



Wild Ones Native Garden Design Richmond

Design by Pete Corbino,
District Native Plants



Designer Statement

In this sample design, I have offered specifications for all the areas of the landscape around the house. I find it useful to work from a broad, anchoring vision, and when planning the landscape, it's worthwhile to think about the whole landscape, but it can also be both pragmatic and helpful to "eat the apple one bite at a time." It's really easy to get overwhelmed when you are excited about a big native plant landscape project. A full landscape design, like this sample, lends a sense of coherence, gives you a big picture view, and can help you keep your plantings legible and coherent. In execution, however, it often works best to use the design as a reference, deciding which part of the project you wish to start with, taking it in phases, and adjusting elements of the design as you go to suit the needs of your site, your budget, and your preferences.

Each part of your landscape can mesh with other parts if you plant in stages and plant purposefully. I believe a good design should also offer a snapshot of some of the plant communities present in your region. A great way to start is with small, big-impact projects like establishing trees and shrubs or by removing some lawn to put in a small pollinator meadow. These kinds of projects will give you a starting point from which you can continue.

To emphasize the importance of maintaining urban canopy, the sample design incorporates several existing trees (based on details from an actual site in Richmond) and develops a coordinated set of plantings that will fit a variety of site conditions, including conditions that will change over time.

For the best support of wildlife, I believe we should plant as many keystone species as we can, and to the extent feasible, plant for all of the seasons. Consider planting your property as a "woodland edge"—particularly if you already have some canopy trees. The sample design has been envisioned as a woodland edge, which is a spot where you can expect to see both flowering understory trees and large flowering shrubs. This type of planting is super important for wildlife as it provides food and shelter for many species. Birds, for example, rely heavily on a dense shrub layer for food and shelter. A woodland edge also transitions well to a more open area like a meadow or a pollinator garden. When planting for wildlife, remember to plant all levels of the landscape (an herbaceous layer, a sub-shrub layer, a shrub layer, and understory trees to complement the canopy trees). Layering your landscape is aesthetically appealing, but it is critical for supporting wildlife.

I like to plant smaller plants but more of them. Planting small plants around existing trees is key as you want to disturb roots as little as possible on existing trees and shrubs. Perennials especially grow really fast and a small perennial or grass even in plug size can be full-sized in one season or flower depending on species. The more plants you get in the less weeding and maintenance you can expect over time. You can strike a pretty good balance with planting density and budget by



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sticking to the smaller plants. A lot of native nurseries have plugs available, but they almost all will have quarts, and sometimes nurseries will offer gallons and quarts of the same species. I almost always go with the quart, as it's more economical and for many species it catches up to the gallon and beyond in one growing season.

Always choose healthy plants in any size. I will plant various sizes of shrubs and trees, but often a larger tree and medium-sized shrub pots. For the most part, I recommend planting up to a #15 (15 gallon) potted tree. There are several options in tree sizes, but I try and limit size to #15 (assuming it is properly potted and not bursting out of the pot). There is an argument that the smaller the tree is, the quicker it will establish—and in theory, a small tree will catch up to a larger one that has to spend a lot of time figuring out its roots. I believe this is generally true, especially of B&B (balled-and-burlapped) trees and shrubs that often are severely root pruned when they are dug up and bagged. I suggest that something as large as a #15 potted tree with all its roots present offers a good compromise between initial size and overall health. Also, remembering site considerations, you will not want to plant a large potted plant or tree in the critical root zone of an existing tree.

Ultimately, these choices are influenced by both budget constraints and site conditions. It also is helpful to remember that, in time, plants will find where they want to be. You can increase or decrease this natural progression by planting faster- or slower-spreading/reseeding plants based on your preference. For this design, I included the underutilized common violet which is a workhorse and will help fill in tough spots all over the landscape. The lawn care industry has waged war against this plant which is a shame as it has beauty and value for wildlife and humans alike in many ways.

I'd also like to add a note on lawns and lawn alternatives. For this design, I have chosen to plant native plants throughout the landscape. I recognize that some turf may be necessary due to HOA rules or a client's recreational preferences. Turf grasses have been specifically engineered to be used in high traffic situations, and if one desires to play soccer in the backyard, there probably isn't an adequate native lawn substitute. The important thing to consider is what is the intent of the space. Can we plant enough native plants, choose to refrain from fertilizers and other chemicals on the remaining play turf, and foster a space that supports wildlife? I think the answer is yes. I would also offer the following: How does a woodland play area sound to you for your kids? Instead of running around on grass, can they run among the plants and trees? Perhaps you put down some playground wood chips, which will turn to soil in time and foster the growth of reseeded wildflowers as they use the space to play. If the area isn't going to receive extremely high foot traffic, other herbaceous plants may make a good lawn alternative that won't have nearly the maintenance issues as turf grasses. These plants include some of our native sedges. Planting a sedge lawn, especially in a space where you often find mushy turf, may solve the problem of mushy turf as the deeper sedge roots will help absorb more water. Planting a native-plant lawn

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alternative will also help change a relatively impermeable space into a more permeable one, reducing water runoff from the area. Some low-growing wildflowers and groundcovers can take some foot traffic. In the end, if you leave turf for a play area, I recommend letting it go to weeds and just keeping it cut short to allow plants to move in (like the common violet!) that can tolerate the harsh conditions and provide dense coverage.

I hope this design inspires you to create gardens that work for wildlife and humans alike.

