

CITIZENS FOR A BETTER EASTERN SHORE

SHORE FACTS

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October 2010

“Going Native” on the Eastern Shore of Virginia

Resources and advice for transforming your land using more helpful, less harmful plants that are still beautiful!

By Sarah Morgan

Early in the spring of 2009, a marketing campaign funded in large part by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program urged Shore residents to “Plant ES Natives.” Several garden centers in Accomack and Northampton Counties sported banners, plant tags identified native species, and there were radio spots and special events.

One such event occurred on April 24, 2009, in Willis Wharf, where local leaders and government officials were invited to help plant a new native plant demonstration at the wildlife observation deck on the harbor. Since that date, other demonstration sites have been developed up and down the Shore.

On October 9, 2010, in conjunction with the Birding and Wildlife Festival, there will be a tour of the Kiptopeke Native Plant Demonstration Garden. The event will start at 10 AM. Additional sites have been planted at the UVA Anheuser-Busch Long Term Research Center in Oyster and a “living shoreline” on the other side of the harbor in Oyster. Demonstration sites have also been established at the ESVA National Wildlife Refuge, the Northampton Free Library, the Chincoteague Island Nature Trail, and another is planned for the Onley Rural Health Center.

Several garden centers, notably Bloomers Garden Center (Eastville), Garden Art (Onancock), Hortco Garden Center and Nursery (Tasley), Maplewood Gardens (between Exmore and Nassawadox), Sunnyside Garden Center (Cheriton), Thomas Gardens (New Church), and The Giving Tree (Mappsville), have been selling various ES Native plants. Their staffs can offer advice and general landscaping tips for homeowners and others who would like to add natives to their gardens.

Some benefits for the Eastern Shore and its residents are

obvious, but some are less apparent. For example, by protecting or planting native trees and shrubs, shorelines are held in place by sturdy root systems, and erosion is kept to a minimum. In addition, those root systems trap sediments and help to prevent soils from entering creeks and marshes. Groundwater quality, as it perks through the soils, is improved due to the plants’ uptake of nitrogen and phosphorous; most importantly, native plants require up to a third less water to maintain viable landscapes.



From an economic standpoint, planting natives is a long-term solution to having beautiful, sustainable surroundings without having to spend a lot of money. Fertilizers and pesticides are less necessary due to the fact that natives are already adapted to the environment and don’t need them.

With less yard space devoted to a lawn, less time is spent maintaining the property, mowing, raking, seeding, etc. In addition, for new construction where natives have been retained on site, preparation and the costs of storm water retention are greatly reduced.

The starting point

But where to start? Many Eastern Shore properties include yards which are conventionally-ordered, with a building or two, a border around the perimeter of the property, and perhaps some planted areas around the building(s). Some are more sunny, some shadier. Some are usually dry, some have drainage problems, including periodic fresh- or saltwater flooding. The same native plants will not thrive in all these areas, but with a bit of guidance from local horticulturists and ecologists, all landowners should be able to reduce their need for fertilizers, insecticides, and use of fossil fuels for mowing

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and weed-eating, while maintaining the kinds of spaces they want for outdoor living. In doing so, they will be helping to improve habitat for local wildlife and will be reducing the amount of environmental pollution they add to the local water, air, and soils.

Interested gardeners should obtain a copy of the excellent publication initiated by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program entitled *Native Plants of Accomack and Northampton*. This soft cover booklet has gotten rave reviews upon its recent release and distribution. Contributing writers and photographers include local resident Dot Field of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, who provided the original native plant list. The booklet lists, illustrates, and describes many of the most beautiful and successful local plants, several of which are crucial for the health of butterflies, birds, and other Eastern Shore wildlife, either migratory or permanent. The book is available online for download at http://www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/documents/esnative-plantguide_000.pdf or to receive a hard copy (42 full color,

water-resistant pages, spiral bound), contact Virginia Witmer at Virginia.Witmer@deq.virginia.gov or 804.698.4320.

