

## How Do I Start?

Helping wildlife doesn't have to be all-or-nothing and you don't have to feel guilty about liking some non-native plants. Including native plants can mean adding just one or a few plants or creating a habitat patch dedicated to native plants. You might be amazed at how many beautiful butterflies show up! Just learning which plants are native will improve the odds that you choose native.

An easy way to start is to consult the National Audubon Society's "Birdy Dozen" plant lists that are especially good for birds, at this link: <https://onondagaudubon.com/native-plants-for-birds/>

***Every native plant helps!***

## For More Information

Staff at the Cortland County SWCD are always available to work with you. Great sources of additional information to get you started include:

The Audubon Society:

<https://www.audubon.org/content/why-native-plants-matter>

Habitat Gardening CNY:

<https://www.hgcny.org/>

The Biota of North America Program:

<http://bonap.net/tdc>

## Come Visit Our Native Plant Garden!

Our front flowerbed at 100 Grange Place is planted entirely to native New York plants with the exception of the iris. The bed includes milkweeds (left), asters, blazing star (below), coneflowers, grasses and more!



Because of its location, only plants needing full sun and that are tolerant of relatively dry conditions will thrive in our garden. For other planting conditions, ask us for recommendations or consult with a native plant nursery or their webpage.



In summer, our flowerbed is alive with butterflies and many species of pollinators. There are often Monarch caterpillars in it as well! Our garden provides food and habitat to support a variety of birds and other species.

Come by and check it out!

Cortland County SWCD  
100 Grange Place, Room 202  
Cortland, New York 13045  
(607) 756-5991  
<http://cortlandswcd.org>



# 5 Reasons to Choose Native Plants

They:

- Feed nestling birds
- Support pollinators
- Require less water and fertilizer
- Are adapted to NY climate extremes
- Are beautiful!



## Why Choose Native Plants?!

Plants native to New York provide wonderful benefits to us and our environment. They provide food for pollinators and birds, require less water and fertilizer and are better adapted to our climate.

Our birds and insects are in a serious decline, and native plants are increasingly important. They're also beautiful!



### Terminology Can Be Confusing!

**Native** - a plant that is native to New York was here before Europeans colonized North America. This means it is adapted to its environment and is able to interact with other plants and animals because they evolved here together.

**Non-native** - a plant that is not native - this means it is native *somewhere else*. It has not adapted to New York in meaningful ways and likely interacts much less, if at all, with other plants and animals.

**Naturalized** - a non-native plant that is able to reproduce and spread in New York.

**Cultivar** - a plant that has been selectively bred for a certain trait, a hybrid of two different plants, or both. Cultivars can be of either native or non-native species. Cultivars can be poorly adapted to New York and even native cultivars may provide reduced benefits to other species.

**Wildflower** - usually refers to plants that grow easily from seed and are often sold in seed mixes to produce a certain flowerbed appearance. It does *not* mean the plants are native.

## Birds Need Caterpillars



We think of birds as eating seeds, berries and insects, and this is generally true for adult birds, baby birds of many, many species

require caterpillars, *lots of caterpillars*, to grow to adulthood. So if we want to have birds on our property, we have to help them successfully raise their young. And this means providing them with caterpillar food, which means native plants the caterpillars can eat. No native plants means no caterpillars which means no baby birds.

## Insects Are Choosy

Many insects are quite choosy about which plants they eat, and many won't eat non-native plants. That might seem to be a good thing since we like to have our flowers and shrubs looking nice. But, if insects won't eat our plants, the plants are not contributing food resources to our ecosystem. The sun transfers energy to plants, but if the energy stops there, all the insects, birds and other organisms don't benefit and the food chain, beginning with the sun, is broken. With a variety of plants in your yard each plant will receive only minor injury and you may not even notice. And when you do see a few insect chew holes in your plants, celebrate!



## Seeing is Believing

Adding New York native plants to your yard is the best way to see the difference—plant them and they will come!

These great videos will also show you how important native plants are:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UonRPIea48Y>

This video discusses the differences in ecological value between native wild plants and native cultivars:

<https://www.grownativemass.org/programs/experts/videos/awhite>

## Where to Get Native Plants

You can get New York native plants from a variety of sources. There are several excellent native plant nurseries in New York and their websites are full of useful information. The following website includes a Native Plant Shopping Guide, which lists the nurseries and the native plants they carry: <https://www.hgcny.org/shopping/> Native plants can be ordered online as well. Make sure the plants are native to New York, and remember to beware of terms such as “naturalized” and “wildflower.”

## SWCD Tree Program

Woody plants that are native to New York can be purchased from our native shrubs and trees sale (visit our webpage for more information). Look for the “N” in the far right column of the plant description sheet. Especially good woody plants for wildlife include oaks, viburnums (highbush cranberry is a viburnum), dogwoods, ninebark and the native flowering, nut tree and pond habitat packs.