-Pete Corbino, District Native Plants

About the Designer

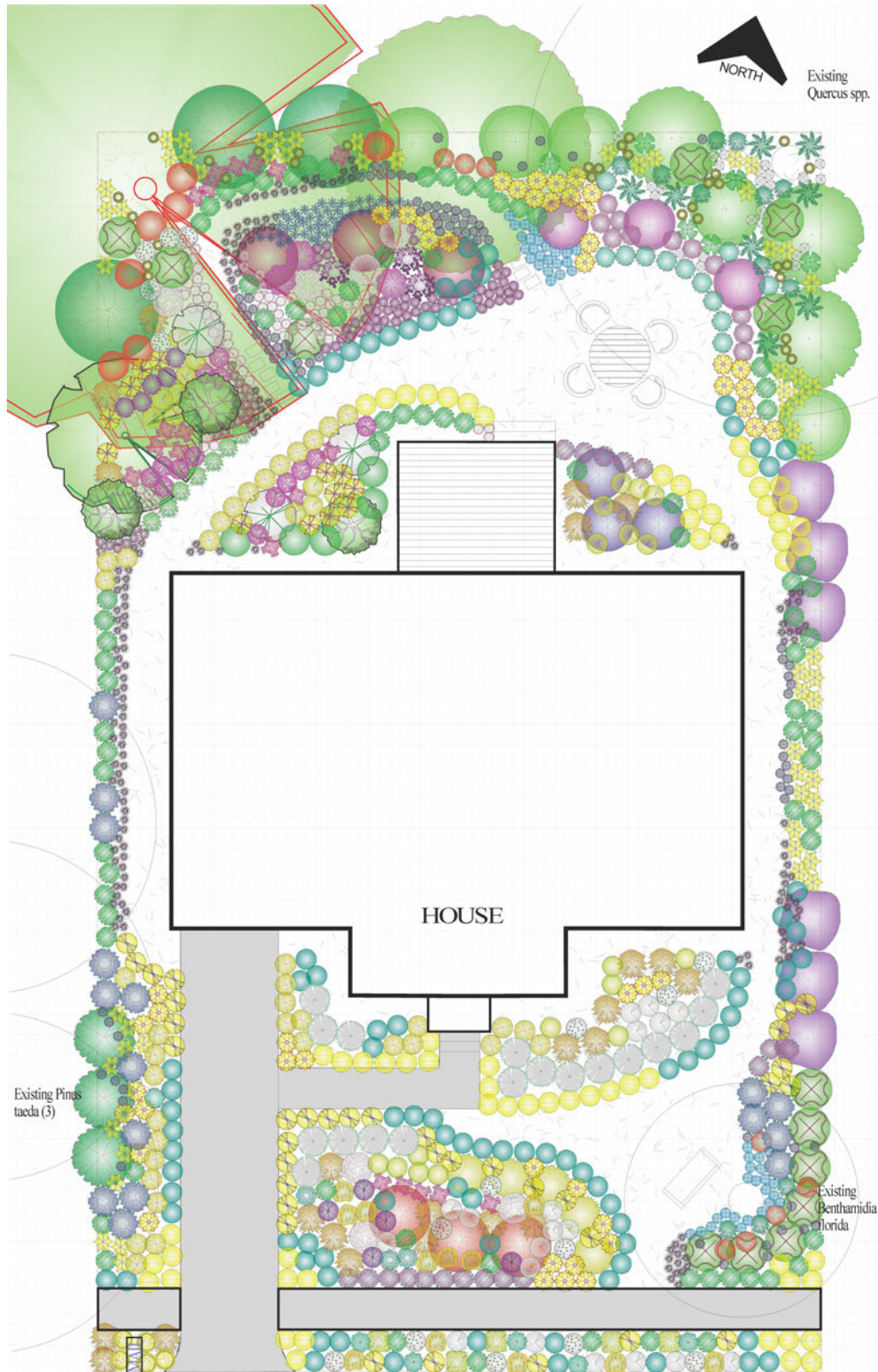


Pete Corbino was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Virginia. He currently lives in Fairfax County and is the owner of District Native Plants, where he provides native plant consultation, design, and installation services to clients in Virginia and the Washington D.C area. He has also worked with Florida Native Plants and Landscaping in Sarasota, Florida. He is passionate about nature and the outdoors, and he enjoys spending as much time outside as possible. He is an ISA Certified Arborist®, a certified Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional, and a contractor with the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP). Pete's goal is to help people bring nature back to the land that they steward by planting for wildlife.



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Legend		
Botanical Name	Common Name	Qty
Flower, Fern		
Polystichum acrostichoides	Christmas Fern	8
Flower, Grass		
Carex crinita	Long-fringed sedge	7
Carex flaccosperma	Sedge, Blue wood	12
Carex rosea	Rosey sedge	7
Elymus virginicus	Wild rye	79
Eragrostis spectabilis	Purple Love Grass	18
Schizachyrium scoparium	Lil bluestem	88
Sorghastrum nutans	Grass, Indian	23
Tripsacum dactyloides	Facahatchee grass	5
Flower, Perennial		
Aquilegia canadensis	Wild columbine	8
Asclepias incarnata	Swamp milkweed	14
Asclepias tuberosa	Butterfly Weed	12
Conoclinium coelestinum	Blue mistflower	53
Coreopsis lanceolata	Coreopsis, lanceleaf	63
Coreopsis verticillata	Coreopsis, Threadleaf	35
Erigeron philadelphicus	Daisy Fleabane, White	79
Eupatorium sessilifolium	Boneset	7
Eurybia divaricata	White wood aster	24
Eutrochium fistulosum	Joe Pye Weed	3
Fragaria virginiana	Strawberry	32
Geranium maculatum	Wild geranium	11
Helianthus divaricata	Woodland sunflower	60
Heliopsis helianthoides	Ox eye false sunflower	5
Iris virginica	Virginia blue flag iris	47
Liatris spicata	Blazing star	5
Lobelia cardinalis	Cardinal Flower	7
Monarda punctata	Dotted horsemint	20
Penstemon digitalis	Beardtongue, Foxglove	19
Phlox, divaricata	Woodland phlox	46
Pycnanthemum tenuifolium	Slender mountain mint	5
Rudbeckia fulgida	Black eye susan	47
Rudbeckia laciniata	Cutleaf coneflower	13
Salvia lyrata	Lyre-leaf sage	170
Solidago caesia	Bluestem goldenrod	32
Solidago juncea	Early goldenrod	10
Solidago nemoralis	Gray goldenrod	38
Solidago odora	Anise-scented goldenrod	5
Solidago rugosa	Rough goldenrod	17
Symphyotrichum cordifolium	Blue wood aster	13
Symphyotrichum laeve	Smooth blue aster	3
Symphyotrichum lateriflorum	Calico aster	16
Symphyotrichum novae-angliae	Aster, New England	5
Veronia noveboracensis	NY Ironweed	3
Viola sororia	Violet	89
Shrub, Deciduous		
Aronia melanocarpa	Chokeberry, Black	3
Callicarpa americana	Beautyberry	6
Ceanothus americanus	New Jersey Tea	18
Clethra alnifolia	Summersweet, Sweet Pepperbush	3
Gaylussacia baccata	Huckleberry	16
Hypericum prolificum	Shrubby St-John's wort	5
Itea virginica	Sweetspire, Virginia	3
Physocarpus opulifolius	Ninebark	3
Rhododendron periclymenoides	Pinxter azalea	3
Sambucus canadensis	Elderberry, American	3
Viburnum acerifolium	Maple leaved viburnum	13
Viburnum dentatum	Viburnum, Arrowwood	5
Shrub, Evergreen		
Kalmia latifolia	Laurel, Mountain	3
Morella cerifera	Waxmyrtle	3
Tree, Deciduous		
Asimina triloba	Pawpaw	3
Cercis canadensis	Redbud	1
Magnolia virginiana	Magnolia, Sweet Bay	1
Quercus falcata	Southern Red Oak	1

