Native Plants

What is the Delaware Estuary?
The Delaware Estuary is located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, surrounded by portions of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. An estuary is where fresh water from a river mixes with salt water from an ocean or bay. Estuaries are fragile ecosystems, which support some of the Earth’s richest and most productive habitats. The Delaware Estuary stretches approximately 134 miles, from the falls of the Delaware River between Trenton, New Jersey and Morrisville, Pennsylvania, south to the mouth of the Delaware Bay.

What are our landscaping traditions?
Our landscape history began when the first settlers arrived in the new world. Colonists brought many plants from their homeland and created landscapes that imitated familiar European-style gardens. Three centuries later our landscapes are dominated by European design elements. Expansive turf-grass lawns with symmetrically planted and shaped trees and shrubs, along with flowerbeds, characterize this landscape tradition. Many of the plants we use are non-natives and because they have not evolved under local conditions, these plants require a great deal of maintenance to survive. Some are aggressive and have escaped from cultivation, thereby invading and threatening the survival of our native plant communities. These plants are known as exotics or non-native species.

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Why native plants?
Native plants are those species that were present before European-settlement in North America. These species have evolved in the presence of local soils and climate conditions and have developed natural defenses to insects and disease. They also require less water and can tolerate drought conditions better than exotic species. These characteristics make native species easy to grow, low maintenance plants with many environmental benefits.

How do native plants benefit the Delaware Estuary?
As rain washes over the land, it carries nutrients and chemicals from lawns and other landscapes to storm drains and groundwater. This rainfall eventually drains into streams and rivers. Because native plants require less fertilizer and pesticides, using them reduces the amount of these pollutants that eventually enter our waterways. Therefore, when we use locally native species on our landscapes we make a meaningful contribution to improving water quality in local watersheds and ultimately the Delaware Estuary.

Native plant species also significantly improve wildlife habitat. Native wildlife has evolved with native plants. Birds, mammals and other wildlife depend on vegetation for food and shelter, including nesting and other types of breeding sites. Unmowed stretches of grass will not only provide valuable habitat, but also help to filter out pollutants in the stormwater.

Exotic invasive plants: What are they?
Exotic plants are any form of vegetation that have been introduced to an area where they would not naturally occur. Because they do not have the same checks and balances as they did in their native lands, many of these species take over and become invasive. These exotic species displace naturally occurring vegetation and in the process upset nature’s balance and diversity.

Invasive plants share the following characteristics:
• rapid growth
• prolific reproductive capabilities including highly successful seed dispersal and germination
• rampant spread and colonization

How do you incorporate locally native plants into your landscape?
Develop a long-term plan to introduce locally native species. A good approach is to work on one section at a time, perhaps designing a native wildflower bed or converting a small section of lawn back into a native meadow. Another approach is to replace non-native plants lost to storm damage, insects or disease, with native species.

How can you purchase native plant species?
Native plants are sometimes hard to find because of people’s fascination with rare and exotic species. During the past few years, the nursery industry has begun to recognize the importance of adding locally native species to their plant inventories that are available for retail sale. If your local garden center has not yet caught onto this trend, explain that you want locally native plant species that need less fertilizer, less pesticide, less water, and that provide better habitat for native wildlife species.

Places where you can purchase native plants and seeds:

1. Bowman’s Hill Wildflower Preserve P.O. Box 663 New Hope, PA 18938 215/862-2924 www.bhp.org
2. Brandeisne Conservancy P.O. Box 140 Chadds Ford, PA 19317 215/759-0037
3. Croshaw Nurseries P.O. Box 339, Mill Land Columbus, MS 39702 601/278-0037
4. Crownville Nursery P.O. Box 797 Crownville, MD 21032 410/949-3363
5. Environmental Concern P.O. Box P 260 West CHEW Ave. St. Michaelis, MD 21663 301/745-9620
7. Natural Landscapes 354 N. Jerusalem Rd. West Grove, PA 19390 610-889-3388
8. Native Gardens 111 Dawson Road Chapel Hill, NC 27516 919/980-5078 www.nativegardens.com
9. North Creek Nurseries 388 North Creek Road Landsburg, PA 15330 610/255-0100
10. Octobers Native Plant Nursery 612 Street Road Elkwood, PA 17536 717/529-4909
11. Pineland Nurseries 522 Island Road Columbus, MS 30202 601/281-9486
12. Niche Gardens 1300 Old mans Road East Stroudsburg, PA 18301 570/426-8457
13. Toadshade Wildflower Farm Rt 5, Box 724 Frenchtown, NJ 08825 908/990-7100 www.toadshade.com
15. Wild Earth Nursery 40 Riche Road Freehold, NJ 07728 732/306-9775 www.wildearth.com

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