



## **Why are native plants important and which ones would be suitable for my yard in and around Rumson?**

By Heather Robinson

Native plants are uniquely adapted to a specific region's climate, soil type, and growing conditions. We are lucky in Rumson to have many beautiful native plants that are easy to maintain, provide year-round interest and habitat in the garden and can make our property more resilient. Here are a few of the many compelling reasons to include native plants in your landscape.

Native plants:

- **SAVE MONEY.** Native plants are stronger and more resilient than non-native plants and as a result are lower maintenance. They require less fertilizer and less pesticides to keep them looking beautiful.
- **SAVE WATER.** Native plants are naturally adapted to our local conditions and need less water to survive and thrive.
- **HELP TO MANAGE STORMWATER RUNOFF.** The root system of a native plant is three to five times deeper than non-natives. The stronger root structures will filter and absorb water as well as hold soil in place preventing erosion and improving water quality.
- **SUPPORT A STRONG ECOSYSTEM:** Non-native invasive species in your yard can squeeze out the native plants that support a healthy ecosystem. You can build a wildlife habitat by planting native plants that provide food and cover for beneficial birds and insects. Fostering these pollinators help all of the plants in your landscape.

Below are a few native plants to consider.

## **Ground Cover**

Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*): This attractive, low-growing ground cover is also deer resistant. It keeps its glossy leaves throughout the season and has an attractive dark red flower in spring. Many beneficial insects pollinate this plant, and its roots have traditionally been used as a substitute for ginger.

Bunchberry Dogwood (*Cornus canadensis*): Good for shaded areas, this plant has tiny greenish flowers in late spring through summer which are replaced by a cluster of bright red berries in fall. Bunchberry attracts butterflies and is deer resistant.

## **Flowering Perennials:**

Orange Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*): The caterpillars of Monarch butterflies rely on milkweed as their only source of food and the flowers are essential to native bees. These are perennial plants (meaning they will come back year after year) and can be purchased as plants or grown from seed. Blooms May-September.

Scarlet Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*) or Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*): Ruby-throated hummingbirds love both of these elegant bright red flowers! Bee balm and cardinal flower are both hardy plants with showy perennial flower that will bloom May-October and can be purchased as a plant or grown from seed.

Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*): These beautiful flowers attract pollinators all summer long, and in the fall, you may see goldfinches feasting on the seeds. Coneflowers are a perennial plant that will bloom from April to September, and can be purchased as a plant or grown from seed.

## **Shrubs:**

New Jersey Tea/Redroot (*Ceanothus americanus*): Tiny bright white flowers in 2" clusters appear in spring, and this low shrub reaches about 3' tall. It attracts a variety of birds and butterflies and was used to make a tea popular in the Revolutionary War period.

American Witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*): This unique woody shrub shows off fragrant cream to yellow blooms in later fall/early winter. The late summer seeds are a food source for many birds and small animals and the oil has medicinal qualities. Reaching up to 30' high and 25' wide, this shrub can be found in many local nurseries.

## **Trees:**

American Holly (*Ilex opaca*): Some of the oldest holly trees in the country can be found on Sandy Hook, so this species does especially well in our area. Many birds and small mammals eat the berries, while the tree provides shelter to birds as well. Holly shrubs and trees can be purchased at many local nurseries.

Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*): The Red Oak is the state tree of NJ, and oak trees in general are considered a keystone species (a species on which other species in an ecosystem

largely depend, such that if it were removed the ecosystem would change drastically). Over 500 insects, 80 species of reptiles and amphibians, 100 birds and over 60 species of mammals rely on oak trees for habitat and food! Oak trees can be purchased at many local nurseries.

There are many ways to include these and other native plants into your property. They can be incorporated into existing garden beds or used to convert turf to a pollinator garden. If you are out of space some plants can even be grown in containers on a patio or porch. You have the power as an individual gardener to help build our local ecosystems!

Below are additional resources to help you find the right native plants for your space:  
Jersey-Friendly Yards: <https://www.jerseyyards.org>

Rutgers NJ Agriculture Experiment Station Home & Garden: <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/home-lawn-garden/>

Native Plant Society of NJ: <http://www.npsnj.org/index.html>

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About the Author: Heather Robinson is the newest member of the Rumson Environmental Commission. She received her B.A. in Environmental Studies from Binghamton University and then took a decade-plus detour into marketing for companies such as Sesame Workshop and Hearst. After living in NYC and Sea Bright, she moved to Rumson in 2013 and enjoys the unique proximity to the water and the small-town spirit. She is a member of the Rumson Garden Club, which promotes knowledge and love of gardening and nature within the community, and is a volunteer for the Rumson schools, American Littoral Society and Impact 100 Jersey Coast. Heather also works for NJ Sea Grant Consortium as a marine science field guide educating students at Sandy Hook. She hopes to foster accessible and exciting programs within Rumson that bring all age groups together to appreciate and protect our natural world.