Herbaceous (nonwoody) perennial plants add year round interest to any landscape and are a popular choice of plants among gardeners.

Why Natives?

By definition, a native Pennsylvania plant is one that grew in Pennsylvania before the European settlers arrived, as opposed to exotic plants which came from other countries after that time period. Natives have many advantages. Because they evolved here, they are well-adapted to our climate and are generally easy to care for once they are established. Many native perennials like less fertile soil and require the addition of little or no fertilizer. Perhaps the most compelling reason to choose natives is to preserve Pennsylvania's biodiversity. Development is rapidly reducing natural areas that shelter a wealth of our native plants; the landscapes that replace the natural areas consist mostly of lawns and exotic plants. Recent research from Dr. Doug Tallamy of the University of Delaware has determined that 90 percent of our native insects are specialists that feed on three or fewer families of plants. The insects rely on native plant hosts and cannot eat the exotic plants that have become common in our yards. A reduction of native insects means that birds have fewer insects to feed to their young, and that will lead to a reduction of bird species. In the next fifty years, what we plant in our yards will determine the kind of wildlife that can live in Pennsylvania. By planting natives, gardeners can help retain our natural history and the beauty and diversity of Penn's Woods.

Choosing Native Perennials

Though native plants have the home advantage, matching their needs to the growing site is still very important. The soil around many of our home sites is often removed prior to home construction and may not be replaced afterwards.

Determine your soil type--do you have heavy clay or silty loam? Is it high or low in organic matter? Does it tend to dry out quickly after a rainfall or does it hold moisture?

Other factors must also be considered. Is the site in sun or shade? How much room does the site allow for perennials to grow to their maximum size without crowding? Combining plants that grow well in the same natural habitats will help create healthy, vigorous plantings. If you do some homework and place plants in the proper environment, you will be rewarded with gardens that thrive with less care.

Note: Natives have many advantages. Because they evolved here, they are well-adapted to our climate and are generally easy to care for once they are established. Featured species: Chrysogonum virginianum.
Planting and Care

Spring, early summer, and fall are the best times to establish native perennials. Test your soil before planting and, if needed, amend the nutrients according to the soil test results. Remember that many natives do not require the addition of fertilizer and may do poorly in highly-fertilized soil. Plants that require moist soil high in organic matter will do well if compost is added. Cultivate the soil to a depth of eight to ten inches and incorporate any soil amendments.

When planting, placing the plant in a hole at the same depth as when it was in the container is important. If the plant is root-bound, make sure you free the root system by gently pulling it apart. Once the backfill soil is added, water the plant thoroughly. Additional water may be needed during the growing season until plants are well established. If planted in the proper environment, many natives need little or no additional water once established. In fact, many meadow species may become leggy if the soil is too moist. A two inch mulch layer of shredded leaves, shredded bark, or compost will help conserve water. However, be sure to keep the mulch away from the plant stems.

Buying Native Perennials

Do not collect from the wild! Collecting plants from the wild causes the depletion of native species and disruption of the ecosystem. Be sure to purchase plants from a reputable source and purchase only nursery propagated native plants. Visit your favorite nursery or seek out native plant nurseries and sales sponsored by conservation societies. Native plants are becoming increasingly popular and easier to find. Your local Penn State Extension office can help.

