



GREEN SPRING GARDENS

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NATIVE HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS FOR SUNNY GARDENS IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. AREA

Native plants are species that existed in Virginia before Jamestown, Virginia was founded in 1607. Therefore, they are uniquely adapted to local conditions. Native plants provide food and shelter for a myriad of birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. Best of all, gardeners can feel the satisfaction of preserving a part of our natural heritage while enjoying the beauty of native plants in the garden. **Most of these plants are native to Virginia. It is noted if they are not native to Virginia: these plants are found in other southeastern states.**

Native herbaceous perennial plants form little or no woody tissue, live for several years, and most are deciduous (leaves turn brown in the winter). Some perennials are short-lived and may only live three years, such as wild columbine, while others can live for decades. They are a group of plants that gardeners are passionate about because of their lovely flowers and foliage, and wide variety of textures, forms, and heights.

Native herbaceous perennial plants are a joy to garden with because they can be easily moved to create new design combinations and provide an ever-changing scene in the garden. They are appropriate for a wide range of gardens, from perennial borders to meadow-like gardens.

The following are useful definitions:

- **Cultivar (cv.)** – a cultivated variety designated by single quotes ('Blue Ice'). A **variety (var.)** or **subspecies (subsp.)**, in contrast, is found in nature and is a subdivision of a species.
- **Naturalistic Use** – native plants that, when properly sited, perform well with minimal care; best used in an informal design that suggests a natural landscape. Most native species can be used this way, but this is the best way to use some species with informal growth habits or others that reseed readily.

The following is a list of native herbaceous perennial plants that perform well in sunny gardens and naturalistic settings in the Washington, D.C. area (6 hours or more of full sun daily). Most of these plants prefer a moist, well-drained site. Perennials that need to grow in wet sites are not included. Light requirements and special cultural requirements or tolerances are noted in the comments column.

Help conserve native plant populations by buying only propagated plants: never buy plants collected from the wild. Two public gardens have websites listing native plant nurseries for the eastern U.S.: the North Carolina Botanical Garden (<http://ncbg.unc.edu/pages/48/>) and the Mt. Cuba Center (<http://www.mtcubacenter.org/gardening-resources/nursery-sources/>). Native plants are sold in the Garden Gate Plant Shop at Green Spring during the growing season, the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society sells plants twice a year at Green Spring on Garden Day (in May and September), and other native plant vendors sell at Garden Day as well. Earth Sanga, Parkfairfax, and the U.S. National Arboretum also have native plant sales at garden events.

An information sheet is available for shady areas as well: *Native Herbaceous Perennials and Ferns for Shade Gardens in the Washington, D.C. Area*. These plant information sheets are available on the Green Spring website under **Gardening** and in our Horticulture Center.

NATIVE HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS FOR SUN

| Scientific Name | Common Name | Comments |
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| <i>Allium cernuum</i> | Wild Nodding Onion | Full sun; bulbs but behave like a perennial – foliage persists the entire growing season; tolerate dry sites; some reseeding |
| <i>Amsonia tabernaemontana</i> (‘Montana’ - shorter than the species type; ‘Blue Ice’ is shorter as well & likely is a hybrid – weaker grower but deeper blue flowers) | Eastern Bluestar | Full sun to light shade; reseeds readily in moist sites; tolerates dry sites |
| <i>Antennaria plantaginifolia</i> Note: <i>A. virginica</i> (shale barren pussytoes) is harder to grow in average conditions – it likes the top of a rock wall at Green Spring | Plantainleaf Pussytoes | Full sun to light shade; prefers dry sites; some reseeding |
| <i>Aquilegia canadensis</i> | Wild Columbine | Full sun (moist site) to light shade; allow to reseed: individual plants short-lived perennials (no mulch or light mulch allows better reseeding) |
| <i>Asclepias incarnata</i> <i>A. purpurascens</i> <i>A. tuberosa</i> Note: <i>A. syriaca</i> (Common Milkweed) best for large gardens or naturalistic use due to vigorous spreading nature | Swamp Milkweed Purple Milkweed Butterfly Weed | Full sun in consistently moist or wet sites; tends to be short lived if conditions not perfect Full sun; prefers moist sites; add lime to the soil when planting Full sun in dry or moist sites; some reseeding; tough plant |
| <i>Aster</i> – see under <i>Doellingeria</i> & <i>Symphyotrichum</i> below (botanists have now divided American asters into different genera). Also see <i>Ionactis</i> under Plants for Special Habitats section. | | |

