The Native Plant Society *of* New Jersey

Summer 2026



Prothonotary Warbler. Photo courtesy of Pat Sutton.

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NPSNJ President Kazys Varnelis, Editorial Advisor;
Hara Rola, Editor; Marissa Bauman, Design and Layout

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Dear Members,

Foote's Pond Wood, in Morristown, was a neglected park until John and Susan Landau went to work on it—pulling out invasive plants, putting in the native plants that belong there, teaching neighbors, and returning season after season until it became a thriving ecosystem. For this issue, NPSNJ Director of Programs Kim Correro revised her comments from the annual meeting into a tribute to John, who passed away in May.

The native plant movement has room for projects at all sorts of scales, from a balcony garden to civic parks to public and private preserved areas. We can only hope that we see many Foote's Pond Woods across our state spring up. Once again, to this end NPSNJ supported people with good projects by giving them the resources to put native plants in the ground. In 2026, NPSNJ committed $18,500 to twenty-one grant awards: $12,500 for eighteen mini-grants and $6,000 for three conservation/science grants. The mini-grants support public demonstration gardens, pocket forests, school gardens, municipal plantings, rain gardens, pollinator beds, library gardens, youth stewardship projects, and restoration work across New Jersey. Among the recipients are a public demonstration garden in Brigantine, a pocket forest in Jersey City, a native rain garden and pollinator beds at Hopatcong State Park, native gardens at Clinton Public School, and a native nature project at the Waldwick Public Library. The conservation/science grants support larger ecological and research-oriented work, including meadow restoration in Bergen and Essex counties and an American ginseng population survey and modeling project in Mercer County.

There is also so much more in this issue. Megan Stypulkoski recounts the passage of the Invasive Species Management Act, signed in January after years of advocacy by NPSNJ members, John Landau among them. In a second piece she tallies the economics of going native: her new thousand-square-foot pollinator garden cost almost nothing to install and came through this summer's triple-digit days unwatered. Kim Correro travels to Cape May for a weekend with Jack and Jesse Connor and Pat and Clay Sutton, whose gardens hold decades of New Jersey birding and native plant history.

One last thing. Membership dues alone do not cover the cost of these grants and we will need your contributions to continue awarding them. Thank you to everyone who donated, applied, reviewed proposals, and volunteered to carry these projects forward.

Kazys Varnelis, PhD



President, Native Plant Society of New Jersey
npsnj.org



New Jersey State House. Photo courtesy of Marion Touvel

The Invasive Species Management Act

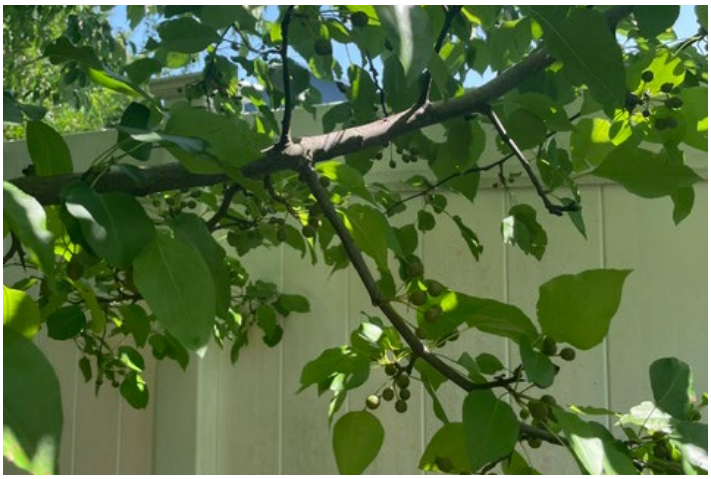
By Megan Stypulkoski, NPSNJ Advocacy Committee

Nearly two decades ago, then-Governor Jon Corzine established an Invasive Species Council with the intention of tackling the growing problem of invasive plants. These plants were taking over forests, roadside edges, old farms, and New Jersey's many parks and wildlife refuges. The economic cost of invasive plants was substantial, and policy makers at the time realized the need for statewide legislation to help. Despite this awareness, the council was disbanded only two years later when Governor Chris Christie was elected to office.

New Jersey lost its first Invasive Species Council, but efforts to ban invasive plants never wavered. Environmental organizations such as NPSNJ, passionate gardeners, and others continued to push for policy while making progress through education and outreach. Native plants increased in popularity while the economic cost of invasive plants continued to climb.

Our collective efforts have paid off. On January 20th, 2026, on his final day in office, Governor Phil Murphy signed the Invasive Species Management Act (A4137) into law. This came six years after the bill was initially introduced by Senator Linda Greenstein, and though the bill received bipartisan support, it was initially vetoed due to concerns over the Department of Agriculture.

This Act not only re-established the Invasive Species Council to routinely review the policy and provide educational resources, but it bans the unregulated sale, distribution, and propagation of 31 invasive species, which includes the infamous Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), Japanese Wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*), and the all-too popular Chinese Silver grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*). This Act took effect immediately, but the ban on propagating these invasive plants will go into effect in early 2027, and the prohibition of their sale will begin early 2028. This time allows the industry to adapt to the new regulations.



Bradford Pear. Photo courtesy of Hara L Rola.

The work does not stop here. While this bill provides a necessary stop-gap to the planting of these invasives, it does not provide resources to remove the plants already here. Joining existing volunteer groups to remove invasive plants is a great way to push progress forward, and more legislation is needed to continue more science-backed policy to protect New Jersey's incredible biodiversity. However, nature-lovers and native plant enthusiasts should rejoice for just how far we have come.

NPSNJ Statement on Native Plants and Cultivars

Native plant gardeners face a question the nursery trade rarely answers plainly: is a "nativar" a native plant? The Native Plant Society of New Jersey's Board unanimously adopted this statement this spring. We offer it as guidance for our members, our chapters, and the garden centers we work with.

The Native Plant Society of New Jersey (NPSNJ) encourages communities and individuals to use native plants (wild-type, straight species, local ecotype—a population adapted to the conditions of a particular place) to maintain our ecological heritage and provide the ecological services that our wildlife of all sorts rely upon for survival. Native plants have evolved and occur naturally in particular regions, ecosystems, and habitats.