Source

- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Mid-Atlantic Recommended Native Plant Species List, 2001
## Suggested Native Plants for Pennsylvania Perennial Gardens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanical Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Bloom time</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquilegia canadensis</td>
<td>Columbine</td>
<td>1-2’</td>
<td>Red &amp; yellow</td>
<td>April-June</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Partial shadeto sun. Self Seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asarum canadense</td>
<td>Wild ginger</td>
<td>4-8”</td>
<td>Maroon</td>
<td>April-May</td>
<td>Moist shade. Ground cover. Inconspicuous flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aster divaricatus</td>
<td>White wood aster</td>
<td>2’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>August-October</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Shade to partial shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aster novae-angliae</td>
<td>New England aster</td>
<td>Up to 6’</td>
<td>Lavender-pink</td>
<td>August to frost</td>
<td>Wet to dry. Sun to partial sun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptisia australis</td>
<td>Blue wild indigo</td>
<td>2-4’</td>
<td>Blue/purple</td>
<td>April -June</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun. Shrubby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelone glabra</td>
<td>Turtlehead</td>
<td>1-4’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>July-August</td>
<td>Moist to wet. Partial shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysogonum virginianum</td>
<td>Green-and-gold</td>
<td>6-12”</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>April-October</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun to partial shade. Ground cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cimicifuga racemosa</td>
<td>Bugbane, Black cohosh</td>
<td>3-8’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>July-August</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Partial sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coreopsis tripteris</td>
<td>Tall coreopsis</td>
<td>3-9’</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>July-Sept.</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun. Use for back of the border</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dicentra eximia</td>
<td>Wild bleeding heart</td>
<td>1-2’</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>April-September</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Partial shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eupatorium fistulosum</td>
<td>Joe-pye weed</td>
<td>2-7’</td>
<td>Pinkish-lavender</td>
<td>July-Sept.</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade. Attracts butterflies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geranium maculatum</td>
<td>Wild geranium, Cranesbill</td>
<td>1-3’</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>April to July</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Shade to partial shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helianthus angustifolius</td>
<td>Narrow-leaved sunflower, Swamp sunflower</td>
<td>3-8’</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>August-September</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heliopsis helianthoides</td>
<td>Ox-eye sunflower, False sunflower</td>
<td>3-4’</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>June-August</td>
<td>Wet to dry. Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuchera americana</td>
<td>Alumroot</td>
<td>1.5-3’</td>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>May-June</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Shade to sun. Ground cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris cristata</td>
<td>Dwarf crested iris</td>
<td>4-12”</td>
<td>Blue/violet</td>
<td>April-May</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Partial shade to part sun. Ground cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liatris spicata</td>
<td>Marsh blazing star, Gayfeather</td>
<td>3-4’</td>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>July-September</td>
<td>Moist to wet. Sun. Attracts Gayfeather butterflies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilium superbun</td>
<td>Turk’s cap lily</td>
<td>2-5’</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>July-August</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Sun to shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobelia siphilitica</td>
<td>Great blue lobelia</td>
<td>2-3’</td>
<td>Blue/lavender</td>
<td>July-October</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Partial sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mertensia virginica</td>
<td>Virginia bluebells</td>
<td>1-2’</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>April-June</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Shade to partial sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarda didyma</td>
<td>Beebalm, Oswego tea</td>
<td>2-3’</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>July-August</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarda fistulosa</td>
<td>Wild bergamot, Horsemint, Beebalm</td>
<td>2-5’</td>
<td>Lavender</td>
<td>July-August</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun to partial shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penstemon digitalis</td>
<td>Beardtongue</td>
<td>2-5’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>June-July</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phlox paniculata</td>
<td>Summer phlox, Perennial phlox</td>
<td>3-4’</td>
<td>Pink to lavender</td>
<td>June-August</td>
<td>Moist, Sun to partial sun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polemonium reptans</td>
<td>Jacob’s ladder, Greek valerian</td>
<td>10-15”</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>April-May</td>
<td>Moist. Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygonatum biflorum</td>
<td>Solomon’s seal</td>
<td>1-5’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>May-June</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pycanthemum tenuifolium</td>
<td>Slender mountain mint</td>
<td>2-3’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>August-September</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun. Attracts beneficials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudbeckia fulgida</td>
<td>Black-eye Susan, Orange coneflower</td>
<td>1-3’</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>July-October</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senecio aureus</td>
<td>Golden ragwort</td>
<td>1’</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>June-August</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Sun to partial shade. Ground cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</td>
<td>Narrow-leaved blue-eyed grass</td>
<td>1-1.5’</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>May-July</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Sun to partial sun. Ground cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smilacina racemosa</td>
<td>False solomon’s seal, False spikenard</td>
<td>1-3’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Shade to sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidago speciosa</td>
<td>Showy goldenrod</td>
<td>1-5’</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>August-September</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun to partial sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiarella cordifolia</td>
<td>Foam flower</td>
<td>8-12”</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>April-July</td>
<td>Moist. Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernonio noveboracensis</td>
<td>New York ironweed</td>
<td>5-8’</td>
<td>Reddish purple</td>
<td>August-September</td>
<td>Wet to moist. Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verónicastrum virginicum</td>
<td>Culver’s root</td>
<td>2-6’</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>July-September</td>
<td>Moist. Sun to partial shade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grasses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanical Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panicum virgatum</td>
<td>Switchgrass</td>
<td>3-6’</td>
<td>Wet to dry. Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizachyrium scoparium</td>
<td>Little Bluestem</td>
<td>3-6’</td>
<td>Moist to dry. Sun. Good fall color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorghastrum nutans</td>
<td>Indiangrass</td>
<td>3-8’</td>
<td>Wet to dry. Sun. Good fall color</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prepared by Shirley Wagner, Master Gardener Coordinator, Penn State Extension, Lancaster County and Connie Schmotzer, Consumer Horticulture, Penn State Extension, York County.

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