



# Why Should I Plant Natives?

## BVGC NATIVE PLANT FACT SHEET



Great Spangled Fritillary Butterfly and Swallowtail Butterfly on Native Bee Balm



Photo by Cathy Ledec

### WHAT IS A NATIVE PLANT?

A native plant is one that has developed in our region over thousands of years. It is specific to our climate, our soil and water supply. Native plants interact with and have an interdependence on our native insects, birds and animal life. They are all interconnected and when undisturbed nature is in balance. Most of our forested areas are new growth forests on previously disturbed lands and trying to regain its balance.

There are many invasive plants species that are crowding out our native species and creating barren monocultures. This is negatively impacting our native insect populations. While one may think that loss of our insects is no big deal, they are actually the basis of life. Without our insects, our native bird and animal populations will not survive. We can help by planting native plants in our gardens!

### WHAT DO NATIVE PLANTS DO?

#### Help Songbirds Raise their Young

According to a Cornell Study, the North American Songbird population has decreased by nearly 40% (3 billion birds) since 1970. This is attributed to loss of native habitat and loss of insect population.

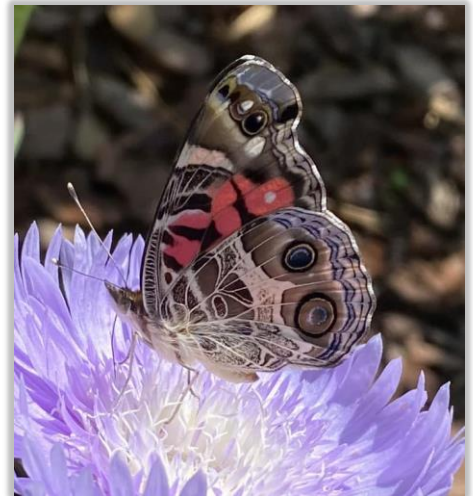


#### Restore Diversity

Insects such as butterflies and native plants co-evolved. Specific butterflies need specific native plants to complete their life cycle and for their offspring to survive. For instance, Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillars eat only spicebush leaves. The Great Spangled Fritillary (above, top) feeds on native violets. And everyone knows the Monarch Butterfly cannot survive without Milkweed.

#### Bring Back our Lost Songbirds and Butterflies

Most North American Songbirds raise their young on caterpillars, not seeds. Without caterpillars many baby birds die of starvation. One baby bird eats over 700 insects per day over 20 period. A single clutch (7 birds) will eat over 3million insects before leaving the nest!



American Lady butterfly on native Stokes Aster  
Tammy Dorfman



Magnolia Warbler on spruce branch with caterpillar  
G. Bartley



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Eastern Tiger Swallowtails on Native Cup Plant



Photo by Tammy Dorfman

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**Give up a portion of your lawn and replace it with native plants!** It can be simple such as replacing your current non-native (and barren) grass with a native grass such as *Sisyrinchium angustifolium* or blue-eyed grass which includes lovely purple flowers or *Festuca rubra*, a native grass of our coastal regions which is shade tolerant. Add more complexity by using native shrubs such as witch-hazel or winterberry, or a native tree. Oak trees are excellent hosts for our native insects and birds. Service berry offers beautiful foliage and berries that serve as food for our birds. There are many beautiful flower species such as *Baptisia australis* (false blue indigo). Refer to Native Plant Trust, plant finder to help you find the perfect native for your garden.

### BENEFITS OF USING NATIVE PLANTS

**Provide habitat and sustenance for our native insects, butterflies, birds and animal species.** Native seeds and berries have a **higher fat content** than non-native cultivars and invasives, helping adult songbirds to survive winter.

**Native plants are more resilient to our climate.** During the drought of 2022, many imported trees and shrubs perished during imposed watering restrictions. Our established natives were more tolerant and could withstand the dry conditions as well as the wet conditions produced in 2023.

**Native plants require less resources!** Unlike the standard Kentucky Blue grass lawn, native grasses do not require the constant watering, the use of fertilizers or require the same extensive amount of mowing. This is true of all native plants once established! This saves money and time!

**Native plants protect our streams and waterways!** Chemical runoff from lawns and landscaping ends up in our aquifers, streams, and ponds. It feeds bacteria in our wells and creates algae blooms in our waterways. Native plants do not require the chemicals and help to keep our waters clean.



Native Plant Trust  
Conserving and promoting  
New England's native plants  
Plant Finder



[Native Plant Trust Plant Finder](#)

### FEED THE BIRDS

#### Native vs. Non-Native Berries Fat Content

Native	% Fat
Northern Bayberry	60.3
Arrowwood Viburnum	48.7
Spicebush	48.0
Gray Dogwood	34.9
Virginia Creeper	23.6
Non-Native	% Fat
Multiflora Rose	0.9
Honeysuckle	0.7
Buckthorn	0.5
Autumn Olive	2.1
Asiatic Bittersweet	2.6