A native plant cultivar (i.e., a cultivated variety, sometimes also called a "nativar") is a native plant selected or bred for certain features—flower color, leaf color, plant size, disease resistance. Most are then reproduced asexually, making them genetically identical clones. Altered traits—doubled flowers, changed leaf chemistry, novel colors (of leaves or flowers)—can make cultivars less useful or entirely unusable by the native insects, birds, and other fauna that depend on them. Some cultivars are sterile—offering neither pollen nor nectar—and cannot reseed, so short-lived perennials will die out and need to be replaced, and pollen-, nectar-, or seed-eating wildlife are left unsupported.

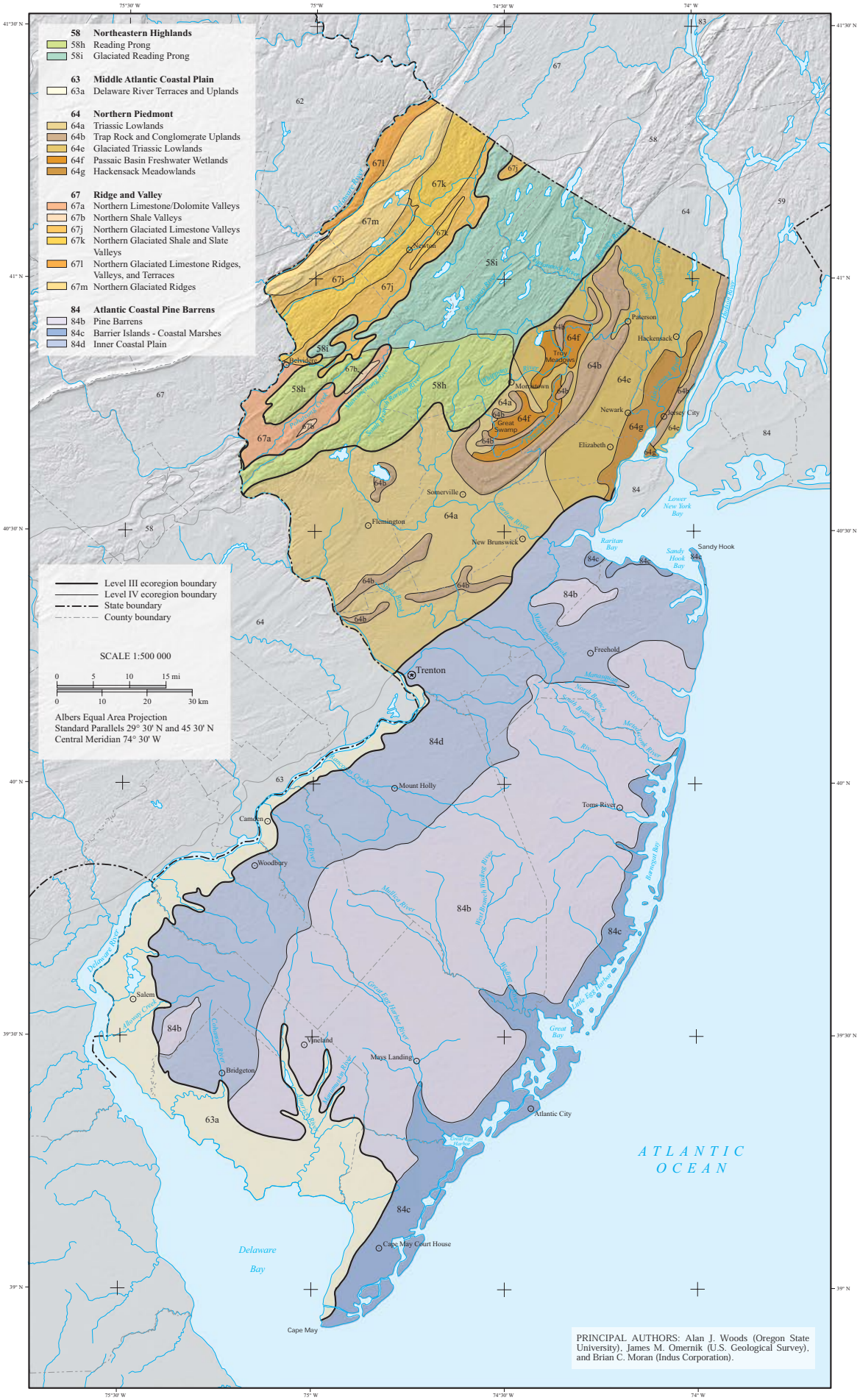
Fertile cultivars also pose their own risks: they can cross-pollinate with local wild populations, contaminating the gene pool of locally adapted ecotypes. Some cultivars are hybrids with a non-native parent species—these are not native plants at all, regardless of how they are marketed, and may prove invasive.

For maximum ecological benefit, prefer local ecotype plants grown from seed; if unavailable, choose straight species native to your state, then straight species from a nearby ecoregion (find your ecoregion: https://bplant.org/region/1374). Use cultivars only as a last resort. Do not plant cultivars in restoration projects.





DRAFT LEVEL III AND IV ECOREGIONS OF NEW JERSEY



EPA map of New Jersey's ecoregions

The Enduring Legacy of John Landau

By Kim Correro, NPSNJ Director of Programs & Co-host of The Wildstory Podcast

Last March, at the Native Plant Society of New Jersey's Annual Meeting and Conference, I had the honor of presenting the inaugural *Bob Swain Award for Native Plant Leadership* to John and Susan Landau. At the time, I knew I was honoring two extraordinary conservationists. I did not know it would be the last opportunity I would have to thank John for all he had given to our NPSNJ community. John passed away in May after a courageous battle with a long illness. Since then, I have found myself reflecting not only on what he accomplished, but on who he was.

Many people knew John as a restorationist, educator, advocate, and tireless volunteer. They knew him as the force behind Friends of Foote's Pond Wood, a champion of native plants, a leader in the fight against invasive species, and a mentor to countless volunteers.

