



## Selecting and Shopping for Native Plants

### What is a native plant?

The term "*native plant*" refers to plants that were growing in North America before European settlement, and includes woody plants (i.e., trees, shrubs, and vines) and non-woody herbaceous plants (i.e., flowering perennials, ferns, grasses, herbaceous vines).

### Why Grow Native Plants?

Native plants are the most sustainable choice for home, business, or school gardens. Beautiful, interesting, and varied, they evoke a sense of place and are essential for creating garden habitat for wildlife. The UGA MAREX CoastScapes invites everyone to work together to protect the biodiversity of our natural areas. Plant conservation is key and it begins right in the home, business, and school landscape with choosing non-invasive plant species. Locally adapted native plants are a sure bet!

### Can growing native plants help me be more environmentally friendly?

Yes! Using native plants is the ultimate environmentally-friendly garden practice. Native plants use fewer resources, such as water, because they are adapted to tolerate normal regional conditions such as local soils, precipitation ranges and temperatures. In addition, when properly sited, planted, and established, they don't require as much intervention with pesticides and fertilizers as ornamentals and exotics. By using native plants, we can avoid invasive plant species like Japanese honeysuckle and Chinese wisteria that harm natural areas. In addition, native plants are essential for supporting local wildlife such as pollinators and songbirds.

## Points to Live By When Shopping and Gardening with Native Plants:

- **Putting a plant in the right place is the key to ensuring its survival and remaining healthy in your landscape.** Use the UGAMAREX CoastScapes Coastal Plain Native Plant search engine to determine what native plants are best for your site: [www.bugwood.org/coastscapes/](http://www.bugwood.org/coastscapes/). In addition, check out the CoastScapes coastal plain native plant lists that provide native plants for specific conservation landscaping uses ([www.coastscapes.org](http://www.coastscapes.org)). Although the plants you are considering may be native to the coastal plain region of Georgia, individual plants may not grow everywhere in the region. In addition, the characteristics of any site will typically vary from place to place and some plants may do better than others at various places within a site. When selecting plants for your landscape, remember that many factors determine the suitability of a plant for a particular location. Consider light requirements, local climate, soil type, moisture, adaptability, hardiness, heat tolerance, and other factors. All plants provided on the UGAMAREX CoastScapes coastal plain native plant search engine ([www.bugwood.org/coastscapes/](http://www.bugwood.org/coastscapes/)) are suited to the USDA Hardiness Zone 8. Please check to see if your zone falls within the 8a or 8b hardiness zone and then choose plants accordingly. Choose native plants that match and thrive under the conditions in your landscape and you will have an environmentally-friendly CoastScapes landscape! You will reduce the need for water, fertilizers, pesticides, and pruning while providing valuable wildlife habitat.
- **Be sure to purchase nursery propagated and grown plants from reputable nurseries and growers and where, possible, buy native plants based on ecotypes.** Whenever possible, buy native seed or native plants from a reputable nursery that sells local ecotypes (plants propagated from seed or stock originally collected in the area you plan to plant rather than in another biogeographic region). Often plants sold as native are not from local sources, and thus may not give you the full benefits of easy growing and wildlife and pollinator forage. Buy only if certified by the vendors as “Nursery Propagated.” Question ambiguous phrases such as “Nursery Grown” because they may be wild-collected plants. Become aware of the methods used for propagation by vendors. UGAMAREX CoastScapes encourages propagation from seed rather than vegetative reproduction, in order to maintain species vigor and genetic diversity. Many vendors now propagate from local seed sources and we encourage you to support such efforts.

- **Never collect plants from the wild or purchase wild collected plants.** Wild-collection threatens the existence of native species and ecosystems, and if collected from far away, will result in plants which have a reduced likelihood of surviving in your garden. Transplant native flora from wild settings only when the plants of a given area are officially slated for destruction, e.g. road construction, subdivisions, pipelines, golf courses, etc. Obtain permission from the landowner before removing wild flora.
- **Use locally adopted native plants.** Research suggests locally adapted native plants are four times more attractive to native bees, butterflies, and wildlife than ornamentals and exotics. Wherever possible, consider how to include native plants, including shrubs and trees, that produce abundant flowers, seeds, and fruits throughout the growing season. Local native plants are usually well adapted to your growing conditions, can thrive with minimum attention, and are good sources of nectar and pollen for pollinators and food for wildlife. Naturalized or exotic species can escape to wild habitats, suffocating and inhibiting the growth and spread of native flora and fauna. Named clones often do not reflect the range of traits of bioregionally-native species, including wildlife value, and if widely planted, can change natural populations.
- **Do not use invasive plants.** Avoid plant species known to be highly invasive. These plants do not provide the quality nectar and food pollinators and wildlife depend on, will likely spread and dominate other species, reduce the diversity and value of the habitat, and increase maintenance demands. Check out the CoastScapes website for more information: [www.coastscapes.org](http://www.coastscapes.org).
- **Avoid hybrids.** Avoid planting hybrid flower varieties or those that have been bred for showy or “double” blossoms, as these often lack the pollen and nectar rewards of the parent species and thus are not suitable for pollinators. In addition, horticultural varieties and hybrids are not necessarily suited to local conditions.
- **Recognize and provide adequate establishment timeline for your native plants.** Although locally appropriate native plants provide numerous benefits (e.g., reduced water needs, reduced fertilizer and pesticide use, etc.), new plantings will require regular irrigation for six weeks to six months or more before they become established. Trees larger than two inches caliper width will take longer to establish. Although native plants have evolved to local conditions, plants of any species must be allowed time to become fully established in a landscape before all of its native plant features will be evident. All plants need water while establishing their root system and during periods of extended drought. Root establishment can take from months to one to several years, depending on the original size of the plant. Larger plants will take longer to establish.