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| <p><i>Coreopsis gladiata</i> (<i>C. helianthoides</i>) - native to NC & southeastern states</p> <p><i>C. major</i></p> <p><i>C. tripteris</i> ('Summer Sunshine' has golden foliage & is shorter than the species)</p> <p><i>C. verticillata</i> ('Grandiflora' is the most durable cultivar, then 'Zagreb')</p> | <p>Swamp Coreopsis, Coastal Plain Coreopsis</p> <p>Woodland Coreopsis</p> <p>Tall Coreopsis</p> <p>Threadleaf Coreopsis</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; tolerant of periodically wet sites (found in swamp forests in nature); lovely fall bloom</p> <p>Full sun to light shade; tolerates dry sites</p> <p>Full sun; some reseeding; likes moist sites & can tolerate periodically wet sites</p> <p>Full sun; tolerates dry sites</p> |
| <p><i>Doellingeria umbellata</i> (<i>Aster umbellatus</i>)</p> | <p>Tall Flat-Topped White Aster</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade in consistently moist to wet sites. Special habitat uses.</p> |
| <p><i>Echinacea purpurea</i> (naturalized in Virginia – native to NC & states west of Virginia)</p> <p>White-flowered cultivars do not persist as long in the landscape – when reseed many have pink flowers</p> | <p>Eastern Purple Coneflower</p> | <p>Full sun; tolerates dry sites; some reseeding; long bloom period</p> <p>Note: <i>E. laevigata</i> is the true VA native but U.S. endangered species & hard to grow (in some mountain & Piedmont counties).</p> <p>Colorful hybrids with other species (many cultivars available) but tend to be short-lived (most often live 1 -3 years).</p> |
| <p><i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i></p> | <p>Rattlesnake Master</p> | <p>Full sun; some reseeding if happy</p> |
| <p><i>Euphorbia corollata</i></p> | <p>Flowering Spurge</p> | <p>Full sun; tolerates dry sites; some reseeding</p> |
| <p><i>Eutrochium</i> (former name <i>Eupatorium</i> - still commonly used in nursery trade & still valid for some species)</p> <p><i>Eutrochium fistulosum</i> (<i>Eupatorium fistulosum</i>)</p> <p><i>Eutrochium</i> 'Big Umbrella' (<i>Eupatorium</i>)</p> <p><i>Eutrochium maculatum</i> 'Gateway' (<i>Eupatorium</i>)</p> <p>Note: <i>Eutrochium dubium</i> 'Little Joe' (<i>Eupatorium</i>) has smaller flowers & is shorter than other Joe Pye Weed.</p> <p><i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i> (boneset) is a white-flowered, shorter plant that likes wetter areas - has been short-lived in gardens (allow it to reseed)</p> | <p>Joe Pye Weed</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; some reseeding; tolerate periodically wet sites. <i>E. fistulosum</i> is native to Green Spring.</p> <p>Most Joe Pye Weeds are tall perennials.</p> |
| <p><i>Filipendula rubra</i> ('Venusta')</p> | <p>Queen of the Prairie</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; needs consistently moist sites</p> |
| <p><i>Gentiana saponaria</i>- connoisseur plant</p> | <p>Soapwort Gentian</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade in consistently moist sites (other species have not been as long lived in garden conditions). Do not crowd.</p> |

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| <i>Helenium autumnale</i> <i>H. flexuosum</i> | Helen's Flower | Full sun in consistently moist sites (<i>H. autumnale</i> is found in wetter sites in nature). |
| <i>Helianthus angustifolius</i> (‘First Light’ is shorter than the species) | Swamp Sunflower | Full sun to light shade; moist or wet sites; some reseeding |
| <i>H. divaricatus</i> | Spreading Sunflower | Full sun to light shade; tolerant of dry sites; vigorous spreading habit in a good site (some shade slows it down) |
| <i>H. hirsutus</i> | Hairy Sunflower | Full sun to light shade; tolerant of dry sites |
| Note: <i>H. tuberosus</i> (Jerusalem Artichoke) best for naturalistic use in bottomland areas – vigorous spreader. Tubers edible. | | |
| <i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i> | False Sunflower | Full sun; tolerates dry sites; similar to a sunflower but blooms sooner; some reseeding |
| <i>Hibiscus laevis</i> | Halberdleaf Hibiscus, Rose Mallow | Full sun; wet or moist sites |
| <i>H. moscheutos</i> (the pink-flowered form once called <i>H. moscheutos</i> subsp. <i>palustris</i> - now <i>H. moscheutos</i>) | Hardy Hibiscus, Rosemallow | Note: <i>H. coccineus</i> (Scarlet Hibiscus) is naturalized in Virginia - native from FL to MS. This species & hybrids of this species, <i>H. moscheutos</i> , & others are beautiful in garden settings. |
| <i>Hylotelephium telephioides</i> (<i>Sedum telephioides</i>) | Alleghany Sedum | Full sun to part shade (in nature in open or shaded rock outcrops); needs excellent drainage & tolerates dry sites - performs well in rock walls |
| <i>Iris virginica</i> | Virginia Iris, Southern Blue Flag | Full sun to light shade in moist or wet sites |
| <i>I. versicolor</i> - similar to above but a more northern species | Harlequin Blue Flag | |
| Note: ‘Gerald Darby’ is a hybrid between the above 2 species for garden use – purplish new foliage in spring | | |
| <i>I. prismatica</i> (finer textured species) | Slender Blue Iris | |
| <i>Liatris spicata</i> | Dense Blazing Star, Liatris | Full sun; tolerate dry sites |
| Note: Other native species need to be more carefully sited & can be shorter lived – Green Spring also has <i>L. aspera</i> , <i>L. microcephala</i> , & <i>L. squarrosa</i> in dry, sloping, sunny sites. | | |
| <i>Kosteletzkya virginica</i> | Virginia Saltmarsh Mallow, Seashore Mallow | Full sun; constantly moist to wet sites; do not crowd; lovely with native <i>Hibiscus</i> ; individual plants often short-lived so allow reseeding |

