collects the monarch caterpillars to raise them in the safety of her watchful eye and then releases the adults. In 2020, Sue released 154 monarch butterflies!



Swamp milkweed

Oakleaf hydrangea



Joe pye weed



Snowberry



Tiger swallowtail on butterfly weed

Union Township Meadow

Size: 3.0 acres

Native species highlights: Swamp sunflower, joe pye weed, blue vervain, swamp milkweed, and black-eyed susan.

When Union Meadow Park's baseball field was consistently too water-logged to use, Union Township made the decision to give the space back to nature. The meadow was burned in September 2019 and then a wildflower seed mix was spread by hand in March 2020. The young meadow already flourishes with color and pollinators.



Swamp milkweed



The Slater family garden

Size: 0.7 acres

Native species highlights: Tall coreopsis, button bush, pale-leaf sunflower, Indian grass, and showy goldenrod. The Slater Family garden has reached great heights... literally! A lush wall of tall-growing natives shields the home from a busy street, providing beautiful privacy. From dry sand, to soggy soil, to shady understories – there's a native for every condition across the Slater's sundry property.



Whorled milkweed

Blue Vervain



Oakleaf hydrangea



Maryland senna

Monarch butterfly feeding from swamp milkweed



Black-eyed susans



New England aster

Maidenhair fern



Native thistle

Libby's Garden

Size: 0.25-0.5 acres of garden beds

Native species highlights: Blue lobelia, hoary vervain, obedient plant, beardtongue, and cardinal flower. Even after 15 years, Libby finds the inspiration to add a new garden bed to her collection every year. The wildlife act as her muse – the flowers are as much for them as they are for Libby (as evidenced by the bees, birds, and butterflies that flit and flutter between the various beds)

ANDREW MAIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S Learning by Nature Garden

Size: 0.05 acres

Native species highlights: Butterfly weed, trumpet honeysuckle, purple cone flower, and garden phlox. Andrew Maier Elementary School converted an unused area of lawn into a pollinator garden to both provision nectar to adult insects and to host young caterpillars, supporting this wildlife during all life stages. The pollinator garden is just one facet of their campus wide "Learning by Nature" initiative to install green infrastructure and create new, outdoor classroom spaces for immersive learning.





Purple cone flower

Hummingbird moth feeding from wild bergamot / bee balm

The Nature Place AT ANGELICA CREEK PARK

Size: 4.5 acres

Native species highlights: Purple cone flower, blue mistflower, blue flag iris, mountain mint, and swamp rose mallow. Restoration of Angelica Creek Park began in 2006, 5 years after Tropical Storm Allison breached the Angelica Dam. Today, Angelica Creek flows through its former lakebed, weaving between two wetlands, and is surrounded by several native plantings cultivated and stewarded by Berks Nature, including a pollinator meadow and rain garden.



Swamp rose mallow

Carolyn's Garden

Size: 1.0 acre of meadow and garden beds

Native species highlights: Switchgrass, wild indigo, ironweed, summer phlox, and cone flower. Wild meets sophistication in Carolyn's garden. A rolling meadow lush with native flowers and grasses grows alongside a series of more traditional perennial beds, yet here too native flowers bloom showcasing their true versatility and beauty.



Indian grass





Purple cone flower



Garden phlox



Garden phlox

