



## WHY NATIVE PLANTS MATTER

Over the past century, urbanization has taken ecologically productive land, fragmented and transformed it with lawns and exotic ornamental plants. It's staggering to note that the continental U.S. has lost 150 million acres of habitat and farmland to the uncontrolled expansion of urban areas sadly, this trend is not slowing. There is a modern obsession with highly manicured "perfect" lawns. The result is the human dominated landscape no longer supports functioning ecosystems and the remaining natural areas are not large enough to support wildlife. This article will hopefully shed light on the importance of growing native plants while giving pause to how we move forward resulting in better decision-making.

Native plants are those that occur naturally in a region in which they evolved. They are a major food source for our birds, insects and animals. Without them, our local birds cannot survive. An example, cited by entomologist Doug Tallamy, has shown native oak trees support over 500 species of caterpillars, where a ginko tree hosts only 5 species. So, if communities started planting this way, we'd create shared woodlands where the collection of plants and animals could live in relative balance. Unfortunately, most landscaping plants available in nurseries are alien species from other countries. Many have become invasive outcompeting native species and degrading habitat in remaining natural areas.

Lastly, our landscaping choices have meaningful effects on our birds and other wildlife. The bottom line: homeowners, landscapers and policy makers can make a huge impact by simply selecting native plants when making their landscaping decisions. Lesson learned: each of us has the ability to make a difference.



### *Some of the benefits of growing native plants:*

**Low maintenance:** once established, native plants generally require little maintenance

**Beauty:** many native plants offer beautiful showy flowers (many our pollinators) also produce abundant fruits and seeds

**Healthier places for you, your family and community:** landscapes are notorious for requiring profuse amounts of artificial fertilizers and synthetic chemical pesticides; 10x more chemical pesticides per/acre than farmland

**Helping the climate:** many long living trees like oaks and maples are effective at storing greenhouse gas carbon dioxide

**Conserving water:** native plants are adapted to local environmental conditions requiring far less water

**Wildlife:** preserving birds, insects and animals

**Your Sheer Enjoyment:** this could easily become a hobby producing many an *awe* moments!

*Native Plants suggested for our zip code 28462: there are over 200*



American Basswood: aka American Linden, produces yellow flowers, attracts bees and birds  
American Beauty Berry: produces beautiful purple fruit, attracts birds  
American Elm: produces seeds and leaf buds eaten by birds; larval host for many butterfly species  
American Holly: produces bright red berries  
American Pokeweed: important to birds during fall migration  
American Sycamore: large tree great for sheltering birds  
American Witch-Hazel: produces fragrant bright yellow flowers Oct to Dec  
Anise Scented Goldenrod: heads of golden yellow flowers favorite of honey bees  
Black Cherry: produces white flowers in spring and black fruit in fall  
Black Eyed Susan: resistant to deer  
Butterfly Milkweed: attractive to butterflies (a host plant for them), hummingbirds; drought tolerant  
Common Buttonbush: produces small white flowers and fruit, attracts pollinators  
Common Persimmon: produces orange fruit, female tree needs a male tree to bear fruit, bird favorite  
Common Yarrow: attracts bees and butterflies  
CrossVine: similar to a trumpet vine, beautiful flowers for bees and hummingbirds  
Dense Gayfeather: tall spikes of rose-purple flowers, hummingbirds are attracted  
Eastern Red-Cedar: drought resistant, pale blue fruit very dense tree great for birds  
Farewell Summer Aster: produces white flowers, attracts butterflies and bees  
Gaillardia: produces red and yellow daisy like flower, attracts butterflies  
Flowering Dogwood: produces white flowers and bright red fruit in fall; butterflies and caterpillars  
Green-Head Coneflower: yellow blooms from July to October attracts butterflies and caterpillars  
Highbush Blueberry: white or pink flowers attracts birds and mammals; deer like blueberry plants  
Orange Coneflower: daisy like plant grows to 4 feet tall, attracts butterflies, bees and birds  
Viburnum: flowers are white produces fruit that is pink and blue, attracts birds and butterflies  
Purple Passion Flower: vine with beautiful flowers produces fruit; birds, bees and butterflies  
Red Chokeberry: produces white flowers and bright red fruit; attracts birds

I hope everyone has enough information to invest time and energy in finding the right native plants for your growing needs. Again, the selection in our area exceeds **200** plants. For more information, contact the following: Cape Fear Audubon Society [info@capefearaudubon.org](mailto:info@capefearaudubon.org); North Carolina Wild Native Plant Society, [ncwildflower.org/](http://ncwildflower.org/) \*Excerpts from these websites were utilized as sources for this article.

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