

Addendum: Additional Details and Answers to Chat Questions

Elaine Mills, presenter of "Selecting Native Plants for Your Home Garden"

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The majority of the **plants described during this presentation** are native to Arlington County and the City of Alexandria in Northern Virginia, and most of them are also indigenous to the Mid-Atlantic Region.

- Two sources of information on the native ranges of plants are the [Plants Database of the USDA](#) and [Native Plants Database of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#) where plant species can be entered to determine in what states they are located.
- For more precise, county by county information, Virginia residents can check the [Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora](#).
- Virginia viewers from areas outside of Northern Virginia will want to look for regional native plant guides. Links to free PDF versions of these guides can be found on the website for the Virginia Native Plant Society at <https://vnps.org/virginia-native-plant-guides/>
- Maryland residents can utilize the [Maryland Plant Atlas](#).
- Delaware residents can use the [Flora of Delaware Online Database](#).
- Pennsylvania residents can search the [Pennsylvania Flora Project of Morris Arboretum](#).
- For Michigan, consult the [Michigan Botanical Club](#)
- Information can also be obtained by checking with the Cooperative Extension unit in a given region or with the native plant society for a particular state.

For **sources of native plants** in Northern Virginia, I refer you to the list of [native-only plant sellers](#) on the Plant NoVA Natives website. [Periodic native plant sales](#) are also listed on the site. For those living elsewhere in Virginia, please check the [list of nurseries](#) compiled by the Virginia Native Plant Society. Local chapters of the VNPS would also have information about local sales such as the annual events at [Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden](#) in Richmond.

I would like to correct two statements I made during the presentation.

- **Golden Alexanders** (*Zizia aurea*), which was mentioned as a ground cover in the Parsley or Carrot Family, serves as a larval host for the Black Swallowtail butterfly, not for moths. The plant is also used as a nectar source by many short-tongued bees and smaller butterflies.

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- In response to a question about good native **plants for slopes**, I mentioned the Ninebark shrub. I meant to refer to New Jersey Tea, which has a deep and extensive root system, making it ideal for dry conditions.

A number of questions came up about the size of my own yard. I have a double lot in Arlington, Virginia, of 7,744 square feet (between 1/8 to ¼ acre). At present I have no lawn. Paths of various types run between deep planting beds in the front and side yards, and there is a more naturalistic layered area in the back. The principles I have used in planting can also be applied to even small yards, and I will be illustrating this in an upcoming class sometime in September.

A major concern expressed by multiple viewers has to do with damage to plants from the **17-Year Cicadas**. Please see the recording of the class “Preparing Your Garden for the 17-Year Cicadas” for information on this. You may also want to refer to this excellent [illustrated article](#) by Michael Raupp, entomologist at the University of Maryland and this [list of plants at high risk](#).

There were a number of questions in the chat box regarding **leaf litter**.

- If you’re concerned about the quantity or potential matting of fallen leaves, you can use the shredding blade of a leaf vacuum or run a lawn mower over leaves on lawn areas to reduce the volume of leaves that you then place around the garden. Michael Goatley, a turf grass specialist based at Virginia Tech, advises that you can actually retain leaves on a lawn to build the underlying soil as long as they are clopped into small pieces.
- Decomposition of leathery leaves, such as those of magnolias or rhododendrons, could be accelerated by shredding.
- Ideally, leaves that fall in forested gardens will not be shredded and would simply be spread a bit if they appear too thick in certain areas. That approach would not endanger any creatures overwintering in the leaves.
- Any clean-up in heavily wooded areas should be scheduled when spring temperatures have warmed to at least 50 degrees so overwintering insects will have emerged.

One viewer expressed frustration at the difficulty of starting small trees due to a heavy **browsing by deer**. The decimation of our forest understory is indeed a very serious problem. For more information see this [article](#) from North Carolina State University.

