

# *Your Front Yard*

## *Plant This:*



**Native meadow plants support life.** Whatever conditions prevail in your garden, there are meadow plants that will work and provide year-round interest. Meadow grasses and perennials are gorgeous mixed in typical flower beds, or you can devote an area to a natural meadow planting. Meadow plantings are deer-resistant and drought-tolerant, and need not look wild or weedy. Hardscape or mown paths will set them off and highlight their beauty. Anywhere lawn grows—and many places where it won't—can become a meadow planting.

## *Not That:*



**Lawn is an ecological desert.** The roots are only a few inches deep, so lawns require constant irrigation; but they cannot absorb heavy rainfall, so they contribute to runoff. Chemical fertilizers mix with storm water runoff and pollute our waterways. Constant maintenance with mowers, edgers, and blowers contributes to noise and air pollution. Virtually the only wildlife supported by lawn are grubs, the larvae of Japanese beetles, which is why so much pesticide is applied, making most lawns toxic to beneficial insects, as well as to children and pets.



# Ornamental Grasses

## Plant This:



There are native ornamental grasses for every situation—sun or shade, wet or dry, tall and upright or low and fountain-like—and they all provide food and shelter for native insects and birds, but are deer-resistant. Try **Little Bluestem** (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), **Tufted hairgrass** (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), **Switch grass** (*Panicum virgatum*), or **Prairie dropseed** (*Sporobolus heteroplepsis*) for year-round interest in any garden.

## Not That:



Many popular non-native ornamental grasses (**Miscanthus**, **Pennisetum**) are invasive. Why use them at all when native grasses are available for every ornamental style?



# Flowering Vines

## Plant This:



Trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) is available with red, pink, or yellow flowers. Not only can it decorate a fence or wall, it attracts hummingbirds, and its fall berries feed migrating birds.

## Not That:



Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) and related non-native vines (*Lonicera morrowii*, *L.x bella*, *L.tatarica*, *L.maackii*) are so invasive they have now been prohibited for sale or distribution in New York and other states. They choke trees and cover roadside shrubs all over the United States.



# Spirea

## Plant This:



Our native spirea or “steeplebush” (*Spiraea tomentosa*) is a beautiful small shrub that produces showy blooms in late summer loaded with nectar that attracts butterflies.

## Not That:



The non-native spirea (*Spiraea japonica*) so commonly planted in our area has been recognized as invasive in local forests and woodlands. It escapes from gardens and seeds itself in the woods, replacing native plants necessary for biodiversity.



# Barberry

## Plant This:



**Ninebark** (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) is a native plant that is becoming more popular due to new cultivars with leaf colors ranging from deep purple through copper or bronze to lime green. All have showy white flowers in early summer and are suitable for many different garden designs.

## Not That:



**Japanese barberry** (*Berberis thunbergii*), in all its varieties, is a dangerous invasive that has not only infested our woodlands, but has been shown to increase populations of deer ticks carrying Lyme disease. Birds carry barberry seeds to the woods where the plants revert to thorny green thickets, providing year-round shelter for mice that carry infected deer ticks. Thus, the ticks remain active year around, increasing their populations. Japanese barberry is prohibited for sale or distribution in New York.



# Fall Color

## Plant This:



For dazzling fall color, it's hard to beat **blueberries**! Both high-bush (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) and low-bush (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) blueberries offer three-season interest, not to mention delicious berries for you and the birds. With pretty white flowers, compact shrub form, gorgeous fall color, edible fruit, and great wildlife benefits, what could be better?

## Not That:



**Burning bush** (*Euonymus alatus*) is a one-trick pony that has degraded forests in the Northeast by spreading itself widely and supplanting native species. Its only virtue, fall color, is easily beaten by many native plants with multi-season interest. For most of the year, burning bush is a scraggly, undistinguished shrub of limited aesthetic value. It is now on New York's list of regulated invasive plants.



# Shade Trees

## Plant This:



The single most important thing you can do for biodiversity in our region is to plant, or save, a **native oak tree**. No other plant supports more wildlife. A mature oak tree takes up thousands of gallons of storm water each year, reducing runoff, but most need little to no supplemental irrigation once established. Any of these would be a great choice: **red oak** (*Quercus rubra*), **white oak** (*Q. alba*), **pin oak** (*Q. palustris*), **willow leaf oak** (*Q. phellos*), **scarlet oak** (*Q. coccinia*).

## Not That:



**Norway maple** (*Acer platanoides*) is an invasive disaster in the forests of northeastern United States. They seed themselves prolifically, shade out native spring ephemerals, native understory shrubs, and seedlings of native trees. They are worthless as a food source to wildlife. The fall color of the Norway maple is a dull yellow, and pales in comparison to that of our native red or sugar maples. Sale of Norway maple, both the green and purple-leaved form, is now regulated under New York's invasive species law.