What I will remember most is his generosity. John shared knowledge freely and enthusiastically. Whenever he learned something new, his first instinct was to pass it along. He wanted people to succeed. He wanted them to understand. He wanted them to feel empowered to make a difference. I met him several years back on a walk with Rutgers and like so many others, I would go on to benefit from his guidance, encouragement, and willingness to answer questions and share resources.

When John and Susan first turned their attention to Foote's Pond Wood, together with a dedicated community, the woodland was overrun with invasive species and difficult to navigate. You couldn't see





Restorationist John Landau. Photo courtesy of Trish Maguire.

the pond from the road. Where others might have seen an impossible task, they saw possibility. In 2021 they completed the Rutgers Environmental Steward program and Foote's Pond Wood was their capstone project. Their dedication, together with the efforts of a committed community, led to FPW receiving the NPSNJ Conservation Grant in 2024. Through years of careful planning, hard work, and community engagement, they transformed not only pockets of the forest and meadow but also inspired the people who came to care for it.

With little more than hoes, clippers, determination, and an unwavering belief that restoration was possible, John fearlessly ventured into some of the park's most daunting infestations of invasive plants.

I always loved hearing Susan tell the story of how he would armor up, grab his tools and declare, "I'm going in."



Restorationist John Landau Tools



South Woods oaks and spicebush.

Alongside Susan and volunteers ranging from grade-school kids to people in their nineties, John rolled up his sleeves and took on the work by hand, one section at a time. Years of persistence brought mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) under control, removed mountains of multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), and held back relentless porcelain berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) saving numerous trees. As the invasives receded, hidden treasures emerged including golden alexanders (*Zizia aurea*), mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), blackhaw viburnum (*Viburnum prunifolium*), spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), and native sedges.

As I prepared my remarks for the Bob Swain Award presentation, I asked John to describe their mission in a few words. With characteristic humility, he called himself and Susan "restoration evangelists." Susan offered another description: "restorationists who try to empower people to become ecological foresters."

Both descriptions fit perfectly because John understood that restoration was never just about plants. It was about people. Every trail cleared, every invasive removed, every shrub planted became an opportunity to teach, connect, and inspire.

That gift for bringing people together defined everything John touched. Whether helping create the Northern New Jersey edition of the Going Native guide, launching the Great Swamp Native Plant Sale, advancing invasive species legislation, serving as a Xerces ambassador or mentoring volunteers at Foote's Pond Wood, his work always extended beyond the project itself. He was building capacity. He was creating leaders. He was showing others what was possible when people work together on behalf of the land.

The numbers tell part of the story: thousands of volunteer hours, tens of thousands of native plants distributed, educational materials shared across the state, and conservation initiatives that will continue for years to come. But the true measure of John's legacy cannot be counted. It lives in the people he inspired to plant their first native garden, remove their first invasive species, attend their first stewardship event, or see a forest differently than they had before.

John's absence leaves a profound void, but his presence remains everywhere. It lives in the understory shrubs growing at Foote's Pond Wood. It lives in the volunteers who will return season after season. It will live in the gardens created from a brochure he helped improve, the legislation he helped advance, and the conservation projects he encouraged. Most of all, it will live in the countless people who were fortunate enough to know him.

The forests he helped restore will continue to grow. The volunteers he mentored will continue the work. And those of us who called him a friend will continue to hear his voice urging us forward, sharing one more idea, one more article, one more reason to believe that positive change is possible. That may be John Landau's greatest legacy of all.

For information on Foote's Pond Wood or to donate, visit fofpw.org.

A Devil of a Tree

By Hara L. Rola, NPSNJ E-News Editor

The battle is on in backyards across New Jersey and beyond to protect native biodiversity by removing invasive non-native plants and replacing them with native ones. One nemesis I've been attacking is the **Tree of Heaven** (*Ailanthus altissima*), a native to China and Taiwan. I think of it as the tree from Hell. There are no angelic properties to this notorious invasive, which is difficult to eradicate. It frequently pops up again and again where I have already removed it.

So, it becomes trench warfare as I dig them up and try to get all the root matter. But they are slick and find ways to stick around with a deep tap root and creeping roots that extend 50 feet to sprout its saplings. I notice that the Tree of Heaven is a strategically mobile foe. I spot it within roadside woods, public parks, and neighbors' yards. Its ability to reproduce successfully in varied conditions makes it a formidable enemy to property owners and gardeners.

It forms dense thickets that crowd out other plants. And uses chemical warfare to retain its locale by emitting an herbicide-like toxin into the soil surrounding itself. Knocking out its competitors can increase casualties of native plants nearby. Also, the plant's body has its own arsenal to avert assaults by human hands. It contains a toxin that can cause skin rashes, so wear gloves when doing hand combat with it.

The Tree of Heaven has an ally, the **Spotted Lanternfly** (*Lycorma delicatula*), which is also from Asia. It's an invasive pest that depends on the Tree of Heaven as its main host plant, using it as a sanctuary as well as food source. The toxic sap of the tree creates a "chemical shield" within the Lanternfly nymphs and adults making them unappetizing to birds and other predators. Unfortunately, the nymphs don't do enough damage to its host to undermine its growth and reproduction. I notice that the Lanternflies, a loyal ally, cling tightly to their host tree as I cut it down but will hop off as I dispose of the limbs. So, here we have a pair of exotic invasives that are both difficult to get rid of. However, I believe if the Tree of Heaven can be eradicated through dedicated removal statewide (I'm not sure it could ever be 100%), the numbers of Spotted Lanternflies could dramatically drop to a more manageable and less destructive population.



Tree of Heaven. Photo courtesy of Hara L Rola.



Spotted Lanternfly (Lycorma delicatula)



Great Egret Chicks — Ocean City Rookery. Photo courtesy of Kim Correro.