In addition to the photos of many of the most beautiful native flowering plants, there are also sections in the book listing other “locals” with their Latin names plus a helpful comparative list of commonly-planted (but non-native and sometimes aggressively invasive) grasses, trees, shrubs, and vines, next to recommended alternative native choices. Some of the non-natives on the list are surprisingly ubiquitous in local gardens, fields, and forests; and although they appear innocuous, they can be detrimental to the survival of song-birds and butterflies. Non-native trees not only take up space, use minerals from the soils and the groundwater necessary for their survival, but in some cases they also prevent the development of the smaller shrubs and plants that constitute the understory that many birds need for shelter and food.

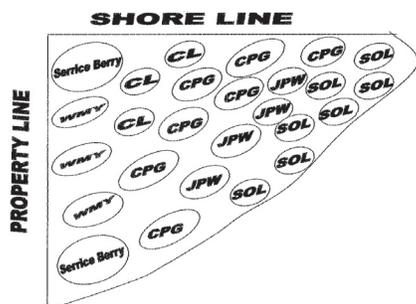
One example of a simple but effective choice for planting involves the Monarch butterfly, which migrates through the Shore. The butterflies need to lay their eggs on milkweed

Native Plants for Seaside Garden

Full Sun

(flip this design to frame water view)

Dry / Sandy / Salt Water Exposure



Serviceberry Tree – 15’ – 30’, white flowers, March to May, attracts a number of birds

WMY – Wax Myrtle, 6’ – 20’, full sun to part shade, silvery berries, butterfly and bird magnet

CL – Coastal Panic Grass – 1’ – 3’, full sun, very salt tolerant

JPW – Dwarf Joe Pye Weed – 2’ – 5’, full sun to part shade, purple flowers, July – August, butterfly magnet

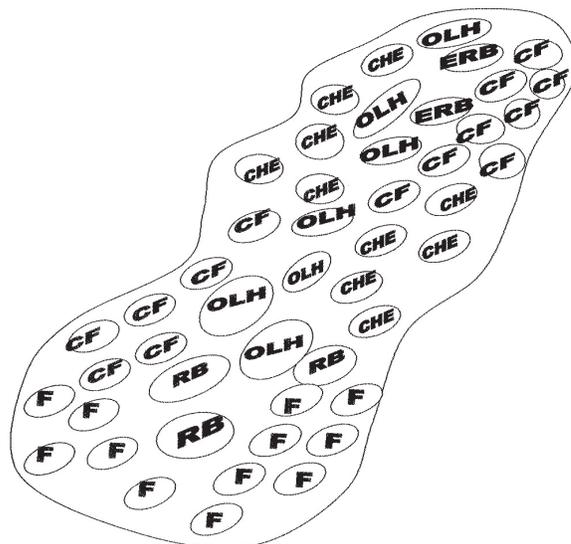
SOL – Solidago – 2’, full sun, blooms golden spikes, July – November, attracts monarch butterflies and birds

Any garden that is to be grown must first have the land prepared – the sod / seeds removed, tilled, soil amendments worked in, and graded properly. Do not add fertilizer the first years as it will burn the new hair roots of the newly installed plants. Watering should be done routinely, preferably with a soaker hose laid under the top coating of mulch.

Native Plants

for Bayside Shade Garden

Moist soil / shady / good soil



RB – River Birch – 30’ – 75’ exfoliating bark, part shade

ERB – Eastern Red Bud – 15’ – 40’ – bright purple flowers, early Spring – under story tree

OLH – Oakleaf Hydrangea – 5’ – 8’ as wide as tall, white pendulant flowers fading to pink

CF – Cardinal Flower – 1’ – 6’ tall, spikes of bright red blooms July to October, hummingbirds love this

CHE – Chelone – 1’ -4’ blush colored spikes, July – September

F – Christmas Fern – 1’ – 3’ tall, evergreen border plant

so that the emerging caterpillars will have adequate nutrition. Two types of milkweed are native to the Shore: Swamp Milkweed and Common Milkweed. The plants will live in wetland gardens and have lovely pink to purple blossoms from May – August. By including these plants in a low-lying area of a property, the gardener will help to ensure the survival of Monarchs and will enjoy the showy flower clusters and four- to six-foot foliage.