There were many questions on **dioecious plants**, those which require planting of separate male and female plants for fruiting. When purchasing plants at a nursery, they would have to be blooming or fruiting in order to make the correct identification. Of course, the absence of fruit on a plant may just mean that female flowers weren’t pollinated!

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- The [Native Plant Society of New Jersey website](#) has excellent photos for distinguishing between male and female flowers of **Spicebush** (*Lindera benzoin*) which can be seen in March to April. Green drupes appear on female plants beginning in June and ripening to red in September.
- The male flowers of **Fringetree** (*Chionanthus virginicus*) are said to be showier and to have longer petals than female flowers, but I haven't been able to find photos with comparisons. The trees bloom in late April to May. Green fruit forms on female trees in July and ripens to deep purple in August.
- In the case of the **Winterberry** and **Inkberry** hollies (*Ilex verticillata* and *Ilex glabra*), male flowers have four or more stamens topped with bright yellow pollen. The flowers of female hollies have a green, "berry-like" structure in the center topped by the stigma. Flowers will be seen in late May to June. Fruit forms on female shrubs in August and ripens through the fall. It will be a dark blue-black on Inkberry and either red or orange on the Winterberry, depending upon the cultivar.
- With regard to optimal spacing between the male and female plants of dioecious species, many online sources say to plant "in close proximity;" others give a distance of no more than 50 feet apart.

For **Pawpaws** (*Asimina triloba*), note that while they are monoecious, a pollinator is needed for cross-pollination between unrelated varieties. Flies and beetles are the pollinators. Plants grown from seed will take from 4 to 8 years before fruiting, and even 3-foot seedlings must mature for 2-6 years before they will set fruit.

Folks had questions on the **spreading tendencies** of plants.

- The clumps of **Christmas Fern** (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) will increase in size over time, but they will not spread.
- While members of the Mint Family, such as **Scarlett Beebalm** (*Monarda didyma*) and **mountain mints** (*Pycnanthemum* species), can colonize by rhizomes and seeding, I find them relatively easy to dig up and control.

There were a few questions about specific plants or plant photos.

- The **purple flower** shown on the slide with Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) is that of Wild Ginger; it is found tucked beneath the leaves.
- The low-growing plant with **star-shaped yellow flowers** on the title and question slides is Green-and-Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*).
- **Forsythia, quince, and cotoneaster** are not native plants.

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- I don't know of any native shrubs that **bloom** quite as **early** as quince. Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) and Downy Serviceberry (*Amelanchier aborea*) bloom in early April.
- Any of the three **milkweeds** I mentioned, Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), Swamp Milkweed (*A. incarnata*), and Butterfly-weed (*A. tuberosa*), would serve equally well as both nectar and larval host plants for Monarch butterflies. Your choice of the plant to grow would be based on level of aggressiveness you tolerate, your soil moisture and light conditions, and preferred height.
- Regarding destructive milkweed weevils on **Swamp Milkweed**, I understand that there has been some success with using pheromone traps, but I don't know of any sources for the average homeowner. The only other recommendation I have heard is to "rotate your crops," but that wouldn't work with a stand of perennial milkweed.
- **Siting for serviceberry trees** (*Amelanchier spp.*) can be difficult because of the prevalence of cedar trees and groundcovers which are the alternate hosts for cedar-apple rust. For helpful information, see this [article on Gymnosporangium rusts](#) by the Wisconsin Horticulture Division of Extension.

There was a great deal of discussion in the chat regarding **Virginia Creeper** (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*).

- While it does have somewhat aggressive tendencies, as a native plant, it is not considered invasive.
- I have allowed the plant to spread as a ground cover in part of a forested area and to climb on a tall fence. My previous research had indicated that it did not pose problems when climbing into trees, but one class participant said it had weighed down two trees in her yard.
- In fact, in addition to its ornamental qualities, Virginia Creeper offers benefits to wildlife. It produces berries for birds in the fall and is a keystone vine, serving as a larval host plant to 29 species of caterpillars.
- The fruit is highly toxic to humans if ingested, and the rest of the plant contains raphides, which irritate the skin of some people.

