



Dave Gilchrist

Male ruby-throated hummingbird



Donna Tolbert-Anderson

Prothonotary warbler

grow NATIVE!

Planting for success

By Kerry Wixted



Kerry Wixted

Monarch on goldenrod



Kerry Wixted

Swallowtail pollinating cardinal flower

Spring planting season is finally here! Choosing native plants saves time and money, and also helps attract more wildlife.

Native plants have evolved over time to live in their natural areas. Maryland's native plants have adapted to our region's climate and soils, require little or no irrigation, and very rarely need fertilizer or pesticides. In addition, native plants are at the base of our food webs and support insect diversity, which in turn supports birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and other invertebrates.

Plant for the food web

Dr. Doug Tallamy from the University of Delaware has found that it takes a whopping 4,800 caterpillars to feed a nest of Carolina Chickadees. That's a lot of caterpillars!

Surprisingly, his research also shows that the best plants for sustaining caterpillars, butterflies and moths are not, as one might think, the non-native butterfly bush. Instead, trees like oaks (*Quercus* spp.) and black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) are better suited to support more pollinators. A single oak tree can support more than 500 species of butterflies and moths!

Getting started

To select the right plants for your landscape, you should scope out your planting area. Choose plants that are adapted for the sun exposure (full, partial or shade), soil type (sand,

clay or loam), soil pH and soil moisture (wet, moist or dry) in your landscape. Once you've determined these factors, you won't need to add fertilizer, lime or compost.

Resources like the *Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping Chesapeake Bay Watershed* guide by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the native plant database on the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center website (wildflower.org) can offer more guidance. In addition, the Maryland Wild Acres website has information on native plants and the wildlife they support.

While native plants are becoming more popular, they can be difficult to find if you don't know where to look. Both the Maryland Native Plant Society (mdflora.org) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Chesapeake Bay Field Office maintain online lists of local nurseries. For the greatest conservation value, plant "true" native species over *cultivars* — plant varieties that are produced by selective breeding. In addition, if you are planting for pollinators, it is important to select plants that are not treated with systemic pesticides.

Once everything has been installed, you can sit back and relax knowing that your yard is part of a greater ecosystem supporting a healthier, diverse world! Enjoy! ■

dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife

Kerry Wixted is a biologist with DNR's Wildlife & Heritage Service.

TOP 10 NATIVE PLANTS FOR MARYLAND WILDLIFE

1

Beebalm

Monarda didyma
wildflower



2

Black Cherry

Prunus serotina
tree



3

Cardinal flower

Lobelia cardinalis
wildflower



4

Common Milkweed

Asclepias syriaca
wildflower



5

Goldenrods

Solidago spp.
wildflower



Northern Red Oak

Quercus rubra
tree

6



Red Chokeberry

Photinia pyrifolia
shrub

7



Silky Dogwood

Cornus amomum
shrub

8



Switchgrass

Panicum virgatum
grass

9



Winterberry Holly

Ilex verticillata
shrub

10

Photos: 1, 3, 7, 10. Kerry Wixted; 2, 6, 9. public domain; 4. Wendy Todd-Caldwell; 5. Martha Johnson