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| <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i> Note: <i>L. siphilitica</i> (Great Blue Lobelia) is more particular about where it will grow well – tends to persist here & there | Cardinal Flower | Full sun to light shade best; moist or wet sites; can be a short-lived perennial but reseeds readily in sites with good cultural conditions - no mulch or light mulch allows better reseeding. Basal foliage can rot when covered up by tree leaves in winter – remove leaf litter. |
| <i>Monarda didyma</i> & powdery mildew resistant cultivars ('Gardenview Scarlet' & 'Jacob Cline') <i>M. fistulosa</i> & powdery mildew resistant cultivars ('Claire Grace' & 'Violet Queen') | Bee Balm Wild Bergamot, Bee Balm | Full sun to light shade; light reseeding <i>M. fistulosa</i> tolerates drier sites & needs more sun. Spread the most in moist sites. These species & others used to create hybrids & cultivars – many cultivars available. |
| <i>Napaea dioica</i> | Glade Mallow | Full sun; likes moist soil; reseeds |
| <i>Oenothera fruticosa</i> , <i>O. pilosella</i> , hybrids, & cultivars | Sundrops | Full sun to light shade; tolerates dry sites; some reseeding |
| <i>Parthenium integrifolium</i> | American Feverfew, Wild Quinine | Full sun; tolerant of dry sites |
| <i>Packera aurea</i> (<i>Senecio aureus</i>) | Golden Ragwort | Full sun (moist site) to part shade; moist or periodically wet sites preferred; reseeds readily in moist locations - somewhat invasive in gardens |
| <i>Penstemon digitalis</i> <i>P. hirsutus</i> Note: <i>P. smallii</i> (Small's Penstemon) - native to NC & other states in the southeastern U.S. Can tolerant more shade than other species (full sun in moist sites to part shade) | White Penstemon, Beardtongue Hairy Penstemon, Northeastern Penstemon | Full sun; most species like excellent drainage & are drought tolerant, but <i>P. digitalis</i> tolerates more moisture in the soil. |
| <i>Phlox glaberrima</i> <i>Phlox subulata</i> & cultivars Note: <i>Phlox nivalis</i> for rock gardens – likes dry, well-drained soils (rocky or sandy soils in nature). <i>P. paniculata</i> (garden phlox) can be grown in full sun but has more problems with true bugs feeding on the foliage in sunnier, drier sites – moist sites in light shade best (see Green Spring plant information sheet <i>Native Herbaceous Perennials and Ferns for Shade Gardens in the Washington, D.C. Area</i> for details) | Smooth Phlox Creeping Phlox Trailing Phlox | Full sun to light shade Full sun; tolerates dry sites – needs good drainage Note: <i>P. pilosa</i> & especially 'Eco Happy Traveler' are rapid spreaders (even in dry areas) & are best for groundcover use in lower maintenance areas such as with shrubs – can crowd out more choice plants. A vigorous cultivar that likes more moisture is <i>Phlox</i> 'Minnie Pearl' – a white-flowered spreader that was found in the wild in Mississippi (<i>P. maculata</i> possibly hybridized with <i>P. glaberrima</i>). Tolerant of wetter soils from its <i>P. maculata</i> parent. |
| <i>Physostegia virginiana</i> (<i>'Vivid'</i> & others) | Obedient Plant | Full sun to light shade; likes moist sites & tolerates periodically wet sites |