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Design Overview

The region surrounding Virginia's capital is a beautiful and ecologically important part of the Commonwealth that also lies at the crossroads of two major geographic and ecological divisions. This part of Virginia transitions from the Mid-Atlantic region to the Southeastern region, and Richmond also sits at the Fall Line (the geological boundary between the Piedmont and the Coastal Plain), which marks an ecological transition zone between central and eastern Virginia. The region also includes several important rivers that feed into the Chesapeake Bay, and partly because of this, Central Virginia's flora has been impacted by humans for millennia. Following European colonization, however, much of the land was heavily farmed, with the result that much of the native forest and savanna were lost to agriculture. More recently, as agriculture has moved west, the area has seen an increase in successional forest. Planting regionally native plants is a great way to support wildlife and help buffer the Chesapeake Bay in an area that continues to see human population growth and, consequently, endure continued impacts from shrinking and increasingly fragmented natural areas. Wherever possible, I have chosen appropriate companion plants, and this design relies on a combination of Coastal and Piedmont species. For example, to complement an existing dogwood, I have included some companion perennials and graminoids that you might find with dogwoods in their natural habitats.

In the short term, you can't go wrong with plants that are found in the regional plant community where your landscape sits; but as our climate changes, it is becoming prudent to consider which plants will better tolerate more extremes. Virginia is already known for hot and humid summers, but as our world grows hotter, whether Virginia will be hotter and *wetter* remains to be seen. Looking ahead, it's smart to consider the potential for much hotter and drier times, so it makes sense to consider the native species that are best adapted to withstand increasing temperatures and potential droughts. For example, when selecting among various oak species, we can consider the natural ranges of the available native species. Virginia is generally toward the southern end of the natural range of *Quercus rubra* (northern red oak) and generally toward the northern end of range of *Quercus falcata* (southern red oak). In this area, I recommend planting the species that may be more tolerant of hotter conditions, which in this case is *Quercus falcata*.

The changing climate makes it even more important to support wildlife and find ways to be more self-sufficient. To that end, I like to incorporate edible and medicinal plants into designs for landscapes that also provide a lot of wildlife benefits. Many native plants have been used for food and medicine, some for millennia. Some plants that I have included in this design are elderberry, chokeberry, huckleberry, strawberry, and *Vaccinium* spp. The rose family and the *Vaccinium* genus are two great examples of woodland-edge fruiting shrubs that provide a lot of wildlife benefit (think specialist bees like the southeastern blueberry bee (*Habropoda laboriosa*)!) while also providing fruits for humans.

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Another important design consideration is ensuring the landscape works well as a legible and interesting setting for a human habitation. For example, this design places the small native shrub *Ceanothus americanus* (New Jersey tea) in front of the house. The choice of this shrub gives some structure and formality to the very front but also reflects a deliberate selection of a short species that will not block windows or eventually lead to overgrown shrubs giving the appearance of "eating the house." To follow a coastal theme, I chose some medium-sized *Callicarpa americana* (American beautyberry) for the left side of the house, but for the area under the existing oaks in the northeast corner, I chose a combination of species suitable for dry shade like those you might find in acidic oak-hickory woods. To help create a forest feeling and some privacy in the back, larger shrubs and a redbud were also included in the design.

Site Conditions

This sample design has been developed for a site with a general southern exposure, which puts the maximum sun exposure possible on the landscape. The design also assumes some existing native trees that are common in the Richmond area. Existing trees are useful when planning for a site because they offer hints toward the plant communities that will work well in that location. For example, in this design:

- A row of *Pinus taeda* (Loblolly pine) trees in the neighbor's property on the west side suggests the site is located on a remnant of pine flatwood. If so, we may expect sandy acidic soil.
- The backyard also has several oak trees (*Quercus* spp.). Oaks are common canopy trees across much of the Greater Richmond area and may indicate relatively dry, acidic soil. Oaks also constitute a long-lived, powerhouse plant that supports hundreds of species. The design for this area incorporates a new canopy tree, *Quercus falcata* (southern red oak) in the northwest corner of the backyard, where it will eventually generate significant shade. The southern red oak was selected because here, toward the northern end of its natural range, it may be expected to be more resilient to climate change moving forward and offer the best chance of long-term success. Maintaining and increasing the canopy as much as possible is beneficial for many reasons.
- The front yard boasts a specimen of the state tree, *Benthamidia florida* (flowering dogwood, previously called *Cornus florida*). Flowering dogwood is both a classic landscaping tree and a dominant native understory tree found in many plant communities in the region. The presence of a mature, healthy dogwood tree is a good sign.

Note: If you have, or intend to plant, a dogwood tree, it is helpful to know that dogwood anthracnose, a foliar disease, is present in the region, and understand the practical steps you can



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take to keep your tree healthy. If you are uncertain about the health of any mature trees on your property, before investing in new landscaping it may be worthwhile to have an arborist visit to check on them and provide advice on how proper tree care can maintain them in a healthy state.

Given the pre-existing trees, the design considers the sun conditions around the trees together with the overall southern exposure when thinking of companion plants and what the soil and moisture conditions will be like under and around the trees.

Getting Started: Prep Work

Prepping a site for new plants is usually straightforward as long as the soil doesn't need decompaction. Even if you will not do the installation yourself, it is wise for homeowners to note the sun, soil, and moisture characteristics throughout the space. This knowledge will help you understand the plant selections in this sample design and adjust them as needed to best fit the conditions of your site. It also is important to carefully remove any invasive plants and non-native vegetation you choose not to retain.