## Where to Find Native Plants

Most nurseries carry some native plants, and some nurseries specialize and carry a greater selection. As the demand for native plants has grown, so has the supply at nurseries. Some plants will be more readily available than others. Our CoastScapes native plant lists and search engine ([www.coastscapes.org](http://www.coastscapes.org)) focused on species most appropriate for planting and available through the nursery trade. Some of the species included, however, are not commonly available but are able to be nursery grown. Research the native plants that are suitable and desirable for your landscape site's conditions, and take a copy of the list with you when you visit nurseries. If you need help, ask for nursery staff familiar with native plants. If you see a plant you like, check to see if it is included in the CoastScapes list for your particular local area and site conditions. Make sure that you check the common name with its scientific name to confirm that the plant you are considering is the intended plant you want to buy. For those species that are more difficult to find, the hope and intention is that the CoastScapes coastal plain native plant lists and search engine will spark a demand, and hence a greater supply. If you have a favorite plant that you cannot obtain, be sure to ask your local nursery to consider adding it to their stock. A list of native plant nursery references is available below.

For the greatest ecological value, select the "true" native species, especially if planting for wildlife and pollinator benefit. There are cultivated varieties ("cultivars") available for many native plants. These are named using the scientific name (Latin genus and species, such as *Rudbeckia fulgida*) plus the cultivar name, a third word in single quotation marks (such as *Rudbeckia fulgida* "Goldstrum"). These varieties have been grown to provide plants with certain physical characteristics, perhaps a different flower color, different foliage, or a compact shape or size. Although these are suitable for gardening, use true species (not cultivars) if you are planning a habitat project to provide food for wildlife. These plants are most suited for use by the native wildlife, and will increase your chances of attracting them.

Ask nurseries about the source of the native species sold. Did they come from seed or cuttings of plants found growing locally, or are they from another region? Ideally, the plants you use should come from stock from the same region, say, within roughly a 200-mile radius in the same physiographic province (e.g., coastal plain). Differences exist from region to region even in the same plant species, due to differences in climatic conditions between distant locations. For example, a plant grown in Virginia may flower at a different time than the same species grown in coastal Georgia. They may have slight physical differences. These characteristics make a difference in designing gardens and they matter to wildlife seeking food sources. We protect a species as a whole by preserving the

genetic variation contained in local varieties. Not only will planting a non-local variety dilute the local native variety but these non-local plants will not grow as well for you as plants that were raised from local stock. The local variety of a species has spent many thousands of years adapting to the vagaries of its local conditions. Recognizing that these challenges can sometimes be difficult to overcome, try to do your best in being a responsible gardener and protector of our wild coastal treasures. The more consumers ask for locally grown plants or seed, the more likely it is that nurseries will carry local stock. Once you begin to explore and experiment with native plants, you'll soon discover that many of these plants go beyond just replacing worn out selections in your yard. Native plants will eventually reduce your labor and maintenance costs while inviting wildlife to your landscape helping to create your own sense of place.

## Native Plant Nursery Sources

Association of Florida Native Nurseries:

<http://www.afnn.org/find-plants>

Georgia Native Plant Society Sources for Native Plants and Seeds

[http://www.gnps.org/resources/Native\\_Nurseries.php](http://www.gnps.org/resources/Native_Nurseries.php)

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, National Suppliers Directory

<http://www.wildflower.org/suppliers/>

PlantNative Native Plant Nursery Finder:

<http://www.plantnative.org/index.htm>

PlantNative Native Plant Nursery Directory:

[http://www.plantnative.org/national\\_nursery\\_dir\\_main.htm](http://www.plantnative.org/national_nursery_dir_main.htm)

South Carolina Native Plant Society

<http://www.scnps.org/links.html>