

Go Native! Conservation Landscaping with Native Plants

Each year we spend countless hours, millions of pounds of pesticides, millions of tons of fertilizers, thousands of gallons of water and an exorbitant amount of financial resources tending to our lawns and landscaping. But what if there was a more efficient way to maintain these areas we take such great pride in? The answer? There is!

“Conservation landscaping” refers to landscaping with the specific intent of reducing pollution and improving the local environment. This specific type of landscaping strategy, often referred to in the Chesapeake Bay region as “BayScaping” or “beneficial landscaping,” uses native plants to mitigate many of the negative environmental impacts associated with traditional lawn and garden care. Conservation landscaping provides many benefits to the environment to include: improved water quality, preservation of native species, and provision of wildlife habitats. A native plant is one that is indigenous to an area over geologic time and that occurs in an area naturally without human introduction.

Why is native planting so important?

Native plants restore many landscape functions that nature originally intended. The benefits of native landscaping are abundant:

- Reduction of resources (time and money utilized for maintenance)
- Improved aesthetic
- Improved air quality
- Reduction of applied pesticides/herbicides
- Control of public safety hazards, such as soil erosion, snow drifting, and flooding
- Improved groundwater recharge and water quality
- Provides habitat for local and migratory animals
- Conserves native plant species



Unlike turf grass, native wildflowers and grasses, such as milkweed and bluestem, have deep root systems that stabilize soil, prevent erosion, and form soil channels that allow rainfall to infiltrate and replenish our groundwater supply. In addition, native plants installed in rain



gardens help filter stormwater runoff to remove various harmful contaminants from entering our streams, rivers, and the Bay.

Landscaping with native plants requires fewer inputs (soil adaptations, maintenance, chemical additives) than lawns and ornamental landscaping, as they are well adapted to regional soil and moisture conditions, and require less care and maintenance. The reduction in use of chemicals alone as a result of planting natives has the ability to reduce pollution in our waterways and improve the health of both beneficial insects and aquatic life.



How do I get started?

The easiest way to practice conservation landscaping is by replacing lawn and garden areas with your choice of native trees, shrubs, and perennial plants.

To Start:

1. Evaluate your site (what to keep, what to replace, where to expand).
2. Create a plan (make sure the species you want is native to the area; pay special attention to the Latin name as many invasive species share common names with natives).
3. Dig in the dirt (be sure to call “811” before digging for trees and large shrubs to ensure you do not disturb utility lines in the area).
4. Be patient.
5. Spread the word.

Once Your New Conservation Landscape is Planted:

1. Manage weeds. Resist the urge to pull weeds. Smother or cut plants/shrubs before flowering/seeding.
2. Limit soil disturbance.
3. Place a mulch layer to minimize open space for weed seed germination.
4. Manage aggressive weeds while accepting minor nuisances that won’t take over.
5. Ensure the area is kept clean and free of debris and litter.





The Big Picture

Our local ecosystem benefits greatly from native plants. Using native plants best suited to YOUR residential area provides significant benefits in mitigating environmental stressors. Small changes in native vegetation can cause a disproportionate positive return; therefore, every little bit helps! Below is a list of the top beneficial Maryland native plants, which can be easily incorporated into the landscape of your home:

Woody Plants*
Oak (<i>Quercus</i>)
Black cherry (<i>Prunus</i>)
Willow (<i>Salix</i>)
Birch (<i>Betula</i>)
Poplar (<i>Populus</i>)
For more recommendations on native trees visit: https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/MarylandersPlantTrees/Recommended-Tree-List.aspx
Herbaceous Plants*
Goldenrod (<i>Solidago</i>)
Asters (<i>Aster</i>)
Sunflower (<i>Helianthus</i>)
Morning Glory (<i>Ipomoea</i>)
Milkweed (<i>Asclepias</i>)
For more recommendations on native plants visit: https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/

*This list is NOT all-inclusive

Visit the following websites for more information on conservation landscaping and planting natives as it relates to water quality:

- <http://www.bringingnaturehome.net/>
- <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DEP/Resources/Files/downloads/rainscapes/factsheets/ConservationLandscapingTechniques.pdf>
- <https://www.mdflora.org/resources/Publications/GardenersGuidelines/Landscaping-Natives.pdf>

Please visit <https://code200-external.gsfc.nasa.gov/250/environmental/environmental-bulletins> to explore other topics of environmental importance.