Some Practicalities

For long-term success, consider some important things before you begin work:

- **Contact Virginia 811.** Call or file online (<https://va811.com/>) at least three days before any digging project. Utility lines will be marked free of charge; lines must be clearly re-marked if weeks or months pass before digging begins. If you hire a contractor, they are required to contact 811, but as the landowner, you must confirm lines are marked before work starts.
- **Private utility lines.** Virginia 811 does not mark privately installed lines such as water/sewer connections to the house, lines to detached structures, invisible fences, satellite or dish cables, propane tanks, or private wells. Factor these in when planning.
- **Herbivores.** Expect deer and rabbits to browse. Protect young plants with liquid deterrents or fencing until they are established.
- **Chemicals.** Stop all chemical applications. Avoid spraying for mosquitoes and do not apply herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, or synthetic fertilizers. These harm pollinators, wildlife, and soil health. If neighbors spray, you may need to have a frank conversation about how it impacts your shared ecosystem.

Lawn Removal

Lawns shed rainwater quickly, sending runoff into streets and storm drains. Native plantings, with deep roots, absorb rainfall and protect water quality. Reducing lawn area supports wildlife and helps protect the Chesapeake Bay from nutrient and chemical runoff.



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This sample design eliminates lawn entirely, but if you wish to retain a small play or gathering area, consider sustainable groundcovers or sedges instead of turf. Lawn removal can also be phased to keep projects manageable.

Common methods include Manual sod cutting removes turf and is an effective method that reduces grass regrowth and solarization or smothering. Ensure the grass is completely dead before planting. Whatever method you choose, the goal is the same: replace monoculture turf with diverse native plantings.

Working With This Design

1. **Get inspiration.** Observe your existing site and nearby landscapes. Central Virginia's transition between Piedmont and Coastal Plain offers diverse plant options. Use the sample design as a guide but adapt to your site.
2. **Assess sun, soil, and water.** Track shade patterns, drainage, soil type, pH, and moisture. Consider soil tests or amendments if your site was disturbed by development.
3. **Inventory existing plants.** Keep mature native canopy trees whenever possible. Remove invasive plants, and consider replacing exotic shrubs with natives. Resources like Plant RVA Natives and the Virginia Native Plant Society provide helpful references.
4. **Expect evolution.** As canopy trees grow, light conditions shift. Meadows trend toward grasses over time. Native gardens are dynamic; you can hold the design steady with care, or allow natural succession to shape it. Always remove invasives.

Embrace Plant Communities

Assemble groups of companion plants that reflect natural communities and thrive in your site conditions. Plant densely and favor smaller sizes for easier installation, quicker establishment, and lower cost. Aim for 75–90% cover at maturity to minimize weeds and erosion.

In Central Virginia, both Piedmont and Coastal Plain species are appropriate. This design includes species from both ecoregions.

Value Straight Species, Value the Canopy

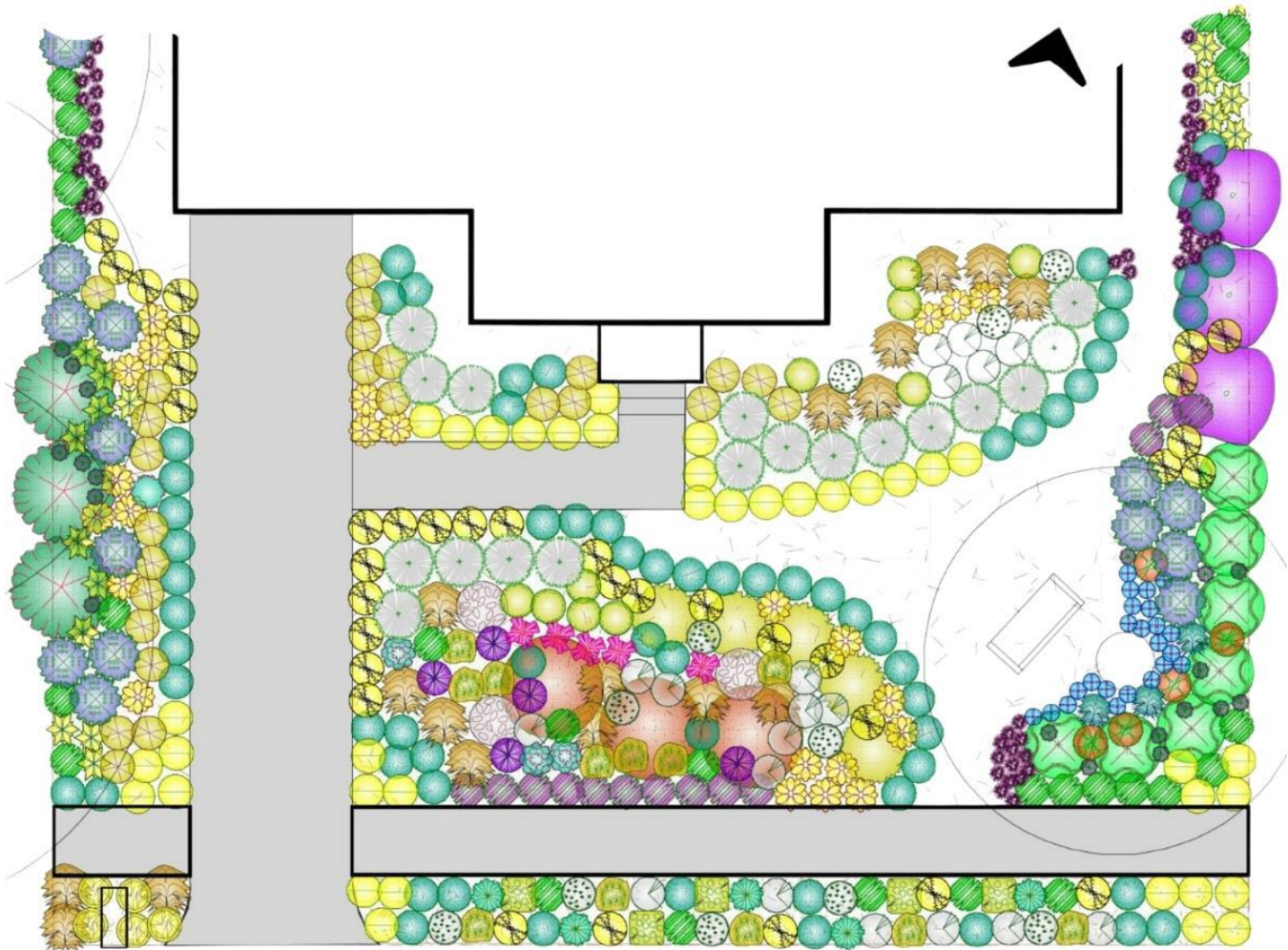
Favor straight species (true native forms) to preserve genetic diversity and maximize wildlife benefit. Maintain or plant canopy trees whenever possible—urban canopy reduces heat islands, improves air quality, and supports equity by cooling neighborhoods.