# Butterfly Gardens

## Plant This:



Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*) sports showy, nectar-loaded flowers, blooms from midsummer to fall, and attracts butterflies of many species. Like many other native flowering plants, it also hosts butterfly larvae, so your garden becomes a source of more butterflies. The bigger the variety of natives, the greater the number and variety of butterflies. Try **coneflowers** (*Echinacea spp.*); **hyssop** (*Agastache foeniculum*); **milkweed** (*Asclepias spp.*); **bee balm** (*Monarda spp.*), and **goldenrod** (*Solidago spp.*).

## Not That:



**Butterfly bush** (*Buddleia davidii*) attracts butterflies, but that is not a good thing. There is not one species of butterfly in our region whose larvae can survive on butterfly bush. If a butterfly drinks nectar from the flowers and then lays her eggs on the leaves of this plant, the larvae will die. So, butterfly bush leads to fewer butterflies, not more. Originally from Asia, it has no insect or animal controls in North America. It produces billions of seeds and is wildly invasive.



# Spring-Blooming Shrubs

## Plant This:



**Shadbush or serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.)** is one of our most valuable native shrubs. It blooms in early spring, covering itself in profuse white flowers that provide nectar for early-season pollinators. In summer, it has an airy form allowing underplanting. It also produces delicious edible berries; but the birds, chipmunks, and squirrels will usually get to them before you can. Its last trick is fabulous fall color. Shadbush gives you three seasons of garden interest and is beneficial to humans and wildlife.

## Not That:



Ah, **forsythia**. This ubiquitous Asian shrub (*Forsythia* spp.) does only one thing: it blooms early in a yellow that some find cheerful, others garish. It is invasive in several states, rooting itself wherever its branches touch the ground. It is everywhere, but it does nothing for insects, butterflies, or birds. If we replaced even a small percentage of all those forsythias with native flowering shrubs, it could make a real difference in biodiversity. Be creative! Replace that old forsythia hedge with a mixed border of native flowering shrubs.



# Groundcover for Sun

## Plant This:



**Barren strawberry** (*Waldsteinia fragarioides* or *Geum fragarioides*) is a low-growing, semi-evergreen groundcover that blooms in early spring with bright yellow flowers. It is drought tolerant and can hold a bank to prevent erosion, but it won't climb your trees or invade the woods. It is easily controlled and absolutely beautiful. Other groundcovers that benefit wildlife, and are beautiful options to replace invasive plants, include **golden groundsel** (*Packera aurea*); **mountain mint** (*Pynanthemum muticum*); or **bearberry** (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*).

## Not That:



A depressing amount of real estate is dedicated to non-native **pachysandra** (*Pachysandra terminalis*). Homeowners seem to plant it under trees, along driveways, and anywhere they don't know what else to do. While it doesn't do much harm if it is surrounded by pavement or regularly mown lawn, it doesn't do much good either. When it is planted near wooded areas, it is a disaster. Because nothing eats it, and it can grow in sun or shade, it spreads aggressively, quickly overpowering everything on the woodland floor.



# Groundcover for Shade

## Plant This:



**Dwarf crested iris (*Iris cristata*)**, available with purple or white flowers, is a low, fast-growing native groundcover for shade. It dies back over the winter, but comes up early and blooms in April. It's easily controlled and easily divided. Too often we think of shady areas as problems to be solved by non-native groundcovers. But since most of our region was once forest, there are hundreds of native plants perfect for shade. Try these deer-resistant groundcovers: **Bunny Blue sedge (*Carex laxiculmus*)**; **Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*)**; **Canadian wild ginger (*Asarum canadensis*)**; or **New York fern (*Thelypteris noveboracensis*)**.

## Not That:



**English ivy (*Hedera helix*)**, all ivy, is non-native and invasive. The destructive power of ivy is frightening. As it climbs trees, it steals light and breaks branches, choking trees from the bottom up. On the ground, it smothers everything on its way to the next tree. It has no controls or competition. **Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*)** is also an invasive non-native plant infesting woodlands throughout our region. **Wintercreeper or climbing euonymous (*Euonymous fortunei*)** is another. These plants should be avoided.



# Ornamental Trees

## Plant This:



Our native **flowering dogwood** (*Cornus florida*) is a three-season beauty. Its fall berries are an important source of nutrition for migrating birds. Although its popularity has been challenged by non-native dogwoods—they are thought to be more disease-resistant—it appears that the disease came into the U.S. on non-natives. However, newer cultivars of the native dogwood are disease-resistant. Other gorgeous native ornamentals are **redbud** (*Cercis canadensis*), **shadbush or serviceberry** (*Amelanchier spp.*), and **Virginia fringetree** (*Chionanthus virginicus*).

## Not That:



**Kousa or Korean dogwood** (*Cornus kousa*) has become very popular in the nursery trade, and new cultivars appear every year. But planting more of these trees is problematic if, as suspected, they host the anthracnose fungus that has damaged native dogwoods. The fall berries of the Kousa are too large for most birds to swallow, and even squirrels seem to ignore them. Yet the tree already has begun to naturalize in New York, signaling a potentially invasive species