

WEST CAPE MAY BOROUGH
NATIVE PLANTS FOR YOUR GARDEN

Submitted by

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LET'S GO NATIVE

For almost twenty years, or more, there has been an increased awareness of how important and vital the cultivation of native plants is to the southern New Jersey, particularly the Cape May region. Why is it that the cultivation of native plants has gained so much popularity and importance recently?

WHAT EXACTLY IS A NATIVE PLANT?

To answer that question, first of all, it is significant to distinguish native plants from non-native ones. Native plants existed on American soil (commonly known back then as the New World) before the arrival of Christopher Columbus--about 517 years ago! Since then, new plants brought into the New World after Columbus's arrival are referred to as "non-native."

ADVANTAGES OF GROWING NATIVE PLANTS

Over these many decades, gradual but increasing numbers of plant growers have come to recognize that native plants are stronger, healthier, and superior in many ways compared to non-native plants. Native plants can withstand drought conditions better, need less watering, are better able to adjust to seaside environments, such as salt air, winter cold, strong ocean winds and hurricanes. In addition, native plants are less vulnerable to other stresses and plant diseases. Best of all, you don't have to give them a lot of attention, like

frequent watering and supplemental nutrients. By contrast, many non-native plants require more attention and timely care. They become more stressed by drought conditions, excessive rainfall, summer heat waves and extended cold periods.

ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGES

Equally important when establishing your garden habitat are these further considerations. Native plants provide food for wildlife, shelter from adverse weather conditions, safety from predators, resting places and enhanced breeding grounds. Now that you're considering native plants to establish on your property, here are a few recommendations.

NATIVE TREES

First, let's start with native trees because they add so much to our environment. Native trees form a majestic canopy over our heads, houses, walkways, public parks and add to the quality of life all around us. Native trees provide clean air and shade from the hot sun in the summer while allowing sunlight to shine through the cold of winter. Furthermore, native trees reduce the howling salt-air-winds so closely associated with living near the seashore. Equally important, native trees provide shelter and habitat for wildlife. They stimulate natural interest in our gardens, neighborhoods and parks. And incidentally, native plants increase the value of our properties and add beauty to our landscapes. Here are some suggestions:

NATIVE TREES FOR CONSIDERATION

Red Maple-Acer rubrum
Sugar maple-Acer saccharum
River Birch-Betula nigra
Eastern Redbud-Cercis Canadensis

Rutgers Dogwood-Cornus florida var. rutcan / rutdan
Beech-Fagus grandifolia
American Holly-Ilex opaca

Sweet Gum-Liquidambar styraciflua
Eastern White Pine-Pinus strobus
White Oak-Quercus alba