If space is limited or utilities interfere, use understory trees. Remember that newly planted trees won't provide shade for years; plant companions for sun initially and adapt the landscape as shade increases.

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Key Features

Front Yard



A small meadow-like area is planned for the sunniest spot in front of the house, and this theme is continued into the hellstrip. When planting in spaces like this it is useful to plant species for blooms throughout the season but also helpful to be aware that—over time—the grass species will tend to dominate the space. Over time, as the plantings age in, you will find you have more grasses than wildflowers. That said, in meadow plantings it’s advisable to plant at least 20% grass species, whose inflorescences also offer beauty and benefits to wildlife. If you wish to keep more wildflowers in the mix over time, you can do some active gardening from time to time (dividing, replacing, or moving plants), but if you like the look of the grasses and enjoy watching the natural succession of meadow plants, it is also fine to let the beds evolve naturally. Some of the species highlighted in this area are:



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Physocarpus opulifolius (ninebark) and *Ceanothus americanus* (New Jersey tea). The *Physocarpus* is a relatively common larger shrub in the rose family. It offers copious and fragrant spring blooms, and its dense habit and subsequent berries are great for wildlife. It does occur in meadows, and gives some visual height to this space. The *Ceanothus* continues the theme of the front garden bed as a meadow-occurring, compact shrub that also offers fragrant spring blooms.

Schizachyrium scoparium (little bluestem), *Elymus virginicus* (wild rye), *Eragrostis spectabilis* (purple love grass), and *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indian grass) are included as meadow grasses. The *Schizachyrium* and *Eragrostis* will stay smaller and can be used effectively on edge areas. *Sorghastrum* is a large and graceful clumping grass that adds good height and texture to the space. The *Elymus* is a cool-season grass that will complement the earlier-blooming wildflowers. It is also one of the most shade-tolerant grasses.

Liatris spicata (dense blazing star); *Symphotrichum laeve* (smooth aster); *Symphotrichum lateriflorum* (calico aster); *Asclepias tuberosa* (butterfly weed); *Eupatorium sessilifolium* (boneset); *Solidago juncea* (early goldenrod); *Monarda punctata* (spotted beebalm); *Penstemon digitalis* (foxglove beardtongue); both *Coreopsis lanceolata* (lance-leaved coreopsis) and *Coreopsis verticillata* (whorled coreopsis); *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium* (slender mountain mint); *Solidago odora* (anise-scented goldenrod) and *Rudbeckia fulgida* (orange coneflower). This mixture of plants ensures that something is always blooming, providing pollen and nectar. The *Eupatorium* is an important component of most wet and dry meadows, and the *Coreopsis verticillata* extends bloom time, as it generally blooms later than the *lanceolata*.

Mailbox Area and Plantings by the Front Entrance

The full-sun meadow theme continues by the mailbox. I encourage homeowners to feel free to use tall plants and grasses if you desire to build up the structure around the mailbox. *Heliopsis helianthoides* (false sunflower) is a sunflower relative that tends to bloom after *Coreopsis* and before the other sunflowers, and can be used anywhere there is full sun. I use it in meadow plantings frequently.

Also continuing the full-sun plantings, the beds to the east and west of the walkway that leads to the front door include a hedge of *Ceanothus americana* (New Jersey tea), which gives some structure and a hint of formality to the gardens. However, these beds emphasize shorter wildflowers and grasses so as not to obscure the front of the house. An additional species used in this space is *Solidago nemoralis* (gray goldenrod). A common shorter goldenrod, it can be used in spaces where shorter plants are desired or even on an edge or border.

Front Garden, West Side

The garden to the west of the driveway is designed for part-shade conditions because of the existing pine trees, and features plants that are typically a component of pine flatwoods or acidic



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oak intermediary forests. Areas under pines will have some shelter from the sun but won't have as much seasonal shade as areas under deciduous trees. Shrubs and forbs selected for this area include:

- *Kalmia latifolia* (mountain laurel) shrubs, which are common evergreen heaths found throughout Virginia.
- *Gaylussacia baccata* (black huckleberry), which is an important blueberry relative—a small edible huckleberry that is clonal and generally more available than some of the other native blueberries.
- *Viola sororia* (common violet), an underutilized native wildflower that will grow in pretty much any condition and readily spreads, which can make them super useful. I like this habit so I plant it expecting it to reseed readily. Violets can even make a green mulch, and generally do not impede the growth of other native plants with which they share a bed.
- *Helianthus divaricatus* (woodland sunflower), a sunflower that is pretty shade tolerant. This plant can get tall, so I have placed it with the *Kalmias*. When adapting this design, note that areas under pines wouldn't have as much seasonal shade as areas under deciduous trees.

Front Garden, East Side

The plan for the east side of the front garden makes use of the existing dogwood tree (*Benthamidia florida*). Here are shade-tolerant wildflowers and a few sedges, as well as a back line of *Viburnum acerifolium* (maple-leaf viburnum), which is smaller, flowering viburnum common throughout Virginia that produces berries, which are great winter food for birds. Additional species to highlight include:

- *Salvia lyrata* (lyreleaf sage), which has been planted on the edge as it has shade tolerance.
- *Phlox divaricata* (woodland phlox) and *Aquilegia canadensis* (Eastern red columbine) are included as spring ephemerals that will emerge early and bloom as the trees are leafing out.
- *Carex flaccosperma* (blue wood sedge), which is a medium-sized clumping sedge that enjoys dry shade. This *carex* has a very attractive blue-green leaf and looks good with the other shade-tolerant plants in this spot.

Pathways

Before moving back into other areas of the design, it's worth taking a moment to consider pathways. This design includes hardscaped paths (e.g., the front walkway and sidewalk by the hellstrip) softer surfaces, and pathways (e.g., the seating areas under the Dogwood tree and off the deck, and the softer pathways alongside the foundations of the house and deck) and an access path leading into the deep shade garden under the largest trees. Some considerations for pathways include:



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- Hardscaped surfaces typically include impervious surfaces, which will affect drainage (and can help dictate which plants will work best in those areas).
- Softer surfaces, like wood chips, leave your options open and give a natural aesthetic to the landscape. Wood chip paths also can make good buffer spots between properties or landscape features.
- Oak, locust, and hickory chips will break down slowly, whereas playground chips are hardwood chips that tend to hold onto each other.
- Paver sand paths also can provide a nice aesthetic. Often used in coastal areas amongst the pines, they fit in nicely on a generally sandy site.
- I like to reuse old flagstones and drop them on the mulch, as shown in the small path into the shade garden in the back.

