

# Treat Your Yard to Natives

*Making the Case  
for Native Plants*





**“(F)or the first time in its history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener. Like it or not, gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation’s wildlife.**

Statements are excerpted with permission from *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*, 2007 by Douglas W. Tallamy, Professor and Chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology, University of Delaware.



# The Background



- Plants are not optional on Earth. Virtually all species – man included – cannot live without them.



# The Background

- Between 95 and 97 percent of *all land* in the lower 48 states modified for human use
- Only 3 to 5 percent remains as undisturbed habitat
  - insufficient to support all wildlife
- Primary conversion: suburban residential landscapes



# The Background



- Unless we modify the places (where) we live, work and play
  - To meet our needs
  - *AND* the needs of other species . . .
- Nearly all U.S. native wildlife species will disappear forever.





# So What?

- Biological diversity – fundamentally necessary for ecosystems healthy enough to support life – including us.
- Most species could live quite nicely with humans if their most basic ecological needs were met...



# So What?

- Because so much alteration of US land has resulted in suburban and urban landscapes, it is now within the power of individual gardeners – you and me – to do something that we all dream of:

**Make a difference.**



# What's "Native"?



- Definition: Best defined by nature herself.
  - Plants do not grow in isolation from the living creatures around them – indeed, are essential to the lives of surrounding creatures.
  - A plant can only function as a true “native” while it is interacting with the community that historically helped shape it.





# Native – or not?

- “Alien” or “exotic” plants do NOT share this evolutionary relationship
  - Frequently not suitable or even accessible as nutrition to local wildlife, including pollinators and birds.
    - Example: Bradford pear and Leland cypress support virtually no wildlife
  - By introducing exotics, we risk introducing alien harmful diseases and insects, despite efforts otherwise.
    - Examples: Hemlock woolly adelgid, chestnut blight, sudden oak death



# The Value of Native Trees and Plants

No animal – including humans -- can process energy for life without plants

Animals that eat the insects  
that eat the plants  
(i.e., birds)

Insects that eat  
the plants / Other  
herbivores

**Plants**



# The Value of Native Trees

- Oak – supports 534 Lepidoptera ssp.



- Hawthorn – supports 159 Lepidoptera ssp.



- Tulip poplar – supports 368 Lepidoptera ssp.



Note: It's about more than just butterflies and moths.



# The Value of Native Trees

- Maple – supports 285 Lepidoptera spp.



- Pine– supports 203 Lepidoptera spp.

- Hickory – supports 200 Lepidoptera spp.





# The Value of Native Trees and Plants

- Shelter, place to raise young



- Water
- Food



# Select Native Plants



- **For the habitat value**

- All plants are NOT created equal

- Removing the food (native plants) of the food (insects) that birds need to rear their young will result in fewer birds.





# Select Native Plants

- **For a balance in nature**
  - Many alien ornamentals escape cultivation
    - Grow faster and reproduce more successfully than native vegetation
    - Overwhelm and seriously degrade local habitat
    - Examples: privet, Japanese honeysuckle, kudzu, multiflora rose, English ivy, vinca, mahonia, Bradford pear



# Create Beautiful Habitat (*not an oxymoron*) with Natives

- Plant Diversity
  - Pollinators and birds evolved in conjunction with different native plants
  - Install a variety to draw lots of pollinators, birds and other wildlife
  - Various plant species provide lots of colors
  - Strive for vertical differentiation
    - Canopy, understory, shrubs, ground level



# Create Beautiful Habitat (*not an oxymoron*) with Natives

- Plant as formally or informally as you prefer
  - Use natives exactly as you would exotics
  - Diminish the amount of sterile lawn to the extent possible
    - Turfgrass is a monoculture supporting no wildlife



# Create Beautiful Habitat with Natives

- Replace alien ornamentals over time
  - As you replace landscape plants, replace with natives
- However, invasive exotics must be removed
  - they won't go away by themselves and may have taken over



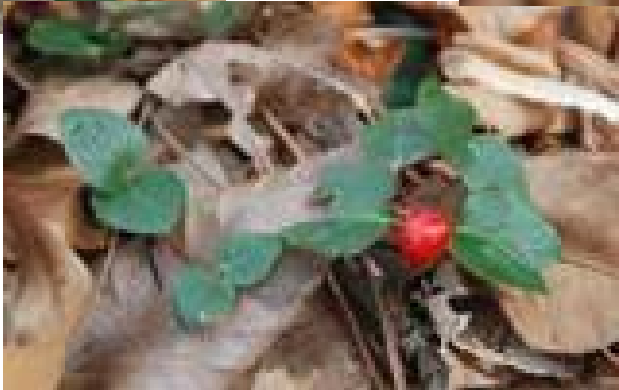
# Create Beautiful Habitat with Natives

- Let native pest controllers do the work of herbicides/pesticides.
  - Less costly and time consuming for you
  - Better for the friendly pollinators and birds you want in your landscape
    - Keep in mind that today's butterfly may be the caterpillar you noticed yesterday.
  - Those “good” insects and birds ARE the native pest controllers.



# Groundcover ideas (thanks to Shannon Pable)

- Evergreen (green in winter): Ginger, Pussytoes, Christmas fern, Spiderwort, Iris Cristata, Tipularia, Galax, Partridge Berry, Moss
- Part to total shade





# Vines

- Crossvine, Carolina Jessamine, native honeysuckle or Trumpet honeysuckle
- Lots of sun needed to bloom



# Shrubs

- Agarista, Leucothoe, American beautyberry, Bottlebrush buckeye, Smooth sumac and Possumhaw holly
- Generally, part shade





# Grasses

- Sugar Cane Plume Grass, Yellow Indian Grass
- Full to part sun



Photos: Carol Hassell, Nearly Native Nursery, Hank Ohme



# References

- <http://Extension.uga.edu>
  - Click Browse Publications,
  - Enter Native Plants in search line
- [www.floridata.com](http://www.floridata.com)
- [www.gnps.org](http://www.gnps.org) – includes retail sources list
- [www.gaeppc.org](http://www.gaeppc.org)
- [www.gwinnettmastergardeners.com](http://www.gwinnettmastergardeners.com)
- *Gardening with Native Plants of the South*, Sally Wasowski, Taylor Pub.

**Gwinnett  
County  
Master  
Gardeners**



# Some Sources

- Shannon Pable,  
[www.shannonpable.com](http://www.shannonpable.com)
- Ashe Simpson Garden Center,  
Brookhaven
- Bannister Creek Nursery, Duluth
- Buck Jones Nursery, Grayson
- Habersham Gardens, Atlanta
- Hastings Nature & Garden Center,  
Peachtree Corners
- Nearly Native, Fayetteville
- Randy's, Lawrenceville
- Woody's Nursery, Duluth

