



Native Plants to Know and Grow

BY CATHY LUDDEN



Native plants are the first and most critical link in the food chain. Insects and other animals in our part of the world co-evolved with local plants over millions of years. Most insects native to our region cannot live on plants that evolved in Europe, Asia or Africa. Without native plants, insect populations fall and food sources critical to songbirds and other animals disappear. By including more natives in the landscape, gardeners can make a positive difference in maintaining biodiversity, as well as attracting beneficial insects, butterflies, pollinators, and songbirds to our backyards.

Most of us already have important native plants in our gardens: oak trees, dogwoods, wild cherries, winterberries, chokeberries, blueberries, goldenrod, milkweed, coneflowers, asters, violets, Joe Pye weed, and many other

Every spring, a Plant Exchange takes place at each GCA Zone Meeting. Each club brings in six, small, generally native, plants that have been propagated that year by its members. Propagation may be by starting seeds, cuttings, layering, or air layering. This is just one way GCA helps spread the love of gardening – and of natives.

familiar plants native to our region that are hosts to beneficial insects, birds, and other animals. But there are hundreds of garden-worthy native plants to discover. And what gardener doesn't get a kick out of trying new and interesting plants, especially if those plants have value to our ecosystem?

The plants shown here and on the back should be used much more commonly than they are—a gardener can really love them. If you can't find them where you usually buy

plants, ask. Nurseries should be encouraged to carry more natives. But you will very likely can find them and other native plants at Rosedale Nursery and at the annual spring sale at The Native Plant Center at Westchester Community College.

PLANTS IN GARDEN PHOTO, FRONT TO BACK:

<i>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</i>	Blue-eyed grass
<i>Oenothera fruticosa</i>	Narrow leaf evening primrose
<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>	Low-bush blueberry
<i>Amsonia hubrichtii</i>	Threadleaf bluestar
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	Bear berry
<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Purple coneflower
<i>Baptisia australis</i>	Wild blue indigo
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	Tufted hairgrass
<i>Liatris spicata</i>	Dense blazing star
<i>Echinacea pallida</i>	Pale purple coneflower
<i>Coreopsis verticillata</i>	Threadleaf tickseed
<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>	Tickseed
<i>Helenium autumnale</i>	Sneezeweed
<i>Viburnum nudum</i>	Possumhaw viburnum
<i>Viburnum trilobum</i>	American cranberry bush
<i>Rubus odorata</i>	Flowering raspberry
<i>Tradescantia ohioensis</i>	Spiderwort
<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Butterfly weed
<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	Swamp milkweed
<i>Iris versicolor</i>	Northern blue flag iris
<i>Hypericum frondosum</i>	St. John's wort
<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>	Summersweet
<i>Spirea tomentosa</i>	Steeplebush
<i>Chelone glabra</i>	White turtlehead
<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>	Common boneset
<i>Eupatorium dubium</i>	Joe Pye weed
<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	Cardinal flower
<i>Aster nove-anglia</i>	New England aster
<i>Amelanchier laevis</i>	Allegheny serviceberry
<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	American arborvitae
<i>Campsis radicans</i>	Trumpet creeper

HOW TO DO IT:

Here are close-ups of three natives to know and grow:

***Spigelia marilandica* (Indian pinks)**

has been the Native Plant Center's Perennial of the Year. It is that rare gem, a shade-loving plant that blooms in vibrant color. Native to the Appalachians and Ozarks, *Spigelia* blooms in late spring, but if it is happy, it will re-bloom on and off through the summer and into the fall. It needs no special care, does not need dead-heading, and is reliably hardy here. It is happy in dappled shade, and evenly moist soil with organic material—an edge-of-woodlands plant. Shiny green leaves stay fresh all summer and into the fall. The two-tone flowers in red/yellow primary colors are stunning. It grows in clumps about a foot tall and increases slowly in place. This plant is a real winner and should be much more common in gardens than it is.



***Jeffersonia diphylla* (Twinleaf)**

is a great discovery for underplanting trees and in woodlands. It is a shade plant grown for its unusual double leaves and interesting seedpods. The small white flowers last seemingly for minutes in the early spring. It's hard to catch them before they're gone. But little cup-like seed pods follow and develop over weeks. The leaves stay lovely all summer long and the plant seeds itself around gently in little clumps.



***Pycnanthemum muticum* (Mountain mint)**

is a fabulous plant for a sunny area with average moisture. Although it is a mint and will spread by rhizomes, it is not hard to control by running a spade around the clump in the spring. It blooms in summer, and the flowers last until after the first frost. It grows about 3 feet tall and the blue/green foliage looks fresh from spring through the end of the season. The bracts at the end of each stalk turn a wonderful silvery color, similar to lamb's ears, and the white flowers form tiny crowns around the ripening seeds. The edible foliage has a minty herbal quality like a cross between spearmint and oregano. That aromatic quality makes the plant less attractive to deer and rabbits.



CATHY LUDDEN is a former Wall Street lawyer who is currently devoting herself to environmental interests, particularly the importance of native plants. The meadow garden pictured at right is her former front lawn. A member of the steering committee of the Native Plant Center at Westchester Community College and president of the board of directors of Greenburgh Nature Center, she is the conservation chair of the Garden Club of Irvington and has represented our club at several GCA NAL conferences.



The Garden Club of Irvington-on-Hudson (GCI) is a member of The Garden Club of America, a volunteer nonprofit organization with 200 member clubs and 18,000 members nationwide who participate in an array of horticulture, conservation and civic improvement projects.

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