

Native Plants for Long Island Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are shallow depressions designed to soak up water and support trees, shrubs, and flowers that tolerate both wet and dry conditions. Native plants are highly recommended for rain gardens because they are more pest resistant than nonnatives, require no fertilizer, and provide habitat for birds, butterflies, and other pollinators. Once established, the deep roots of native plants increase the water-holding capacity of the soil, hold it together, and prevent erosion. See our horticulture leaflet called “Creating a Rain Garden” for more information.

Never dig up native plants that you find in undeveloped areas or on public land. To do so would benefit your garden at nature’s expense—and it is often illegal. Nurseries are beginning to sell more native plants as the demand for them increases, so ask your local nursery to stock them.

Rain gardens usually have two to three moisture zones, ranging from wet (lower areas with periodically saturated soils and short periods of standing water) to upland (sloping edges with fast-draining or dry soils). Here are some North American native plants listed according to the rain-garden locations where they thrive: wet, upland, sunny, or shady.

Herbaceous Plants for Sunny Wet Zone Sites

FLOWERS

Sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*)
 Canada anemone (*Anemone canadensis*)
 Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
 Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
 Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)
 Boneset (*Eutrochium perfoliatum*)
 Joe-pye weed (*Eutrochium maculatum*)
 Bedstraw (*Galium boreale*)
 Bottle gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*)
 Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*)
 Giant sunflower (*Helianthus giganteus*)
 Oxeye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*)
 Blue flag (*Iris versicolor*)
 Spike gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*)
 Great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*)
 Virginia mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum virginiana*)

New England aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*)
 New York aster (*Symphyotrichum novi-belgii*)
 Tall meadow rue (*Thalictrum dasycarpum*)
 Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*)
 Culver’s root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*)
 Golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*)

GRASSES AND SEDGES

Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)
 Bushy bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*)
 Blue joint grass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*)
 Sedges (*Carex*, *Scirpus*, and other species)
 Canada wild-rye (*Elymus canadensis*)
 Rushes (*Juncus* species and others)
 Rice cutgrass (*Leersia oryzoides*)
 Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)
 Cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*)

Herbaceous Plants for Shady Wet Zone Sites

FLOWERS

Wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*)
Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)
Joe-pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*)
Virginia waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*)
Spotted touch-me-not (*Impatiens capensis*)
Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*)
Canada mayflower (*Maianthemum canadense*)
Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)
Woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)
False dragonhead (*Physostegia virginiana*)
Tall meadow rue (*Thalictrum dasycarpum*)
Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)

FERNS

Ostrich fern (*Matteuccia pennsylvanica*)
Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*)
Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*)
Interrupted fern (*Osmunda claytoniana*)
Royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*)
Marsh fern (*Thelypteris palustris*)

Shrubs for Wet Zone Sites

Most of these species do well in sun or shade:

Black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)
Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*)
Silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)
Gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*)
Red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)
Red-osier dogwood 'Isanti' (*Cornus sericea* 'Isanti')
Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)
Dwarf bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*)
Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)
Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)
Meadowsweet (*Spirea alba*) (needs sun)
Steeplebush (*Spirea tomentosa*)
Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos alba*)
Nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*)

Herbaceous Plants for Sunny Upland Zone Sites

FLOWERS

Giant Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*)
Wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)
Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Tickseed 'Moonbeam' (*Coreopsis verticillata* 'Moonbeam')
Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
Oxeye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*)
Blazing star 'Kobold' (*Liatris spicata* 'Kobold')
Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*)
Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
New England aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*)
Sweet goldenrod (*Solidago odora*)

GRASSES

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)
Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

Herbaceous Plants for Shady Upland Zone Sites

FLOWERS

Green-and-gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*)
Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*)
Coral bells (*Heuchera americana*)
Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)
Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)
Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*)
Blue wood aster (*Symphyotrichum cordifolium*)

SHRUBS FOR SHADY UPLAND ZONE SITES

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*)

FERNS

Interrupted fern (*Osmunda claytonia*)
Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)