Edging along pathways can be useful to help keep them defined/tidy. Many options are available to suit individuals' tastes and budgets.

Side Yards

In many residential neighborhoods, the sides of the property can be shady, so the design incorporates plants that can do well if there is shade along the east side of the house. A mix of taller and shorter grasses and wildflowers generates interest across the seasons, and some shorter shrubs—here including huckleberry—have been included to provide continuity and legibility as the eye tracks back through the landscape. Highlighted plants in this area include:

East Side of House

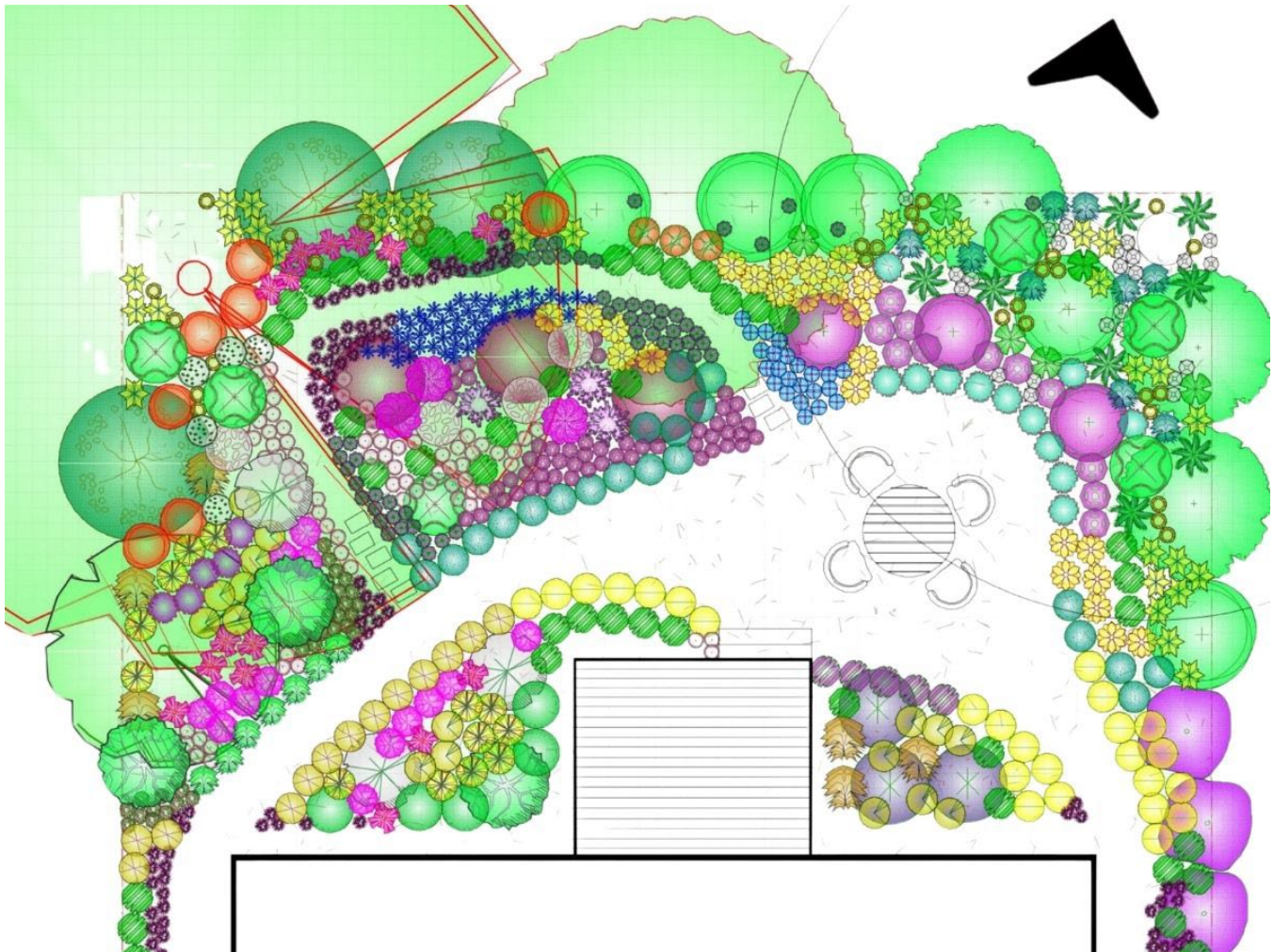
Callicarpa americana (American beautyberry) is grouped in threes toward the front and the back of the house, which creates a repeating pattern that helps people recognize the intentionality of the design. Beautyberry is a classic shade-tolerant shrub that is frequently found in the Coastal plain and is popular for its clusters of magenta berries that last well into the winter. It produces berries on new growth, and can be pruned as needed in late winter or very early spring (before new growth begins), both to simulate the browsing the shrub would sustain from animals in the wild, and to retain a desirable size and shape. Tips on pruning are given in the maintenance section. The berries are not the tastiest first choice menu item for hungry birds, so they tend to be left for later, but they do offer a helpful food source during the leaner, later months.

Gaylussacia baccata (black huckleberry), a host plant for the red-spotted purple butterfly (*Limenitis arthemis*), Henry's Elfin butterfly (*Callophrys henrici*), and huckleberry sphinx (*Paonias astylus*), and also a source of food and shelter for other wildlife. Mature specimens typically reach a height and spread of 1 to 3 feet, a manageable size that makes them good choices to add some layering to a narrow bed.

West Side of House

As on the east side of the house, using some tallish grasses that won't crowd the relatively narrow space helps provide a nice divider with the adjacent property while providing some habitat. Noting the row of pines in the neighbor's yard I chose a coastal pine flatwood theme for the area. This simple planting includes a row of *Salvia lyrata* (Llyreleaf sage) in front of a backdrop of *Elymus virginicus* (wild rye) and *Kalmia latifolia* (mountian laurel). A trail of *Coreopsis vericillata* (threadleaf coreopsis) on the south and *Solidago nemoralis* (gray goldenrod) to the north visually blend the path from the front yard to the backyard, respectively.