Many Eastern Shore gardeners are hesitant to abandon their more familiar landscaping plans in favor of planting (or replanting) natives. The hardy and attractive Crape Myrtles so cheerfully lining Route 13, for example, are not considered native. Neither are English Boxwoods or several other popular species; however, by dedicating just a portion of your yard to natives, you will be improving habitat for migratory songbirds, reducing your use of harmful minerals and chemicals, and cutting down on the time it takes you to care for your property.

By observing the guidelines for creating native areas on your property, you will be satisfying the needs of our millions of yearly visitors (migratory songbirds), saving money, and helping the Eastern Shore's fragile ecosystem, as well as helping to ensure the future health of our water.

The diagrams on the preceding page were created by Barbara Custis, owner of Maplewood Gardens, to help the average gardener start planting natives. The plans may be modified – for a smaller garden, eliminate plants; for a larger one, spread them out.

Additional publications available

Landscaping for a variety of conditions is covered in another publication, *Migratory Birds of the Lower Delmarva – a Habitat Management Guide for Landowners*, which was produced by the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William & Mary. It was a precursor to the Plant ES Natives campaign, and is available by free download from the campaign website: www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/documents/delmarva.pdf.

The book contains information regarding the types of migratory birds that visit our area plus maps and charts showing the main areas they use. There are chapters on general management guidelines including specific recommendations by land type and incorporating songbird habitat into the planning phase of a new homesite. In addition, the book outlines suggestions for complying with local regulations including definitions for Resource Protection Areas and Resource Management Areas, which can affect what landowners can do in these environmentally-sensitive locations.

According to the Plant ES Natives website at www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/go-native.html, another helpful publication is also available for download, *Virginia Hospitality*. “This full-color publication was produced by the Virginia Coastal Program and the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary. It tells the story of the fall migration of thousands of birds along the Virginia Eastern Shore. The publication offers many wonderful photos of migratory bird species and describes how these species rely on

Look for this distinctive light green plant tag!



the area's vegetation during their migration.”

The website mentioned above has links to a myriad of information, plus gorgeous photos of native plants, many taken by local resident Dot Field.

For more information about Eastern Shore plants also visit -

USDA Plants Database (United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service) - <http://plants.usda.gov/>

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Native Plants for Wildlife and Habitat Conservation (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) - <http://nps.gov/plant/pubs/chesapeake/toc.htm>

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Austin - <http://wildflower.org/>

Flora of North America - <http://fna.org/>

The Flora of Virginia Project - http://dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/vaflora.shtml (Information on development of project)



Local garden centers stocked natives for the 2010 spring and fall planting seasons.

Photo by Dot Field (DCR)

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ShoreLine wishes to thank Virginia Witmer and Dot Field for their advice and photos.

Current Plant ES Natives Campaign Partners

as listed on the Plant ES Natives website

Accawmacke Ornaments
Accomack County
Accomack-Northampton County Planning District
Commission
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
Appleseed Nursery
Barrier Islands Center
Bloomers Garden Center
Eastern Shore Alliance for Environmental Education
Eastern Shore Nursery of Virginia
Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge
Eastern Shore Soil and Water Conservation District
Hermitage Farm Nursery
Hortco Garden Center and Nursery
In Full Bloom Landscapers
Maplewood Gardens
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of
Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
Northampton County
Southeastern Expeditions
Sunnyside Garden Center
Tankard Nursery
The Ivy Farms
Thomas Gardens
Town of Chincoteague
The Nature Conservancy
University of Virginia, Anheuser Busch Coastal Research
Center
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Village of Willis Wharf
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program
Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Eastern
Shore Regional Office
Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Office of
Environmental Education
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper
Virginia Master Gardeners
Virginia Master Naturalists

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Laura McKay, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program
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Ann Regan, Office of Environmental Education/Department of
Environmental Quality
Joe Scalf, The Nature Conservancy Coast Reserve
Art Schwarzschild, UVA, Anheuser Busch Coastal Research
Center
Laura Vaughn, Barrier Islands Center
Lou Verner, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
Virginia Witmer, Virginia Coastal Zone Management
Program

Please direct inquiries about the campaign and re-
quests for campaign materials to: Virginia Witmer, Virginia
Coastal Zone Management Program, (804) 698-4320.
Either Virginia or a campaign partner will respond as soon as
possible.

Plant
ES Natives
They're Shore Beautiful!