

Why Are Native Plant Species Important?



A good definition of “native” is provided by Ricke Darke and Douglas Tallamy in *The Living Landscape: Design for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden*: “A “native” plant or animal is one that has evolved in a given place over a period of time sufficient to develop complex and essential relationships with the physical environment and other organisms in a given ecological community.”¹ Native species are the foundation of our native ecosystems and essential for human survival.

Our native plants here in Lower Frederick Township include perennial and annual wildflowers; grasses, sedges and rushes; ferns and clubmosses; and the woody trees, shrubs and vines that covered “Penn’s Woods” when the first settlers arrived. (Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources)

At the Village Center Park, we are planting the pollinator and two perennial flower beds with native perennials as an example of how to best support our local ecosystem. There are compelling reasons for all of us to plant native plants in our gardens:

1. **Protect our wildlife habitat** – This is the most important reason. Our local wildlife, especially our pollinators, which include bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, birds and bats, have evolved here together with the native plants and depend on one another for survival. Many of our pollinators can only feed on plants they co-evolved with. We especially need our pollinator insects to pollinate our crops for food. If our gardens contain no native species, our pretty flower beds become ecological deserts for the pollinating insects. Many of our native plants rely on the habits of native animals for pollination and seed dispersal.

¹ The reality is that our native plant communities change over time due to climate change, predation, succession and massive disturbance events.

2. ***Native plants are generally easier to grow and cheaper to maintain*** – Native plants are well adapted to our local climate and soils. Many native plants prefer less fertile soil and require no fertilizer. Most natives generally require little or no pruning or deadheading once they are established. Always make sure to “plant the right plant in the right place” by considering the conditions the plant prefers so that it will thrive.
3. ***Preserve Pennsylvania’s biodiversity*** – In Pennsylvania there are an estimated 3,180 species of flowering plants². Recent research indicates that more than a third, or roughly 1,230 species, are now nonnative exotic plants that have been naturalized or spontaneously occur (invasive) in the state. Native habitats are being increasingly replaced by species that do not support our ecosystem.
4. ***Native plants are not invasive*** – Some native plants are aggressive growers, but they are not “invasive.” Our biological heritage is threatened by nonnative or exotic plants that have escaped into our woodlands, roadsides and fields. Invasive species many times do not have predators or parasites in our area to keep them in check and they easily spread and often outcompete the native species.
5. ***Maintain a “Sense of Place”***- Our native plants define our local community and our biological heritage. Natives represent the authentic roots of our unique local natural landscape.



² Pennsylvania State College of Agricultural Sciences Extension



Partial list of the native plants you will see in the Village Center Park flower beds:

- Black-Eyed Susan
- New England Aster
- Coneflower
- Blue False Indigo
- Winterberry Holly
- Red Osier Dogwood
- Creeping Phlox
- Beebalm, Wild Bergamot

More on invasive species in Pa:

<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Conservation/WildPlants/InvasivePlants/InvasivePlantFactSheets/Pages/default.aspx>

List of eastern Pennsylvania native plants:

http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/DCNR_20031352.pdf