Backyard



Deck Area

The east side of the deck offers another opportunity for a diverse planting. In this design, the bed is anchored by three *Aronia melanocarpa* (black chokeberry), another common, medium-sized shrub. In the rose family, black chokeberry produces clusters of large, edible berries, the



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astrigent tartness of which gives rise to its common name. It is commonly cultivated in Europe where selections are grown for fruit used to make jams and jellies. Indeed, chokeberry may likely be an important fruit of the future as it is tolerant of heat, drought and changing weather conditions. *Aronia arbutifolia* (Red chokeberry) also is available, native in the Richmond area, and could be used in this spot, but red chokeberry may grows a little larger, and black chokeberry may be slightly easier to obtain from commercial sources.

A spot on the immediate west side of the deck is well-drained but remains moist. Here, I included some plants that will benefit from the moisture and sun. Included are:

- *Magnolia virginiana* (sweetbay magnolia), which is evergreen to semi-evergreen in the region and is found in wetlands as an important understory shrub or tree.
- *Sambucus canadensis* (common elderberry), the "Elder Mother," a very fast-growing and clonal wetland shrub that produces clusters of white flowers and purple berries that are relished by birds. Elderberry also is an important medicinal plant.
- *Itea virginica* (Virginia sweetspire), another medium-sized shrub commonly found throughout the region.
- *Tripsacum dactyloides* (eastern gamma grass, also called Facahatchee grass), a very large clumping grass found in floodplains in the region.
- *Rudbeckia laciniata* (cutleaf coneflower), a very tall Rudbeckia that is found in wetlands and produces copious, multiple-headed stalks of flowers.
- *Asclepias incarnata* (swamp milkweed), a classic and important milkweed for sites that combine sun and moisture. Many people like to plant as much milkweed as possible to support monarch migration. Several native milkweeds are available to suit specific conditions, and it is a good idea to include a variety of milkweed species in our landscapes to increase the likelihood that monarchs will find a suitable food source when needed to support them throughout their lifecycle. This design uses both *Asclepias incarnata* (here) and *Asclepias tuberosa* (in the sunnier front yard). It is also important to group multiple specimens of each milkweed type together. This helps the monarch females find the plants and lay more eggs, because Monarchs have evolved to typically lay a single egg on each milkweed plant.
- *Solidago rugosa* (roughstem goldenrod), a wetland-occurring goldenrod, is also included here and offers late-season color and nectar.

Northwest Corner

Opposite the deck on the west side, the plantings begin to transition toward the area under the new *Quercus falcata* (southern red oak). Here, plantings include:



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- *Erigeron philadelphicus* (fleabane), a smaller clonal wildflower found in many conditions but particularly in moist sun.
- *Carex crinita*, a large wetland sedge.
- *Fragaria virginiana* planted as a groundcover together with the elderberries. Wild strawberry readily spreads, is semi-evergreen, and provides edible fruit (if you get to it in time).

Planting a new canopy tree like a southern red oak is a legacy contribution to the environment. Keeping the growth of the new oak in mind, this part of the design includes wildflowers and shrubs that have both sun and shade tolerance, which will enable them to handle the changes in the landscape over time. Over several decades, this space will evolve to become quite shady. Highlights of this planting bed include:

- *Morella cerifera* (southern wax myrtle), a large evergreen shrub with glossy leaves and a dense growing habit. It will act as a large buffer shrub on the property line. This is a classic coastal plain shrub that can grow in pretty much any condition.
- *Lobelia cardinalis* (cardinal flower), a great hummingbird plant, also does really well in both sun and shade. In shady conditions it also can tolerate drier conditions than it would normally prefer in natural areas.

An informal woodland path takes advantage of more consistent moisture in this shady area and features some larger wetland wildflower species along with an edge that uses smaller clonal wetland species. Later-blooming perennials offer pollinator support, and the combination of plants provides both useful focal points and some height and a sense of privacy in this area. Included are:

- *Clethra alnifolia* (sweet pepperbush), a larger shrub found in the region that thrives in wetland conditions in sun and shade.
- *Veronia noveboracensis* (New York ironweed).
- *Eutrochium fistulosum* (Joe-pye weed), a tall and attractive pollinator powerhouse that draws butterflies, skippers, native bees, hummingbirds, and beneficial wasps, and also acts as a host plant for the caterpillars of several native moths.
- *Eupatorium sessilifolium* (boneset), echoing the use of boneset in the front.
- *Iris Virginia* (Virginia blue flag iris), a common wetland species that does well in some shade.
- *Conoclinium coelestinum* (blue mistflower), a lovely plant and prolific reseeder that will help fill in spots and outcompete weeds.



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Northeast Corner

The rear north corner of the property is organized around the shade of an existing large oak. The species selected incorporate some you may find in an acidic oak-hickory community. The plantings also include keystone species like asters and goldenrods that will provide late-season blooms. Highlighted species include:

- *Viburnum dentatum* (Arrowwood viburnum), a very common large viburnum shrub that thrives in dry shade.
- *Asimina triloba* (paw-paw), continuing the theme of edible natives. Paw-paw has a very large, unique fruit and is well adapted to dense shade as an understory tree.
- *Symphyotrichum cordifolium* (blue wood aster), a shade-tolerant, small aster species.
- *Solidago caesia* (blue stem goldenrod), a very shade tolerant goldenrod and a common component of shaded oak communities.
- *Eurybia divaricata* (white wood aster), another aster that is clonal, spreads readily, and is extremely shade-tolerant. White wood aster is one of those end-of-season blooming asters that will bloom prolifically, even in the densest shade. Colonies of this plant will bring bee species into the dense shaded understory, which is quite a contrast to where we may think about typically seeing them buzzing around full- sun wildflowers.
- *Polystichum acrostichoides* (Christmas fern), a common fern in many shaded environments
- *Carex flaccosperma* (Blue wood sedge) and *Carex rosea* (rosy sedge) add texture within the understory layers of the planting. *Carex rosea* offers a very attractive, fine leaf blade, a striking contrast to the *flaccosperma*'s big, blue-green blades.

Maintenance

There is no such thing as a maintenance-free landscape. Our native plantings and naturalistic gardens are still, at their core, managed gardens that will always require some care, but with native plant landscapes the most effort is usually required during the establishment of new plantings.