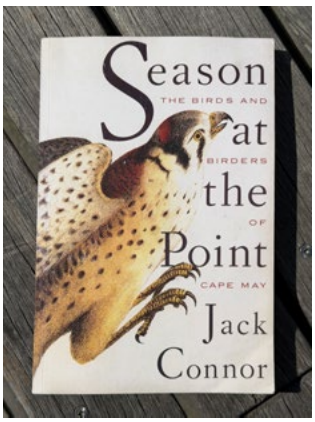
Prothonotary Warbler. Photo courtesy of Pat Sutton.

A Weekend Adventure in Cape May with Jack & Jesse Connor and Pat & Clay Sutton

By Kim Correro, NPSNJ Director of Programs & Co-host of The Wildstory Podcast

Birding, Native Plants, and A Surprise Visit from a Prothonotary Warbler!

Cape May had been calling to me for months, but life kept finding ways to intervene. Every time I thought I had a date on the calendar, something important came up. Then, on June 19th, I finally made the trip.



To prepare, I immersed myself in two books that helped me further understand why this small peninsula looms so large in the birding world. The first, *Season at the Point: The Birds and Birders of Cape May* by Jack Connor, is a captivating account of an autumn migration season in the 1970s and the naturalists who helped establish Cape May as one of the world's premier birding destinations. Through Connor's writing, I met Pat Sutton, then a young naturalist in her mid-thirties; Clay Sutton and Pete Dunne, who shaped Cape May's hawk-watching tradition; a young David Sibley on the cusp of international acclaim; and the many conservationists whose passion and vision transformed a windswept corner of New Jersey into a mecca for bird lovers. I also read *Birds and Birding at Cape May* by Pat and Clay Sutton, hoping to arrive with a deeper appreciation for the decades of work that made Cape May an internationally renowned center for bird study.

As a first stop, Jesse and Jack (also co-leaders of the Southeast Chapter of NPSNJ) invited me to meet them at the Ocean City Rookery at the Ocean City Welcome Center on Route 52. It is considered one of the best and most accessible bird nesting colonies in New Jersey because the parking area and pedestrian overlook place you almost directly above the nests. Jack and Jesse's spotting scope offered a breathtaking look at Black-crowned Night Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, and White Ibises perched in the trees with their young. The birds were so close we barely needed binoculars, and the sounds of chicks calling for food made it a magical experience. If you enjoy wildlife photography or birdwatching, the Ocean City rookery is one of the best free wildlife viewing spots on the Jersey Shore.

Afterwards, Jack and Jesse graciously invited me back to their home for lunch. Jesse had prepared a delicious mushroom quiche and salad, while Jack served a cup of coffee made from beans he had roasted himself. Jesse proposed we eat lunch outside in her native plant garden since the weather was ideal.

Calling it a garden is an understatement. Widely admired by native plant enthusiasts throughout



Jesse Connor Meadow. Photo courtesy of Jesse Connor.

A Weekend Adventure in Cape May with Jack & Jesse Connor & Pat & Clay Sutton (continued)

southern New Jersey, it is considered one of the region's finest woodland native landscapes. Jesse and Jack have lived on the property for more than thirty years, and during that time Jesse, a highly respected garden designer and educator has transformed it into a living masterpiece.

Towering native canopy trees form a cathedral-like ceiling above layers of understory trees and shrubs. Woodland wildflowers weave through drifts of native grasses and sedges, while ferns and groundcovers soften the forest floor. Every corner of the property from the mature woodland and life-filled pond to the meadow ablaze with abundant groupings of blazing stars (*Liatris*), Joe-Pye weed (*Eutrochium dubium*), milkweed (*Asclepias*), New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*), and countless other native plants reflects decades of knowledge, observation, and stewardship.

Jesse is one of Pat's wildlife gardening mentors, but over the years I've developed my own relationship with her. Visiting the home where she raised her children while Jack wrote and taught to support the family felt like the perfect place to begin this adventure. Her garden is a thriving natural ecosystem, artfully shaped by someone with a deep understanding of both botany and place. Winding paths, inviting seating areas, and abundant birdlife create a space that feels both intentional and effortless. When it came time for lunch, I chose a spot overlooking the meadow. Jesse's decades of work created a setting as memorable as the meal.

The next day, I drove out to the Sutton house with plans to help Pat in her garden. To reach the garden, we walked through the house, something I had been looking forward to ever since reading Jack's description of it in *Season at the Point*. (If you're curious about how Clay and Pat first met, you'll have to read the book.)

The house was everything I had imagined and more. It is warm, welcoming, and lived in. It's the kind of place that immediately puts you at ease. Every room is filled with books, artwork, and the accumulated treasures of a life spent pursuing beauty, curiosity, and nature. Rather than feeling curated, it feels authentic, with each object seeming to have a story behind it right down to the hand towels in the bathroom.

What struck me most were the large, screened windows in the kitchen and bedroom, which open onto views of the garden and bird feeders. The boundaries between indoors and outdoors seem to dissolve. Light pours in, birds flit past at eye level, and the garden feels like an extension of the house itself. It is the sort of place that invites you to linger over a cup of coffee, watch the birds, and lose track of time.

Instead of diving straight into work, Pat suggested we take a stroll and enjoy some of the garden's treasures. We paused to admire dragonflies, frogs, and tiny clusters of frog eggs before settling into the woodland to watch for a Ruby-Throated Hummingbird.

Along the way, Pat introduced me to the caterpillar of the Red-spotted Purple Butterfly, which cleverly mimics a swallowtail minus the tails. She explained how it lays a beautiful little egg on the very tip of a black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) leaf, where the caterpillar begins nibbling its way back, leaving the leaf's center vein behind like a tiny skeleton.

As hummingbirds zipped to and from the feeder, the woods echoed with the Prothonotary Warbler's cheerful "sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet." Pat told me that Prothonotary Warblers nested on their property a decade ago and were back this year. During nesting both the male and female make nonstop trips to the nest, their bills stuffed with caterpillars. "That," Pat laughed, "is the ultimate seal of approval." Her property is so full of caterpillars, the Prothonotary never has to travel far for dinner.

