

Elaine Mills, presenter of Best Bets: Native Plants for Dry Conditions

The plants discussed in this presentation are native to the Mid-Atlantic.

- Viewers from other areas of 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/>
- Viewers watching from other states may wish to consult county-level maps at <https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/java/> to confirm the presence of the plants in their regions. State native plant societies and local Extension offices should also be able to provide information on locally native species.

As mentioned in the talk, the list of [native-only sellers](#) on the Plant NoVA Natives website mentions sources where the staff are likely to be most knowledgeable about native plants, particularly when there are questions regarding the sex of dioecious plants, such as Eastern Redcedar.

Specific Native Plants:

A question was posed regarding various **species of serviceberry** (*Amelanchier*). An [article](#) by Wisconsin Horticulture, Division of Extension, compares several species, including Downy, Allegheny, and Canadian. It appears that *Amelanchier canadensis*, which occurs naturally in bogs and swamps, may be the best choice for wet garden sites.

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.

- According to our Extension Agent, a 2- to 3-mile radius between affected species is recommended. Effective removal of the alternate host is not practical for the home gardener as cedar is a common volunteer in our landscape.
- For further helpful information, see this [article on Gymnosporangium rusts](#) by the Wisconsin Horticulture Division of Extension and this [fact sheet](#) by Clemson Cooperative Extension.

Common Yucca (*Yucca filamentosa*) has a deep and extensive root systems and mature plants will begin to grow basal offsets around the base. If it is necessary to remove a plant, it may be difficult to remove it completely by digging out. Many miniature plants may grow back if there are any remaining roots or broken root segments.

Black-Eyed Susans may develop several disease problems due to fungus or powdery mildew.

- Spread of these pathogens can be avoided by proper spacing between plants to increase air circulation around the foliage, allowing leaves to dry off from dew or after rainfall events. Because the plants spread quickly, it will be necessary to pull volunteer plants.
- It is also a good idea to use drip irrigation rather than overhead watering which could splash fungal spores between plants. Finally, any diseased plant material should be removed and disposed of.

I apologize for my confusion between goldenrods (*Solidago*) and *Rudbeckia* species, one of which was mentioned. Regarding the **planting conditions for some native goldenrods** and which is best for dry conditions:

- Rough-Stemmed Goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*) requires moist to wet soil.
- Tall Goldenrod (*Solidago altissima*) takes moist to dry soil.
- Blue-stemmed/Wreath Goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*) is a woodland species, preferring moist to dry part-shade.
- Gray Goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*) can tolerate drought and dry, poor, rocky soil, so it probably the best for sunny dry conditions.

Eastern Prickly Pears (*Opuntia humifusa*) are **edible**.

- The sweet juicy fruits are called tunas, and the pads, called nopales are popular in Mexican and Central America cuisine.
- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower database provides [details on preparation](#); be sure to note the information on proper removal of the glochids, miniature, bristle-like hairs, which can cause severe skin irritation.

Specific Planting Questions:

A viewer inquired about plants for **dry shade**.

- The best species discussed in the presentation are Green-and-Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*) and White Wood Aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), and Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*).
- Other possibilities could include Golden Ragwort (*Packera aurea*), Wild Stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*), Woodland Sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*), Blue-Stemmed Golden (*Solidago caesia*), Blue wood Aster (*Symphotrichum cordifolium*), Christmas Fern

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(*Polystichum acrostichoides*), Marginal Wood Fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*), River Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), and Bottlebrush Grass (*Elymus hystrix*).

One participant inquired about appropriate **plants to use under oak trees**.

- It is important to note that lawns are not compatible with oaks. Oaks do best in more acidic soil, while turf grass prefers an alkaline pH. Oak trees can get waterlogged with the watering used to maintain a green lawn.
- In natural settings, the ground below oaks has few understory plants. In a home landscape, it is important to choose plants that either associate with them in the wild or that do well in dry shade.
- Sedges adapted to shady sites, such as Pennsylvania Sedge, also known as Oak Sedge, (*Carex pensylvanica*) and Plantain-leaved Sedge (*Carex plantaginea*) may be good choices as their use won't disturb the tree roots.
- While this [article from the UC Master Gardener Program](#) focusses on oak trees in California, it presents some important guidelines for planting under and around oak trees.