Watering

Be prepared to water plants through establishment. In general, the smaller plant the less time it needs to establish. In a new landscape, I would err on the side of caution and be prepared to water all new plants daily through a hot and dry summer. Larger shrubs and trees may take a year or two, or even more, to establish. As long as the soil drains well, I think it's pretty hard to overwater most plants, so I usually recommend watering them if you have any doubt about soil moisture. As you get more comfortable with the landscape and the plants, you may be able to play it by ear to a greater extent.



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After a full season of establishment and winter of dormancy, there is a good chance most larger trees and shrubs will be much less sensitive to drought. At this point it is wise to be prepared to begin watering them again, but if you are comfortable watching them, just be responsive to their needs and use clues like soil moisture to help guide you.

Supplemental Watering

Once established, properly placed natives usually will not need supplemental water or fertilizer, but it is never a bad idea to water a little bit during unusually bad droughts. Established plants also can benefit from some additional water during droughts, particularly oak trees.

Weeding and Mulching

Be prepared to weed for a time as the new plants grow in. There is a very good chance the soil has an extensive seed bank, and the soil disturbance of planting the new plants may cause weeds to germinate. Be prepared to monitor the space for weeds for quite some time.

Applying an initial layer of mulch will cover exposed soil and help suppress a lot of weeds. I usually recommend putting down a double-shredded hardwood or wood chip mulch when the plants are installed. The layer doesn't need to be very thick: usually, just 2 or 3 inches will suffice. The mulch helps retain moisture and suppresses weeds, and it will eventually break down and contribute nutrients to the soil. You probably won't need to mulch again, as the natives will spread to fill in the open spaces.

Around deciduous canopy trees, you can also expect a lot of free mulch in the form of leaves, which I recommend leaving as much as possible. Trees need their leaves throughout the whole yearly cycle, and wildlife species also depend on them. Our woodland plant species have evolved to push through leaf litter, so as long as it's not very thick or very wet, it shouldn't cause any problems. You can gently move the leaves away from the base of any of the more sensitive plants if you desire, especially when the landscape is younger or the plants are smaller and younger, but if you have planted plants that evolved to live under deciduous canopy trees, they will be right at home with the leaves that fall from those trees.

Even after establishment, pioneer species and invasive plants will continue to show up, so developing a consistent maintenance routine will help keep the task from ever getting overwhelming. The best approach is not to let the weeds get ahead of you, which can make weeding a massive chore. Do it a little at a time and it will be much more manageable. As the natives grow and spread and you keep the seed bank suppressed, weeding should slowly get easier. Part of the goal with denser plantings is for the new plants to grow in and outcompete the weeds so even if you start with small plugs, you should notice a significant reduction in weed pressure by the third year.

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Legend		
Botanical Name	Common Name	Qty
Flower, Fern		
Polystichum acrostichoides	Christmas Fern	8
Flower, Grass		
Carex crinita	Long-fringed sedge	7
Carex flaccosperma	Sedge, Blue wood	12
Carex rosea	Rosey sedge	7
Elymus virginicus	Wild rye	79
Fragrostis spectabilis	Purple Love Grass	18
Schizachyrium scoparium	Lil bluestem	88
Sorghastrum nutans	Grass, Indian	23
Tripsacum dactyloides	Facelatchee grass	5
Flower, Perennial		
Aquilegia canadensis	Wild columbine	8
Asclepias incarnata	Swamp milkweed	14
Asclepias tuberosa	Butterfly Weed	12
Conoclinium coelestinum	Blue mistflower	53
Coreopsis lanceolata	Coreopsis, lanceleaf	63
Coreopsis verticillata	Coreopsis, Threadleaf	35
Erigeron philadelphicus	Daisy Fleabane, White	79
Eupatorium sessilifolium	Boneset	7
Eurybia divaricata	White wood aster	24
Eutrochium fistulosum	Joe Pye Weed	3
Fragaria virginiana	Strawberry	32
Geranium maculatum	Wild geranium	11
Helianthus divaricata	Woodland sunflower	60
Helopsis helianthoides	Ox eye false sunflower	5
Inis virginica	Virginia blue flag iris	47
Liatris spicata	Blazing star	5
Lobelia cardinalis	Cardinal Flower	7
Monarda punctata	Dotted horsemint	20
Penstemon digitalis	Beardtongue, Foreglove	19
Phlox, divaricata	Woodland phlox	46
Pycnanthemum tenuifolium	Slender mountain mint	5
Rudbeckia fulgida	Black eye susan	47
Rudbeckia laciniata	Cutleaf coneflower	13
Salvia lyrata	Lyre-leaf sage	170
Solidago caesia	Bluestem goldenrod	32
Solidago juncea	Early goldenrod	10
Solidago nemoralis	Gray goldenrod	38
Solidago odora	Anise-scented goldenrod	5
Solidago rugosa	Rough goldenrod	17
Symphoricarpos cordifolium	Blue wood aster	13
Symphoricarpos laeve	Smooth blue aster	3
Symphoricarpos lateriflorum	Calico aster	16
Symphoricarpos novae-angliae	Aster, New England	5
Veronica noveboracensis	NY Ironweed	3
Viola sororia	Violet	89
Shrub, Deciduous		
Aronia melanocarpa	Chokeberry, Black	3
Callicarpa americana	Beautyberry	6
Ceanothus americanus	New Jersey Tea	18
Clethra alnifolia	Summersweet, Sweet Pepperbush	3
Caylussacia buccata	Huckleberry	16
Hypericum prolificum	Shrubby St-John's wort	5
Itea virginica	Sweetspire, Virginia	3
Physocarpus opulifolius	Ninebark	3
Rhododendron perichlymenoides	Pinxter azalea	3
Sambucus canadensis	Elderberry, American	3
Viburnum acerifolium	Maple leaved viburnum	13
Viburnum dentatum	Viburnum, Arrowwood	5
Shrub, Evergreen		
Kalmia latifolia	Laurel, Mountain	3
Morella cerifera	Waxmyrtle	3
Tree, Deciduous		
Asimina triloba	Pawpaw	3
Cercis canadensis	Redbud	1
Magnolia virginiana	Magnolia, Sweet Bay	1
Quercus falcata	Southern Red Oak	1



Landscape Design by:
Pete Corbino
District Native Plants

Date: 2/4/2025

Landscape Plan:
1
Wild Ones Richmond/Central Virginia

Scale: 1" = 30'

Revision #:

