Plants and Insects: Made for Each Other

Our native flora and fauna evolved together over a long period of time—thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of years—in a complex set of relationships with each other. At the hub of this system are insects, which eat the plants and are eaten in turn by others, making the food web work for all species—including us humans at the "top" of the chain. Although it might sound ideal to have our gardens and landscapes free of insects, it is not so! Achieving this end would quickly result in the loss of most wildlife species and the collapse of the entire ecosystem. Fortunately, our gardens can be both beautiful and full of life at the same time. A healthy landscape is a treat for the senses—with pollinators, butterflies, birds, and interesting ecology to discover. The more biodiversity that is there, the better the balance.

What You Can Do

Every garden matters ~ Every landscape counts.®

Because so much land has been developed and subdivided into ever-smaller parcels, what each of us does at home and in our local communities is critically important. It is exciting, rewarding, and fun to recreate healthy ecosystems.

Here are the key ingredients:

- Plant with an ***emphasis on native plants***
- ***Remove invasive plants*** and dispose of them so they cannot spread further.
- Garden for ***beauty and biodiversity***—reduce lawn area, use organic fertilizers in small amounts, stay away from pesticides.

Grow Native Massachusetts provides resources and educational programs for all. Help us provide free access to our lecture series, outreach, and website by donating or becoming a member. We cannot do it without you.

More Information at GrowNativeMass.org

Made from 100% Recycled Materials & Soy-Based Ink

Mass Cultural Council

Design: Cynthia Frawley Graphic Design,
Edits by J&S Business Products
Photography: Kristin Andres, David Forsyth, Claudia Thompson

Why Native Plants?

Grow Native massachusetts

Every garden matters ~ Every landscape counts®

www.grownativemass.org

What are Native Plants?

In Massachusetts and New England, plant species that grew here before European colonization are characterized as “native” or “indigenous.” They are integral to their home ecosystem and provide the foundation for all life in their region.

The introduction of non-native plants from other continents is relatively recent—beginning only 400 years ago with the colonization of North America, then accelerating with the growth of transportation and globalization.

Our understanding of the disruptive effects this has on local ecosystems is just beginning. Not until the 20th century did we recognize plant or animal “invasiveness,” and the importance of native plants to local food webs is only starting to be studied.

“Naturalized” plants are exotic (non-native) species introduced by humans that can now sustain populations on their own. But even if they have been established here for several hundred years, this does not make them native. They have not had the much longer evolutionary history required to be fully integrated into local ecosystems.

Insects are the primary diet of songbirds in spring and summer, and only native plants host the rich variety of insects that these birds depend upon.

birds

Native plants provide critical food for birds. In addition to berries and seeds, natives host the insect life that is essential to the avian diet and especially to birds raising their young. Without native plants, we simply wouldn’t have birds.

habitat fragmentation

Habitat fragmentation is one of the biggest threats to wildlife and biodiversity. But the great news is: You can recreate essential habitat right at home by planting more native plants and managing your landscape with ecologically sound practices.

organic gardening

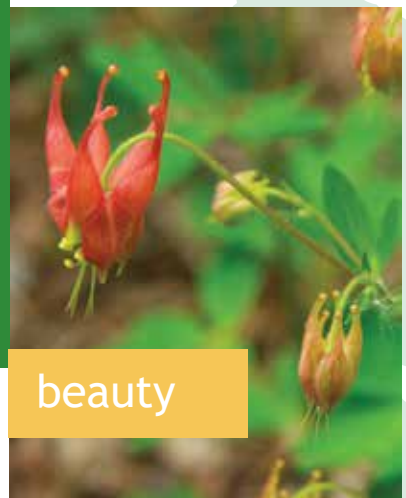
Organic food production cannot take place without healthy, native plant habitat. Growing our food supply without pesticides and herbicides requires the predators and pollinators that this habitat nurtures.

butterflies

The majority of butterfly species can only reproduce on native plants, and typically can only use certain plant species or families. For example, tiger swallowtails can reproduce on native cherries, which also happen to be an excellent source of nectar for the adults.

invasive plants

Not all non-native plants become invasive, but far too many do. The majority (85%) of all invasive woody plants in the United States are escapees from our gardens—plants originally introduced as ornamentals in the horticultural trade.



beauty

Massachusetts has approximately 1,800 species of native plants and they are all beautiful!