Another viewer asked about the proper method for replacing non-native plants with native species on a dry slope that is **habitat for native bees**. I have corresponded with Sam Droege, a local expert on bees at the US Geological Survey, and he has shared the following information:

- In general, most bee action will be in the spring and they put their nests several inches down. Pulling out the plants or light cultivation should not be a problem.
- Waiting until the fall, would be optimal for not disturbing the bees.
- Recommended plants could include prairie-like plants that are good for pollinators, such as Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*), Narrow-leaved Mountain-Mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*), Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), Blue Wild Indigo (*Baptisia australis*) and Yellow Wild Indigo (*B. tinctoria*), Gray Goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*), Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*), Maryland Goldenaster (*Chrysopsis mariana*), Small's Ragwort (*Packera anonyma*), and Shrubby St. John's Wort (*Hypericum prolificum*).
- Other possibilities might be Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Meadows also have a large grass component, so you could add Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*).
- The idea of using plus of the plants might be best for causing the least disturbance to the soil and nests.



General or miscellaneous questions:

I would like expand on my answers to several questions regarding **plants and deer**:

- Regarding protecting saplings from deer, I understand that deer usually browse twigs less than one inch in diameter. Young trees that are 1 to 6 inches in diameter with smooth bark are most likely to be damaged by deer rubbing. The site [How to manage deer damage on trees](#) by the University of Minnesota Extension and [Control Deer Damage](#) and [Deer Damage Control Options](#) by the Kansas Forest Service provide detailed information on protection techniques.
- White Wood Aster (*Eurybia divaricata*) is said to be unpalatable to deer and rabbits, but as our Extension Agent Kirsten Conrad says, lists of deer-resistant plants should be renamed “Some plants that are resistant to some deer some of the time.”

For viewers with concerns about Black Walnut, Penn State Extension has compiled this [list of plants tolerant to Black Walnut](#).

Here are some recommended **guides for tree identification**:

- *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American trees: Eastern Region*. Compact, 364 species identified by leaf shape, fruit, flower, fall color.
- *The Sibley Guide to Trees*. 600 species illustrated in detail by top nature illustrator.
- *Peterson Field Guide Series: A Field Guide to Eastern Trees*. Pocket-sized, keys by summer leaves and winter leafless details.
- *Tree Finder: A Manual for the Identification of Trees*. Pocket-sized, dichotomous key for 300 common native trees.
- [Virginia Tech Dendrology](#) is an online source with leaf and twig dichotomous keys.
- [Common Native Trees of Virginia](#) by the Virginia Department of Forestry is another online reference tool with a dichotomous key.
- The Flora of Virginia phone app has both a graphic key and dichotomous keys, plus a reference library.

I am confirming the information I shared on **planting the small trees** I described; they should be planted about 15 feet away from the foundation of a house. For more helpful information on [sustainable landscaping basics](#), see the recording in the Virtual Classroom on the MGNV.ORG website.

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Pruning shrubs after flowering will remove fruit. If selective pruning is done, a good number of flowering branches can be retained to develop fruit.

In response to a question regarding the **use of herbicides by a neighbor**, I would clarify that any plants sited along the fence line on the questioner's property may be affected because of spray that is carried on the air.

- Native shrubs could be just as adversely affected as the crepe myrtles that are planted there now. Herbicides, such as those used for weeds, are also very harmful to pollinators.
- If a neighbor is using pesticides in an attempt to control mosquitoes, I would refer to the series of articles on the MGNV.ORG website which explain better methods on control. (Type "mosquito" in the search box for links to multiple articles.)

There were several questions on **cultivars**:

- The 'Goldsturm' cultivar of *Rudbeckia hirta* should provide wildlife support similar to that of the straight species because the color of the flower has not been changed.
- On the other hand, the cultivars of **Ninebark** where the foliage color has been modified to purple or bronze won't be recognized as larval host plants for Lepidoptera caterpillars. The flowers will still offer nectar and pollen for beneficial insects.

My favorite resource on **pinching back and pruning herbaceous plants** is *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: The Essential Guide to Planting and Pruning Techniques* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust.