

# Points to Live by When Shopping and Gardening with Native Plants

Putting a native plant in the right place is a key component to sustainable landscaping. In doing so, you reduce the need for water, fertilizers and pesticides, reduce water pollution, save time and money, while providing healthy habitat for wildlife.



Whether you are gardening in a small backyard garden or restoring habitat, native plants support life and the practice of soil and water conservation. Even a few natives added to a garden can attract more birds, pollinators, beneficial insects and wildlife.

## What is a native plant?

The term “*native plant*” refers to plants that existed in North America before European settlement (prior to 1513) and are indigenous in natural associations to a particular region, ecosystem and habitat. They include woody plants (i.e., trees, shrubs, and vines) and non-woody herbaceous plants (i.e., flowering perennials, ferns, mosses, grasses, herbaceous vines).

## Why Grow Native Plants?

Native plants are the most sustainable choice for home, business, or school gardens. Beautiful, interesting, and varied, they evoke a sense of place and are essential for creating garden habitat for wildlife. The UGA EcoScapes Program invites everyone to work together to protect the biodiversity of our natural areas. Plant conservation

is key and it begins right in the home, business, and school landscape with choosing locally adapted native plant species.

In addition, using native plants is the ultimate environmentally-friendly garden practice. Native plants use fewer resources, such as water, because they are adapted to tolerate normal regional conditions such as local soils, precipitation ranges and temperatures. In addition, when properly sited, planted, and established, they don't require as much intervention with pesticides and fertilizers as ornamentals and exotics. By using native plants, we can avoid invasive plant species like Japanese honeysuckle and Chinese wisteria that harm natural areas. In addition, native plants are essential for supporting local wildlife such as pollinators, beneficial insects, and songbirds.



UGA Marine  
Extension and  
Georgia Sea Grant  
EcoScapes  
Program

EcoScapes  
Website:  
Google  
“UGA EcoScapes”



Native plants are extremely diverse and provide an array of beautiful choices for the gardener and landscaper. The oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*, left) provides for large, showy inflorescences, outstanding summer foliage, fall color, and attractive winter form. The low maintenance coastal salt- and drought tolerant Indian blanket (*Gaillardia pulchella*, right) blooms profusely and thrives in dry, full sun conditions with good drainage.



## Points to Live By When Shopping and Gardening with Native Plants:

- **Putting a plant in the right place is the key to ensuring its survival and remaining healthy in your landscape.** Use the UGA EcoScapes native plant search engine to determine what native plants are best for your site: [www.bugwood.org/ecoscapes/](http://www.bugwood.org/ecoscapes/). Although the plants you are considering may be native to a specific region of Georgia, individual plants may not grow everywhere in the region. In addition, the characteristics of any site will typically vary from place to place and some plants may do better than others at various places within a site. When selecting plants for your landscape, remember that many factors determine the suitability of a plant for a particular location. Consider light requirements, local climate, soil type, moisture, adaptability, hardiness, heat tolerance, and other factors. Please check to see what USDA plant hardiness zone and ecoregion your location falls within and choose plants accordingly. Choose native plants that match and thrive under the conditions in your landscape and you will have an environmentally-friendly
- **Be sure to purchase nursery propagated and grown plants from reputable nurseries and growers and where, possible, buy native plants based on ecotypes.** Whenever possible, buy native seed or native plants from a reputable nursery that sells local ecotypes (plants propagated from seed or stock originally collected in the area you plan to plant rather than in another biogeographic region). Often plants sold as native are not from local sources, and thus may not give you the full benefits of easy growing and wildlife and pollinator forage. Buy only if certified by the vendors as “Nursery Propagated.” Question ambiguous phrases such as “Nursery Grown” because they may be wild-collected plants. Become aware of the methods used for propagation by vendors. UGA EcoScapes encourages propagation from seed rather than vegetative reproduction, in order to maintain species vigor and genetic diversity. Many vendors now propagate from local seed sources and we encourage you to support such efforts.





Scarlet rosemallow (*Hibiscus coccineus*) is known for its showy flowers, prolific flower production, extended flowering period, and foliage.

- **Never collect plants from the wild or purchase wild collected plants.** Wild-collection threatens the existence of native species and ecosystems, and if collected from far away, will result in plants which have a reduced likelihood of surviving in your garden. Transplant native flora from wild settings only when the plants of a given area are officially slated for destruction, e.g. road construction, subdivisions, pipelines, golf courses, etc. Obtain permission from the landowner before removing wild flora.
- **Use locally adopted native plants.** Research suggests locally adapted native plants are four times more attractive to native bees, butterflies, and wildlife than ornamentals and exotics. Wherever possible, consider how to include native plants, including shrubs and trees that produce abundant flowers, seeds, and fruits throughout the growing season. Local native plants are usually well adapted to your growing conditions, can thrive with minimum attention, and are good sources of nectar and pollen for pollinators and food for wildlife. Naturalized or exotic species can escape to wild habitats, suffocating and inhibiting the growth and spread of native flora and fauna. Named clones often do not reflect the range of traits of bioregionally-native species, including wildlife value, and if widely planted, can change natural populations.
- **Do not use invasive plants.** Avoid plant species known to be highly invasive. These plants do not provide the quality nectar and food pollinators and wildlife depend on, will likely spread and dominate other species, reduce the diversity and value of the habitat, and increase maintenance demands.
- **Avoid hybrids.** Avoid planting hybrid flower varieties or those that have been bred for showy or “double” blossoms, as these often lack the pollen and nectar rewards of the parent species and thus are not suitable for pollinators. In addition, horticultural varieties and hybrids are not necessarily suited to local conditions.
- **Recognize and provide adequate establishment timeline for your native plants.** Although locally appropriate native plants provide numerous benefits (e.g., reduced water needs, reduced fertilizer and pesticide use, etc.), new plantings will require regular irrigation for six weeks to six months or more before they become established. Trees larger than two inches caliper width will take longer to establish. Although native plants have evolved to local conditions, plants of any species must be allowed time to become fully established in a landscape before all of its native plant features will be evident. All plants need water while establishing their root system and during periods of extended drought. Root establishment can take from months to one to several years, depending on the original size of the plant. Larger plants will take longer to establish.

For more information regarding Georgia's native plants; wildlife, pollinator and other beneficial habitats guidance; or sustainable landscaping

practices, go to the UGA EcoScapes website (Google "UGA EcoScapes").



The small to medium sized, slow-growing and graceful deciduous fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) provides a showy spring flowering period. Although often found in wet areas in nature, it is adaptable to a wide range of soil moisture conditions, including quite dry sites and prefers full sun for best flowering. Source: UGA Marine Extension



Marine Extension and  
Georgia Sea Grant  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