After our chat, we spent a little time in the garden, where Pat gave me a crash course on spotting Mulberry Weed (*Fatoua villosa*) versus Blue Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*). Then we escaped the heat for grilled cheese sandwiches and Campbell's tomato soup, which hit the spot. Over lunch, Clay shared the story of leaving a grueling office job and his three-piece suit behind to become a field biologist with an environmental consulting firm, working all over New Jersey and tracking endangered species as the firm's ornithologist. He traded conference rooms for hawks, snakes and salamanders and never looked back.

Pat reminisced about the early days of native gardening, when she and Jesse struggled to find plants because native nurseries were few and far between. Right on cue, the conversation was interrupted by a flash of yellow outside the window. "The Prothonotary is at the left-hand tube feeder! Do you have your binoculars?" Pat asked. I had left both my camera and binoculars outside on the porch, so Pat handed me hers. There it was: a brilliant Prothonotary Warbler, glowing bright yellow against blue-gray wings. Pat explained that they eat insects and rarely visit feeders, making the sighting especially lucky. "He's so sneaky," she said. "He comes in and sings, but you usually can't find him." Moments later, another interruption. "Tiger Swallowtail on the Bottlebrush Buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*) near the perennial garden!" Clay laughed. "As you can see, it's hard to get anything done here."

Both the Sutton and Connor homes are decorated with original David Sibley artwork from his iconic field guides, a detail I found meaningful after reading their books. Before leaving each house, I asked if I could peek into their offices. I wanted to stand in the rooms where years of reading, writing, advocacy, and dreaming had unfolded, surrounded by shelves of well-worn books and stacks of magazines that helped shape the native plant movement and important bird conservation work.

As we said our goodbyes, Pat and Clay tucked a few treasures into my hands: Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) plants and seeds from their garden and a clump of sedum, not native, but a cherished family heirloom and a great non-problematic pollinator magnet. Then Pat suggested one final stop: Reeds Beach. There, she introduced me to the story of horseshoe crabs, which crawl ashore each spring to spawn, leaving behind millions of tiny eggs that fuel the migration of shorebirds.

The lesson of the weekend was about connections between native plants and wildlife, mentors and students, years of past advocacy and those still to come. Like the seeds and stories so generously shared, the smallest gifts often have the power to grow into something far larger than we imagine.

Pat Sutton's 1st iNat sighting of Mulberry Weed in her garden
inaturalist.org/observations/316333181

Red spotted purple caterpillar
patsuttonwildlifegarden.com/red-spotted-purples-spring

Horseshoe crabs on Reeds Beach
instagram.com/reel/DZ2PIRsgf0G

Kim Correro is the Director of Programs for NPSNJ and the Co-host of The Wildstory Podcast
instagram.com/kimcorrero

What's in a Name? How to Read a Plant Label

By Bobbie Herbs, NPSNJ IGC Committee Co-Chair and Recording Secretary

It's recommended to do some homework before you start sourcing plants for your ecological garden and landscape. Putting the right plant in the right place with the right companions does take a bit of effort. Yet, it's worth it when your garden thrives with little or no inputs beyond pulling a weed here and there and watering the first year.

Once you know your light and soil conditions, check the plant tags to match what you need: full sun (6hr+), part sun/shade (up to 6hr), shade (less than 6hr). Your soil type can be analyzed by your county's Rutgers Cooperative Extension agency. To find your county's office, visit extension.rutgers.edu/county. Soil types are: acidic, neutral, or alkaline; soil textures are the result of clay, sand, or loam. Then you are ready to make a list of plants that will work together and thrive in your yard.

Also, sourcing native plants is not as simple as going to a big box retailer and picking eye-candy. With the wealth of native specialty retailers in New Jersey, you can be sure your plant choices are native species. Some local garden centers also offer native plants from reputable growers. Some have held "Pollinator Days" sponsored by NPSNJ to educate and raise awareness of their availability and benefits. Visit npsnj.org/native-plants/where-to-buy-natives to access a list of native plant nurseries and garden centers.



When you find yourself at the garden center, distractions are many. Stay focused on your prepared list, yet when the pretty plant beckons, here are some plant tag tips to ensure it is a straight species. What's most important is to determine if the plant you fell for is a native species or cultivar, or something else entirely. You might wonder what are all the names on the tag, the Latin, the English, the quotations and icons?

Let's use *Dryopteris marginalis* as an example of a straight species. Eastern Wood Fern is native to all NJ counties except Cape May according to USDA county lists. Using the Linnean Binomial System, the international standard for naming discrete plants and animals, Eastern Wood Fern's binomial includes the plant Genus (*Dryopteris*) and species (*marginalis*). This is also known as the scientific name, it is typically italicized Latin in two parts. There is no other plant on the planet with that binomial. On plant tags it is not always italicized as you see in the visual.

The common name for a specific plant is often colloquial, reflecting regional, personal and community preferences. Common names can reference two different species or one species with varying names all leading to confusion. Thus, the use of the Latin binomial is to ensure you are selecting the correct plant.

Many native species have been reproduced through tissue culture to ensure traits are identical from one plant to the other. These cultivars are sometimes called nativars, they have reduced genetic diversity due to cloning for exact replication of flower and/or foliage color, double flowers or mature size.

Cultivars are easy to spot on plant tags. Take this example of Beardtongue *(Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red'*),* shown right. The tag includes the common name, specific epithet, and the cultivar name 'Husker Red.' The name in quotations indicates this is a cultivar. Although some labels may not have the cultivar name in quotes, as you can see in the second tag, look for a second name beyond the common name.



Hybrids are plants that have been crossed. One of the more popular genera

to breed with each other are *Heuchera* and *Tiarella*. This breeding can result in plants that tolerate more shade and moisture than Heuchera, and more sun and dry soils than *Tiarella*. Examples of *Heuchera* and *Tiarella* hybrid tags are shown below.

Note the use of the primary plant Genus ONLY on the tag front. There is a disclosure on the back of the tag that it is a hybrid. The newly derived plant will have an additional name like 'Husker Red' in quotations. These new plants 'Buttered Rum' and 'Morning Star' may also be trademarked or have a patent pending notation [PP17486 Morning Star], giving growers the opportunity to license the breeding methods, increasing revenues beyond growing and selling the newly developed plants.

