



ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

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COMMUNITY LEADERS PICK UP THEIR SPADES FOR PLANT ES NATIVES CAMPAIGN

RICHMOND, VA. – This spring the Plant ES Natives campaign is branching out as “community leaders” across the Eastern Shore help spread the message that Eastern Shore native plants are “Shore Beautiful!”

In March, the [Plant ES Natives campaign](#) held its first community leader training at Eastern Shore Community College. Community leaders are those who will assist the campaign in expanding its reach into the broader Shore community through presentations, exhibits and public events. Leaders also will serve as liaisons with local garden centers, including lending a hand in tagging native plants, and will share the word of natives for sale at the centers.

After completing their training, the newly certified community leaders received special lapel pins recognizing their status. They also received copies of the free [guide to Eastern Shore native plants](#) produced by the campaign, “Native Plants of Accomack and Northampton,” to distribute within their communities.

The Plant ES Natives campaign is a multi-year, multi-partner effort launched in April 2009 with funding from the [Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program](#) at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. The community leader program is the latest step in moving this community-based initiative forward.

In addition to providing the colorful new native plant guide, the campaign is running [radio ads](#) on WERS through the end of May urging residents to look for the “Plant ES Natives” plant tag on their next visit to an Accomack or Northampton garden center. Participating garden centers have received banners advertising that they sell Eastern Shore native plants.

To showcase the beauty of Eastern Shore native plants, the campaign is installing and certifying [demonstration gardens](#). Gardens are open to the public in Wachapreague, Willis Wharf, Chincoteague, Oyster, Kiptopeke State Park and the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. Another is in progress at the new medical health center in Onley. Information about these gardens and the native plants used is available on the campaign’s website. The campaign also plans to offer a self-guided tour of the sites this fall as part of a “Plant ES Natives Celebration Day.”

Eastern Shore native plants are encouraged because they have been part of the Shore's local ecology since before John Smith's landing and they are adapted to the Shore's local soils and climate conditions, resulting in many benefits to the region, its residents and migratory birds. Eastern Shore native plants:

- Require less watering and fertilizing than non-natives and are less susceptible to drought conditions. Less watering means conserving potable water supplies for non-watering uses.
- Are often more resistant to insects and disease and thus less likely to need pesticides that may leach into water supplies or run off into shellfish aquaculture farms.
- Provide critical habitat and food for the millions of migratory birds that rely on Virginia's Eastern Shore as a rest stop each spring and fall.
- Help preserve the diversity, beauty and function of the shore's natural ecosystems.

Additional community leader training sessions will be offered for residential gardeners interested in helping with the campaign. To learn more about the campaign and how these native plants are "Shore Beautiful," visit the DEQ website at www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/go-native.html. Or contact Virginia Witmer, the campaign's coordinator at the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program at (804) 698-4320, Virginia.Witmer@deq.virginia.gov, or Laura McKay, program manager for the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program at (804) 698-4323, Laura.McKay@deq.virginia.gov. The campaign also is on [Facebook](#).

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