



New Guide Showcases the Beauty and Variety of Eastern Shore Native Plants

By Virginia Witmer, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program

Confused about which plants are native to Virginia's Eastern Shore? Looking for a quick reference to these plants without having to consult numerous sources?

The *Plant ES Natives* Campaign just released a new guide to help. "Native Plants of Accomack and Northampton" is free, full color and features beautiful color photographs – a rainbow assortment of 88 native flowers, ferns, vine, grasses, shrubs and trees. Included is a description of the species, its growing requirements, along with interesting facts about the plants. For example, did you know that Sneezeweed does not derive its common name from the effects of its pollen, but on the former use of its dried leaves in making snuff, inhaled to cause sneezing that would supposedly rid the body of evil spirits?

An index in the guide provides a list of 199 native plants, determined by state botanists to pre-date Captain John Smith's arrival on the Shore. Eastern Shore natives not only have adapted over thousands years to life on the lower Delmarva, they are an integral part of the Shore's ecology - its coastal forests, fields, salty marshes, sandy beaches. Whether you have a shady, sunny, wet, dry or salty landscape to offer, this guide will direct you to the right plants for your home.

During focus groups held on the Shore in late summer 2008 by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, Shore gardeners were unanimous in expressing their need for a guide. The Virginia CZM Program also distributed a native plant survey in a December 2008 edition of the Eastern Shore News to capture a Shore-wide perspective on the use of native plants. Understanding why residents choose to plant what they do was critical to developing an effective *Plant ES Natives* campaign.

The majority of residents who responded to the written survey said that they plant and care for their trees, shrubs and other plants to *beautify* their property. There also was a strong response to environmental benefits, including feeding birds and butterflies and creating wildlife habitat. Using less water and fertilizer was also a factor in deciding what to plant. These are just a few of the aesthetic, environmental and economic benefits Eastern Shore native plants provide.

The new guide illustrates the campaign's slogan "They're Shore Beautiful!" to great effect and emphasizes the critical role native plants play in the Shore's ecology, especially as one of only a few rest stops for migratory songbirds each spring and fall.

Last April, the *Plant ES Natives* campaign kick-off was held in Willis Wharf at the site of the new Virginia CZM funded wildlife observation platform and a "shoreline" native plant demonstration garden. Since then the campaign has helped install other demonstration sites to showcase the beautiful variety of Eastern Shore native plants, including three sites highlighted in the new guide - a "shady garden" in Chincoteague on the Island Nature Trail, a "maritime forest" in Oyster at the Anheuser-Bush Coastal Research Center, and a "pollinator garden" at the Eastern Shore of VA National Wildlife Refuge.

A number of other demonstration sites are in various stages of completion, including a "healing garden" in Onley the new Rural Health Center. This spring, a native plant pollinator garden and songbird habitat restoration forest will be planted at Kiptopeke State Park on a 25-acre expansion of the park on Route 13, newly acquired with Virginia CZM funds and a donation from singer/songwriter James Taylor.

The Plant ES Natives campaign focuses on supporting the local economy by encouraging residents to ask for and purchase native plants at local garden centers, helping to increase demand and supply. Campaign radio ads on WESR encourage Shore residents to plant natives and look for a green *Plant ES Natives* tag at local garden centers. Gardeners will now also be encouraged to bring along the new guide.

To request your free copy of "Native Plants of Accomack and Northampton", visit the Accomack or Northampton County Cooperative Extension Office or contact Virginia Witmer at virginia.witmer@deq.virginia.gov or 804.698-4320. The guide is also downloadable from the *Plant ES Natives* Campaign website at <http://www.deq.virginia.gov/coastal/go-native.html> .