To ensure you have purchased the plants that will thrive in your landscape, be sure to research and select native species that match your conditions. Make certain you have straight species with robust genetic heritage for long lasting survival in the wild and in your yard.






Blazing Star with Monarch

Summer Tips & Tasks for Native Plant Gardeners

By Jesse Connor, Co-Leader of Southeast Chapter

Blazing star, *Liatris spicata*, is one of the easiest to grow species of *Liatris*, and one of our top three pollinator plants. It's a must-have for a native plant garden. I have stands of it planted in multiple spots in the sun where its rosy-purple spikes of densely-packed flowers attract butterflies (especially skippers) as well as a host of other insects. This adaptable perennial grows in clumps and is usually 3-5' tall.

TIP: Leave the flower spikes up all winter for the songbirds to feast on and for some self-seeding to occur. Pot up the grass-like seedlings in the spring, they will mature quickly and add to the success of your pollinator garden.

Jersey Shore Chapter Tour of Georgian Court University

By Karen Walzer, Co-Leader

Jersey Shore chapter members enjoyed a June tour of the native plant gardens at Georgian Court University (GCU) in Lakewood on the 13th. Dr. Michael Gross, Professor of Biology and Director of the Sister Mary Grace Burns Arboretum, guided us on the tour. Over the past 25 years, Dr. Gross has planted and maintained multiple native gardens and plant collections at GCU.

The university is located on the former estate of George Jay Gould, the son of railroad tycoon Jay Gould. Designed by architect Bruce Price and built in the 1890s, the Georgian Court estate mirrored the opulent lifestyle of the Gould family. The estate's formal English and Italian gardens, designed by Mr. Price, and a Japanese tea garden, designed by Takeo Shiota, are now part of GCU's Sister Mary Grace Burns Arboretum. The entire GCU campus, including its gardens, is designated a National Historic Landmark.

Our tour focused on GCU's native gardens. Dr. Gross pointed out that the campus is located within the northern extent of the New Jersey Pine Barrens, so we would be seeing some typical native plants of the region. The first stop was the Oak Knoll garden and low-mow area. The reduced mowing there has created a savannah-like environment under the oak trees. We saw native grasses, trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*), St. Andrew's Cross (*Hypericum hypericoides*), and other natives that have repopulated an area that used to be regularly mowed.

From there we visited three native perennial gardens planted next to campus buildings. Each garden included signage explaining that these native plantings support pollinators and other wildlife. An incredible variety of species from groundcovers to small shrubs are thriving in these foundation gardens. Several native "volunteers" have also moved in, taking advantage of the inviting native community.

The next stop was a rain garden that captures roof runoff from an adjacent campus building. Dr. Gross took over maintenance of the rain garden basin, which had been neglected for several years, and replanted it with native species. The rain garden, other native plant gardens, and low-mow areas are all part of the university's sustainability efforts.





After quick stops at two of the plant collections on campus, sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) and American holly (*Ilex opaca*), we finished at the Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) grove. The trees are growing well in a central campus area crisscrossed by multiple walking paths. The taste of the ripe fruit of these native trees is often compared to banana pudding. As we admired the immature fruit on the trees, Dr. Gross shared his tip for preserving it – he freezes the fruit whole, making it easy to peel and remove the pit when he's ready to eat it. Collecting the fallen fruit before the university's maintenance crew mows the area is one of the challenges he faces as caretaker of the native plantings on campus.

Another challenge for Dr. Gross is the large deer population. He has installed fences around most of the native gardens to protect the plants from deer browse. Entrance gates on these fences are never locked. Signs on the gates welcome visitors to enter the gardens for a closer look at the plants (and remind them to please close gates when leaving).

The Sister Mary Grace Burns Arboretum, which includes the native gardens, is open for free self-guided tours from 8:00 am to dusk daily, except during major university events. Visit the GCU website for more information and a map.

Information: georgian.edu/arboretum

Map: georgian.edu/wp-content/uploads/GCU-Arboretum-2-page-Brochure-Map-04.21.25.pdf

The Above and Bee-Yond Award 2026

Monmouth Chapter News

Each year, the Monmouth Chapter of NPSNJ hosts a "Spring Into Natives Groundhog Day Party", where we celebrate our achievements from the previous year and look forward to spring. The chapter also took the opportunity to present the first annual "Above and Bee-Yond Award."

The award recognizes a person or organization whose native plant and environmental impact extends beyond their individual sphere of influence and engages others in creating and maintaining native plant habitat in Monmouth County. They have built relationships, educated others, steered people towards a shared vision, and/or influenced organizations or governments in ways that positively affect their actions. The impact of their efforts is multiplied by the people and groups they have engaged. NPSNJ Monmouth recognizes that the people and other living things of Monmouth County benefit from the expanded adoption of native plants and habitats - a direct result of the efforts of this award winner.

The "Above and Bee-Yond Award," was presented by Chapter Leader Kim Rowe to Jon Gibbons, originator and facilitator of the "Patchwork for Wildlife" program. Jon is President of Candide's Garden & Friends, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, which runs Candide's Garden and administers the Patchwork for Wildlife initiative.

Drawing on Candide's Garden, a "Menu of Environmental Solutions," the Patchwork for Wildlife program aims to create a significant area of environmentally beneficial landscape and gardens in the community – one yard at a time. The program also provides advice to homeowners on making environmental improvements. To recognize their efforts, the program confers Certificates of Appreciation at annual Award Celebrations, and hosts Environmental Garden Tours. There are now five communities participating in the program: Belmar, Lake Como, Point Pleasant, Point Pleasant Beach, and Red Bank. Notably, under Mary Warner's leadership, with Kim and Jon's support, Red Bank's Patchwork has recognized over 30 yards in their first year!



