

## Native Plants - A Win/Win for Longswamp

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If you'll be planting a new garden this year, or perhaps adding to an existing flower bed, you'll do yourself and others a favor by planting native species. If you're nostalgic for the scenery and flavors of yesteryear, and enjoy the bonus of helping the birds, bees and beneficial insects in your yard, a native fruit bearing or ornamental bush/tree is the way to go. With warmer weather and spring plant sales just around the corner, Longswamp Township's Environmental Advisory Council wants to underscore the benefits served when planting species considered native to the area.

Native plants are those found in the United States before European settlement, and they play an important role in nature's delicate balance. They are particular to a given region because they have adapted and evolved over hundreds or thousands of years in that region's climate and conditions. From the soil, rainfall, sunlight and pollinator populations right here in our backyard, our native plants have found everything they've needed to survive. These plants, trees and bushes are part of our natural heritage, and since more than 2,000 species are considered native to Pennsylvania, there are plenty to choose from when considering your next project.

Without getting too far into the weeds (pardon the pun) on the subject, non-native species are those introduced from other regions, climates and countries over recent and not so recent times. These species may or may not thrive or even survive in our area, and they can be temptingly beautiful. The problem is that they are often invasive and can cause environmental and economic harm. Since invasive plants have come to the area relatively recently, they've not made their way into our ecological "food chain". Thus, they often outcompete the native species and takeover an area, choking out the native species. If left unchecked, non-native invasives could make native species a thing of the past.

Thankfully, there are huge benefits in terms of time and money to make the planting of native species a "no brainer". For starters, because they've evolved here, native plants can withstand drought, cold winters and other extreme conditions. This reduces the chance that you'll need to replace those perennials next year. And because they've adapted to our area's soil and rainfall amounts, those fruit trees will require less supplemental watering and fertilization, once established. And while we enjoy those time and money savings, our native birds, pollinators and wildlife are beneficiaries too. When we attract them to our properties with the food and habitats they've always known, birds, for example, can help us manage certain pests (mosquitoes, stink bugs, etc.), thereby limiting our use of pesticides and other costly controls. You see, it's all part of a continuing and mutually beneficial cycle.

So as you're making your plans and dreaming about getting dirty in the garden, do some online research (links below) and stop in to your trusted nursery to ask about the native plant species available. Also look for labels indicating that the plant, bush or tree is native to southeastern Pennsylvania or the northeast U.S. (keep it as local as you can). Then get out there and get planting, knowing that your efforts will provide great benefit to you, your Longswamp neighbors and future generations in every way.

(For a list of Pennsylvania's native and non-native, invasive plant species, visit [www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/Wildplants](http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/Wildplants). Also, the public is enthusiastically invited to join Longswamp Township's Environmental Advisory Council every 3rd Monday of the month, 7 p.m., at the Township building).