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| <p><i>Pycnanthemum muticum</i></p> <p><i>P. verticillatum</i> – a Virginia native but the showiest form is <i>P. verticillatum</i> var. <i>pilosum</i> (native to WV, TN, KY, & other states) – reseeds readily</p> <p>Note: <i>P. montanum</i> (Thinleaf Mountain Mint) is a nice species but hard to find in the nursery trade (plants at Green Spring appear to be hybrids).</p> <p><i>P. tenuifolium</i> (Narrowleaf Mountain Mint) is less vigorous than the above species & can get crowded out by them – give it adequate space.</p> | <p>Clustered Mountain Mint</p> <p>Whorled Mountain Mint</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; tolerate dry sites; some reseeding</p> <p>Note: <i>P. muticum</i> is a vigorous spreader in moist sites (spreads by runners) – drier sites & some shade slow it down</p> <p>Some species have not been as long lived in gardens. The clumper <i>P. incanum</i> (Hoary Mountain Mint) has been shorter lived.</p> |
| <p><i>Ruellia caroliniensis</i></p> <p><i>R. humilis</i></p> | <p>Ruellia (commonly called Wild Petunia but in different plant families)</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; tolerant of dry sites. Naturalistic use best – heavy reseeding when adapted to a site (slower growth in shady areas).</p> |
| <p><i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i> (‘Goldsturm’ is commonly sold; several varieties in nature – not addressed in the <i>Flora of Virginia</i>)</p> <p><i>R. laciniata</i></p> <p>Note: <i>R. hirta</i> (Black Eyed Susan) & <i>R. triloba</i> (Three-Lobed Coneflower) are biennials or short-lived perennials.</p> <p><i>R. subtomentosa</i> (Sweet Coneflower; native to TN, KY, & other states in the central U.S.) – more tolerant of dry sites than <i>R. fulgida</i> & taller. ‘Henry Eilers’ has narrow petals – sometimes get the parent type when reseeds.</p> | <p>Orange Coneflower</p> <p>Cutleaf Coneflower, Green-Headed Coneflower</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; spreading habit & reseeding can make it too vigorous in some sites; looks best in moist sites</p> <p>Full sun to light shade; likes moist sites; some reseeding</p> |
| <p><i>Salvia azurea</i> var. <i>grandiflora</i> (native to TN, KY, & other states in central U.S.)</p> | <p>Azure Salvia</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; tolerates dry sites; light reseeding</p> |
| <p><i>Sedum glaucophyllum</i></p> <p>(see <i>Hylotelephium telephioides</i> above – once classified as <i>Sedum</i>)</p> | <p>Cliff Stonecrop</p> | <p>Full sun with excellent drainage – performs well in rock walls; tolerates dry sites</p> |
| <p><i>Scutellaria incana</i></p> | <p>Showy Skullcap</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; some reseeding</p> |

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| <p><i>Silphium asteriscus</i> (<i>S. dentatum</i>)</p> <p><i>S. perfoliatum</i></p> <p><i>S. terebinthinaceum</i></p> <p><i>S. trifoliatum</i></p> <p>Note: <i>S. laciniatum</i> (compassplant) is naturalized in Virginia & native to states further west – good vertical accent</p> | <p>Southern Rosinweed</p> <p>Cup Plant</p> <p>Prairie Dock</p> <p>Whorled Rosinweed</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade (<i>S. asteriscus</i> is the most shade tolerant); tolerate dry sites; some reseeding (<i>S. perfoliatum</i> reseeds the most – reseeds readily)</p> <p>Hybrids also appear when grown near each other in gardens (appear to have hybrids of <i>S. laciniatum</i> & <i>S. terebinthinaceum</i>)</p> |
| <p><i>Solidago rugosa</i> ('Fireworks')</p> <p><i>S. sphacelata</i> 'Golden Fleece' (have not tried to grow the species)</p> <p>Note: Species for naturalistic use – Many species are suitable, & clumping types are best for gardens such as <i>S. ulmifolia</i> (Elmleaf Goldenrod)</p> <p><i>S. shortii</i> 'Solar Cascade' – good for dry, sloping sites (species itself is federally endangered & native to Kentucky & Indiana)</p> | <p>Rough-Stemmed Goldenrod</p> <p>Golden Fleece Goldenrod</p> | <p>Full sun; tolerate dry sites; <i>S. rugosa</i> reseeds readily. 'Golden Fleece' also tolerates some shade.</p> |
| <p><i>Stokesia laevis</i> (native to SC & other southeastern states) ('Honeysong Purple', 'Klaus Jelitto', 'Peachie's Pick', & 'Purple Parasol')</p> | <p>Stoke's Aster</p> | <p>Full sun to light shade; likes moist sites</p> |
| <p><i>Symphotrichum</i> (<i>Aster</i>):</p> <p><i>Symphotrichum novae-angliae</i> (<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>) ('Honeysong Pink' is a taller cultivar with a flower color different than the species type; 'Purple Dome' is a short cultivar – seedling usually taller so remove)</p> <p><i>S. oblongifolium</i> (<i>Aster oblongifolius</i>) ('Raydon's Favorite' – broad-spreading plant that is superior to 'October Skies')</p> <p>Note: <i>Symphotrichum laeve</i> 'Bluebird' (<i>Aster laevis</i>; Smooth Blue Aster) is showier than the species. Shorter lived than the above species; the species itself is best for naturalistic use.</p> | <p>New England Aster</p> <p>Shale Barren Aster</p> | <p>Full sun best; prefers moist sites but tolerates periodically wet sites (tolerates dry sites but loses lower leaves). 'Purple Dome' looks better in dry periods than taller selections if don't water enough.</p> <p>Full sun. <i>S. oblongifolium</i> & <i>S. laeve</i> tolerate dry sites best.</p> <p>Many aster species for naturalistic use & not for gardens – some species spread too rapidly, some species are less showy in gardens, & others don't live long in cultivation. For example, <i>S. lateriflorum</i> (Calico Aster) & cultivars are beautiful but are short lived in cultivation.</p> |