Kim Rowe and Jon Gibbons



Mary Warner and Jon Gibbons

For more information:

Kim Rowe monmouth@npsnj.org

Jon Gibbons candidesgarden1761@gmail.com

Mary Warner ogeeoheck@gmail.com







The Cost of Going Native

By Megan Stypulkoski

Summer is still young here in northern New Jersey, but we've already seen record-breaking heat with many parts of the state soaring into the triple digits. The high heat and humidity keep many folks inside, but gardeners are a different breed. In my Community Garden, the mornings of these high-heat days were some of the most crowded I've seen. Everywhere you looked, hoses were snaked in between garden plots as we all did our best to help our crops cope with the heat wave. Some gardeners set up shade cloth to protect their prized tomatoes while others pulled the last of their spring vegetables like snap peas and lettuce.



While I doted over my cucumbers and summer squash, I was grateful I could afford to neglect my pollinator garden. One of the most admirable qualities of native plants is their low-maintenance nature. Many native plants in New Jersey are perennial – a life cycle that is well-suited to a temperate ecosystem. Their deep roots are able to effectively sequester moisture from the soil, which allows the plant to survive heat waves and (depending on the species) even drought. My new pollinator garden, only in its first year, withstood the 100+ degree days without a drop of water. The *Rudbeckia* continued to flower without a care in the world, and the *Monarda* continued to prepare for full bloom. The *Helenium* and *Bidens* kept on growing, and even the young Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*) was able to handle the heat without intervention. Many of these plants were grown by seed, and the others were generously donated by fellow gardeners. Despite over 1,000 square feet of space, this garden cost nearly nothing to install. It took a few back-breaking days to dig through the dense, rocky soil, but it'll require minimal maintenance work to keep out invasive plants once the native plants have fully established.

Native plants have hit an all-time high in their popularity as Americans shift towards a more sustainable approach to landscaping. Advocates of native plants stress their ecological importance, citing the benefit to pollinators, wildlife, and even climate control. The deep roots of native perennials not only make them resistant to drought, but they help prevent storm water runoff and erosion. Native plants support a significantly greater number of insect species than non-native plants do. It's estimated that about 25% of our native bees are pollen specialists, and many species of butterfly, moth, beetle, and even fly have special relationships with certain species of plants as well. These special plant-insect relationships are the foundation of more complex species interactions.

Biodiversity is a key facet of ecosystem resilience. Ecosystem resilience is, essentially, an ecosystem's ability to overcome catastrophe. This catastrophe could be the loss of a keystone species, an extreme weather event (such as floods, drought, or heat), or the introduction of a novel pest. The more of this diversity we preserve, the better we are able to buffer the impacts of climate change and habitat loss.

Diversity isn't just about the number of species in an ecosystem however. A key part of a healthy community is species abundance, or the number of

individuals within that species. The greater a species' abundance is, the greater its genetic diversity. This genetic diversity facilitates adaptation to new climates, changes in insect communities, and more. Genetic diversity matters. If a plant becomes less common, then those insects who specialize on it will also become less common. With fewer individuals and greater distance between populations, their genetic diversity may slump.

There are many environmental reasons to incorporate native plants in landscaping, but their lower maintenance may be the most attractive quality for many homeowners looking to reduce their workload. When a native plant is established, it will emerge in the spring when the temperature and light conditions are suitable and will return to this area for many years to come if the habitat is suitable. Whether a homeowner's soil is clay, sand, or loam, there are native plants uniquely adapted for these gardens, with some plants offering drought resistance and others that prefer wet, compacted soil. There is no need for expensive soil amendments, fertilizers, or compost for these plants. Many native plants are adapted to leaf detritus and benefit from the moisture, nutrients, and fungal associates that leaf litter offers. This cuts back on time and effort spent raking and removing leaves in the fall.

Every time I hear someone lament about how often they must water their annuals, I think about my native plant gardens and how much I can neglect them. An annual plant's shallow roots make it more sensitive to drying out, especially in a window box or flower pot, but this high turnover of annuals in landscaping is a big business – the horticulture industry is an $18.3 billion industry. Every year, Americans spend millions on annual garden plants and turf grass care. These plants get planted into pots and garden beds where they bloom for a few weeks or a few months. When their season ends, they get ripped out and thrown away. Yet these annual flowers have a bigger price than their checkout cost; they're grown in commercial greenhouses and use synthetic fertilizers and heavy watering before they are shipped to nurseries for retail sale. These fertilizers leach into our waterways, and the high-density planting in these greenhouses often requires the use of pesticides to mitigate pests and disease. The plastic pots they are grown in often wind up in the trash. Turf grass is mown weekly, watered often, and has no benefit to wildlife. The shallow roots of turf grass do little to prevent storm water runoff. In New Jersey, flooding is becoming more and more common, and flood damage is costly to both private citizens and municipalities.

Ornamental landscaping has had a heavy hand in the biodiversity crisis we now face. Many of our worst invasive plants were introduced for the landscaping industry, and despite the significant passing of the Invasive Species Management Act, the cost of removing established invasive plant populations is substantial. A 2021 study estimated that invasive species have cost North America more than $26 billion per year since 2010—an explosive increase from the estimated cost of $2 billion per year since the 1960s (Crystal-Ornelas *et al.* 2021). These costs impact agriculture, recreational spaces, public utility operations, fisheries, and more. Without proper mitigation, the costs are projected to skyrocket. Municipalities may not have the resources for the proper control of these invasive plants, and natural resources departments are understaffed and underfunded. The brunt of this work falls on volunteers.

More Americans are facing economic uncertainty as the cost of living continues to rise. For gardeners, the appeal of native plants is multi-faceted; we can prioritize the environment, mitigate climate disaster, and save money and time to boot. Private citizens can have a forceful impact on preserving and enriching our natural biodiversity – even a pot of asters on an apartment balcony can make a difference.

As my Community Garden's new pollinator garden continues to grow, it won't be long before it provides plenty of seeds to share widely with others. Perhaps this is one of the greatest joys of native gardening – the incredible connections you make when you share your gardens and your seeds with others.

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NPSNJ 2026 Mini-Grant Recipients:

Atlantic County

- *Native Plant Public Demonstration Garden, Brigantine — Brigantine Green Team and City of Brigantine Public Works.* A coastal demonstration garden showing how native plants can be used in public landscapes.