Native ferns suitable for a shady wet area include:

- [Athyrium asplenoides \(Lady Fern\)](#)
- [Matteuccia struthiopteris \(Ostrich Fern\)](#)
- [Osmundastrum cinnamomeum \(Cinnamon Fern\)](#)

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- [*Osmunda spectabilis* \(Royal Fern\)](#)

In response to a question regarding small native trees suitable for use as **street trees**, here are some I have seen used in this manner:

- [*Aesculus pavia* \(Red Buckeye\)](#)
- [*Amelanchier arborea* \(Downy Serviceberry\)](#)
- [*Cercis canadensis* \(Eastern Redbud\)](#)
- [*Chionanthus virginicus* \(Fringetree\)](#)

In response to a question about **smaller shrubs**, here are some suggestions:

- *Aronia melanocarpa* 'Low Scape Mound' (Black Chokeberry), 12-24"
- *Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low' (Fragrant Sumac), 18"-3'
- *Itea virginica* 'Little Henry' (Virginia Sweetspire), 2-3'
- *Ceanothus americanus* (New Jersey Tea), 3'
- *Hypericum prolificum* (Shrubby St. John's Wort), 3'
- *Ilex opaca* 'Maryland Dwarf' (American Holly), 3'

In response to a question on plants that provide **seed for birds**, here are some possible perennials and grasses:

- *Agastache foeniculum* (Anise Hyssop)
- [*Echinacea purpurea* \(Purple Coneflower\)](#)
- [*Eutrochium dubium* \(Coastal Joe Pye Weed\)](#)
- *Helianthus divaricatus* (Woodland Sunflower)
- [*Heliopsis helianthoides* \(Oxeye Sunflower\)](#)
- [*Liatris spicata* \(Blazing Star/Gayfeather\)](#)
- [*Panicum virgatum* \(Switchgrass\)](#)
- *Rudbeckia* species ([Black- and Brown-eyed Susans](#), [Orange Coneflower](#))
- [*Schizachyrium scoparium* \(Little Bluestem\)](#)
- *Silphium perfoliatum* (Cup Plant)
- [*Sorghastrum nutans* \(Indian Grass\)](#)
- [*Vernonia noveboracensis* \(New York Ironweed\)](#)

Miscellaneous Resources:

- I will mention again the book I find so helpful on **maintaining perennials**. It's *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust.

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- There is a **garden planting and maintenance schedule** in the back of DiSabato-Aust's book. Other published calendar-type references are *Month-by-Month Gardening in the Mid-Atlantic* by André and Mark Viette and *Month-to-Month Perennial and Shrub Maintenance Chart for the Mid-Atlantic* by District II National Capital Area Garden Clubs.
- I have come across two online sources of **landscape design plans**:
 - [Native Plants for the Small Yard](#) by Kate Brandes through the Ecological Landscape Alliance
 - [Native Landscape Plans](#) on the website for Grow Native! (based in Missouri)
 - Some adjustments may have to be made to the species lists, substituting plants that are locally native.
- The New Hope Audubon Society has compiled an excellent [list of keystone plants](#) based on studies by entomologist Doug Tallamy. While the chart was prepared for the North Carolina Piedmont region, the species are generally native throughout the East Coast. In addition to listing the number of Lepidoptera species supported by each larval host plant, the chart provides information on other benefits to wildlife, such as availability of nectar, berries, and seeds or nuts.
- Penn State Extension has a helpful list of [plants tolerant of Black Walnut](#).
- Other helpful resources mentioned in the chat were iNaturalist and leafsnap, two **plant identification apps**.
- For information on **oak tree decline**, please see the article [Climate Change, Weather Extremes, and Oak Decline](#) on the MGNV website.
- Locally, contact the Master Gardener Help Desk (mgarlalex@gmail.com) for information on **soil test kits**. In other parts of Virginia or other states, gardeners should check with their local county Cooperative Extension office.