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| <i>Thalictrum pubescens</i> | Tall Meadow Rue | Full sun to light shade; prefers moist sites but can take dry sites; some reseeding |
| <i>Vernonia gigantea</i> <i>V. noveboracensis</i> Note: <i>V. lettermannii</i> 'Iron Butterfly' is a short, drought tolerant cultivar (species is native to Arkansas & Oklahoma; seedling are taller than the cultivar) | Giant Ironweed New York Ironweed | Full sun to light shade; reseed readily – some gardeners may only want for naturalistic use; tolerate periodically wet sites |
| <i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i> | Culver's Root | Full sun to light shade; some reseeding |
| <i>Zizia aptera</i> (only in Virginia Native Plant Garden) <i>Z. aurea</i> (in Virginia Native Plant Garden & other gardens) | Heart-leaved Meadow Zizia, Heart-Leaved Golden Alexanders Golden Zizia, Golden Alexanders | Full sun to part shade; some reseeding; species are similar - basal leaves are simple for <i>Z. aptera</i> & compound for <i>Z. aurea</i> (cut foliage) |

Many additional species for naturalistic use or for special habitats including:

- Erigeron pulchellus* (Robin's Plantain; cultivar selected in Virginia is 'Lynnhaven Carpet')
- Ionactis linariifolius* (*Aster linariifolius*; Flaxleaf Whitetop Aster) - rock garden use
- Manfreda virginica* (Eastern False Aloe)
- Mimulus ringens* (Alleghany Monkey Flower) - moist to wet sites; pops up here and there over time
- Salvia lyrata* (Lyreleaf Salvia; purple leaved forms available)
- Sisyrinchium angustifolium* (Blue-Eyed Grass)
- Verbena hastata* (Swamp Verbena)
- Verbesina alternifolia* (Common Wingstem)

Scientific Names Of Plants - Current Names Are From:

- **Encyclopedia of Life** (<http://eol.org/>) – institutional partners include Harvard University, the Missouri Botanical Garden, the Smithsonian Institution, and The Field Museum.
- **Tropicos** from the Missouri Botanical Garden (<http://tropicos.org/>)

If a second scientific name is given, it is usually an old name that is still seen in some references or used by some nurseries. However, sometimes the above databases do not agree on names.

Other References:

Flora of Virginia. Alan Weakley, J. Christopher Ludwig, and John Townsend. 2012. BRIT Press. Botanical Research Institute of Texas.

The **Kemper Center for Home Gardening Plantfinder** at the Missouri Botanical Garden is an excellent reference for plant names, gardening information, and photographs (<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/plantfindersearch.aspx>). It features plants in their Kemper Center display gardens and is an excellent website about ornamental plants.

The Lady Bird Wildflower Center at the University of Texas in Austin has developed the **Native Plant Information Network** for native plants (www.wildflower.org/explore/).

USDA PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov/>) - this database focuses on plants native to the U.S. and to U.S. Territories and Protectorates, as well as naturalized non-natives and invasives.

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