Bergen County

- *Garretson Farm Native Plant Garden — Garretson Forge and Farm.* Replacement of non-native plantings with native shrubs and garden plants that support pollinators, birds, and visitors to the historic farm site.
- *The Pollinator Garden — Garden Club of Teaneck.* A public pollinator garden using native plants to support insects, birds, and community education.
- *Waldwick Public Library Native Nature Project — Friends of the Waldwick Public Library.* Native plantings at a public library to create a visible educational landscape for library visitors and the surrounding community.

Burlington County

- *Evesham Library Free Seed Exchange — Garden Club of Marlton and Evesham Library.* A library seed-exchange program paired with a native plant demonstration garden and educational materials for the public.

Camden County

- *Pocket Park Garden, Haddon Township — Haddon Township Community Gardeners.* A compact public park garden showing how small urban and suburban spaces can support biodiversity.

Hudson County

- *Historic Reservoir #3 Pollinator Path & Youth Stewardship Garden — Jersey City Department of Recreation, Parks & Youth Development.* A youth-led pollinator pathway and outdoor learning site at Historic Reservoir #3.
- *Pocket Forest–Pershing Field Park, Jersey City — Pershing Field Garden Friends.* A pocket forest planting that adds native habitat and shade in a dense urban neighborhood.

Hunterdon County

- *Clinton Public School Native Gardens — Clinton Public School.* Native gardens in a school setting, giving students and the public a living example of ecological planting.
- *Hunts Mill Park in Clinton — Clinton Conservancy.* Native plant restoration and public garden work at Hunts Mill Park.

Mercer County

- *Name that Native in Hamilton's Gardens — Green Team.* Native plant identification and interpretation in Hamilton's public gardens.

Monmouth County

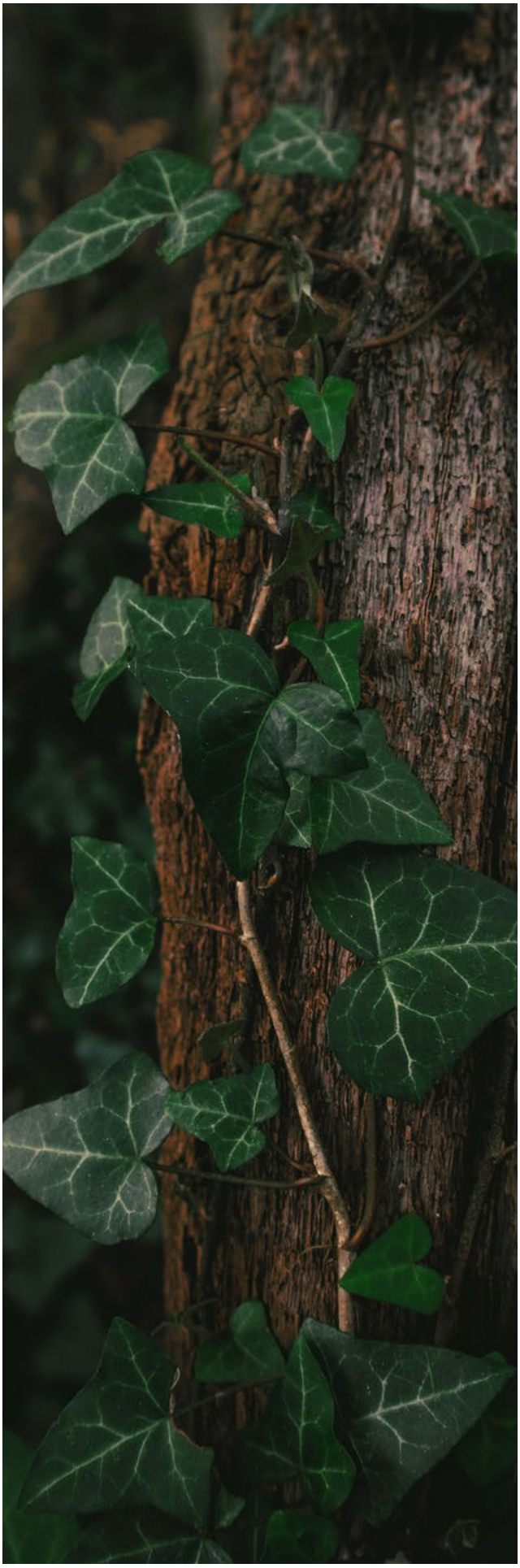
- *Native Plants DEMO Garden at Maclearie Park — Belmar Environmental Commission.* A demonstration garden showing how native plants can be used in public landscapes along the shore.
- *Neptune City Municipal Complex Native Planting — Neptune City Environmental Commission.* Native plantings at a visible civic site, modeling ecological landscaping for residents.
- *Township of Ocean Learning Gardens — Ocean Township Garden Club.* Learning gardens connecting native plants with public education and community engagement.

Morris County

- *Coleman Road Park Improvements — Washington Township Environmental Commission and Green Team.* Native plantings that improve habitat and strengthen public awareness of ecological landscaping.
- *Native Rain Garden & Pollinator Beds, Hopatcong State Park — Lake Hopatcong Foundation.* Rain garden and pollinator plantings in a highly visible state park setting.
- *Plant this not That — Shrubs — Morris Township — Ted Largman Community Garden at ValleVue Preserve.* A public comparison of native shrub choices with less beneficial landscape plants.

Ocean County

- *Native Garden Creation, Cloverdale Farm County Park — Cloverdale Farm County Park volunteers.* A native garden in a county park setting, supporting public education and habitat.



English Ivy League

The back wall

a green tsunami

of never ending leaves...

a surge of vines

covering

whatever

is in its path

slowly choking life

out of trees

shrubs, blooms...

arrived pre-revolution

came with the colonists

a three hundred year

British invasion

non-stop...

trying

to swallow up

the whole country

Hara L. Rola 2018 / Revised 2026

The Native Plant Society *of* New Jersey

Our mission is to promote the appreciation, protection and study *of* New Jersey's native flora.

npsnj.org

