

Landscaping Plants in Different Ecoregions

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Maryland is affectionately referred to as a ‘Little America’ because it has multiple, distinct ecosystems, ranging from low mountains and ridges in the Appalachians to tidal marshes and estuarine ecosystems in the Chesapeake Bay to the coastal plains along the Atlantic Ocean. These three main ecosystem types are delineated as “mountain”, “Piedmont” and “coastal plains” ecoregions. (Although, technically, these designations are “EPA Level II Ecoregions”, we refer to them as simply ecoregions in this article. See ArcheWild®, pages 4 and 5 of this issue, for details). These three ecoregions have unique growing conditions, as well as unique plant and animal assemblages. While some plant species naturally span all three ecoregions, others grow in only one, and many are even more geographically restricted within a given ecoregion due to climatic, soil, and historical conditions. So when it comes to landscaping, choosing plants for the appropriate ecoregion and specific site conditions increases the likelihood of successful plant establishment and support of local wildlife.

There are multiple tools available to help home gardeners and landscape

professionals select the right plant for the right place. The US Fish & Wildlife Service’s *Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping* has long been the go-to reference and includes growing conditions and wildlife support information. There’s also the new Commercial Maryland Native Plant List (scan QR code below) with similar and additional data. This comprehensive list has ~600 species that are commercially available and well-suited for residential and commercial landscapes. Research in the Mid-Atlantic region shows that yards with at least 70% native vegetation can maintain healthy food webs, with biodiversity support increasing with higher percentages of natives. Keystone species such as *Quercus*, *Acer*, and *Vaccinium* support vast numbers of Lepidoptera (butterflies, moths, and skippers) species, which 96% of terrestrial birds rely on to feed their young. Below are examples of conservation landscaping options for each ecoregion. Some of the



Scan with your cell phone or visit extension.umd.edu/resource/commercial-maryland-native-plant-list/

species span more than one ecoregion.

Luckily, purchasing native plants is about to become much easier! The state of Maryland recently funded the Maryland Native Plants Program (MNPP) to increase the use and sale of native plants and to raise awareness about their critical ecological roles in supporting wildlife and providing environmental services.

As part of the MNPP, the Maryland Department of Agriculture just launched the Maryland’s Best Native Plants Certification to help customers identify retail locations that are dedicated to offering plants native to Maryland. There are three tiers of certification—bronze, silver, and gold which reflect the percentage of native plant species in the retailer’s inventory. Retailers can register at marylandsbest.maryland.gov/marylands-best-native-plant-program/ and plant seekers can look for the logo shown above. The Maryland Native Plant Society also maintains a list and map of retailers that sell native plants at www.mdflora.org/nurseries.html.



Look for this Maryland’s Best logo when shopping for native plants

Text Box 1 - Caption ecoregion coding.

	Light	Mountain	Piedmont	Coastal Plains
Wildflower	sun - partial	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	<i>Oenothera fruticosa</i>	<i>Limonium carolinianum</i>
	partial - shade	<i>Anemone acutiloba</i>	<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>	<i>Uvularia perfoliata</i>
Graminoid	sun - partial	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	<i>Spartina alterniflora</i>
	partial - shade	<i>Carex laxiculmis</i>	<i>Carex willdenowii</i>	<i>Luzula echinata</i>
Shrub	sun - partial	<i>Ilex montana</i>	<i>Amorpha fruticosa</i>	<i>Itea virginica</i>
	partial - shade	<i>Viburnum lantanoides</i>	<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>	<i>Viburnum acerifolium</i>
Tree	sun - partial	<i>Acer spicatum</i>	<i>Quercus phellos</i>	<i>Carya pallida</i>
	partial - shade	<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>	<i>Magnolia tripetala</i>	<i>Quercus bicolor</i>

REFERENCES

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