

News from the Piedmont Master Gardeners

For Immediate Release

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Master Gardeners Begin Work with Retailers to Make Locally Native Plants More Widely Available

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va.—Volunteers from the Piedmont Master Gardeners are reaching out to garden centers, nurseries and other retailers in the Charlottesville-Albemarle County area to promote the native plants they carry and to increase the supply and variety of native plants they make available to the buying public. This effort is part of [Plant Northern Piedmont Natives](#), a campaign spanning 11 Virginia counties that is encouraging more extensive use of native plants in yards, parks, and other public and private landscapes.

In their outreach, the Piedmont Master Gardeners are encouraging plant retailers to stock more native plants and to make them more visible to their customers. To that end, PMG is providing these businesses with a free package of promotional materials, including a display banner that reads “Find Native Plants Here” and copies of a brochure titled “Why Plant Natives?” that outlines for customers the many benefits of native plants, both for the gardener and the environment.

In addition, PMG volunteers are applying bright red “Virginia Native” stickers to plant containers to indicate the plants are native to the Northern Piedmont [ecoregion](#) and to distinguish them from other offerings.

“Now is the optimum time to purchase native plants and add them to our landscapes, but shoppers often find it confusing when they try to determine what is and what isn’t locally native. Our labels will make that clearer,” said Bernice Thieblot, one of the Master Gardeners leading this effort. “Also, by building partnerships with our local plant retailers, we are helping them raise awareness of the importance of native plants to healthy ecosystems, and the reduced care and maintenance they require once established.”

Participating garden centers as of September 1 include The Corner Store in Ruckersville, Eltzroth & Thompson Greenhouses, Fifth Season Gardening, Ivy Corner Garden Center, Ivy Nursery, ProTech Farm and Nursery in Barboursville, Snow’s Garden Center, and Southern States at both the Harris Street and Leake Square locations. These are in addition to area nurseries that specialize in native plants, such as Hummingbird Hill Nursery, Little Bluestem, Twinleaf Native Nursery, The Nature Foundation at Wintergreen and LaLa’s Garden.

As a next step, the campaign is developing materials that retailers can use to help customers select the right plant for the specific conditions in their yards and gardens.

What are native plants, and why are they important?

In general, a plant is considered native if it grew here before the arrival of European colonists. Over time, native plants have co-evolved and adapted with native wildlife to form intricate beneficial relationships. Native plants are particularly important for what scientists call the food web. For example, they provide food for plant-eating wildlife, such as caterpillars, which in turn support species that feed on insects, such as birds. Moreover, native plants are adapted to local conditions, reducing the need for fertilizers, pesticides and extensive watering.

“Many ornamental garden plants originated in far-away places and provide little support for local wildlife, and some are invasive, displacing native species,” Thieblot noted. “By contrast, native plant communities are powerhouses of biodiversity, especially if grouped in ways that mirror how they are found in nature. Together, they provide food, nesting places and safe habitat for pollinators, birds and many other forms of wildlife. They’re critical to restoring the health of our landscapes.”

About the *Plant Northern Piedmont Natives* campaign

Part of a statewide effort, the Plant Northern Piedmont Natives campaign has been launched with the support of the Virginia Native Plant Society, the Piedmont Environmental Council and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. In addition to the Piedmont Master Gardeners, more than two dozen other partner organizations and government agencies are engaged in the campaign. Together they are encouraging home and professional gardeners to grow plants from a list of nearly 200 species native to this region. In addition to the Charlottesville-Albemarle area, the campaign covers the counties of Buckingham, Culpeper, Fauquier, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Nelson, Orange and Rappahannock.

The campaign was initiated to help meet increasing public demand for native plants in our area and comes at a time when there is growing interest in conservation landscaping. The use of appropriate native plants is an essential element of this approach to landscaping, which aims to provide food and habitat for wildlife, promote healthy soil, suppress invasive species, improve air and water quality, conserve energy and reduce or eliminate the need for harmful chemicals.

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About Piedmont Master Gardeners: Part of Virginia Cooperative Extension’s Master Gardener Program, the Piedmont Master Gardeners are volunteer educators who offer outreach and training to promote science-based, environmentally sound horticultural practices and sustainable landscape management in the Charlottesville-Albemarle area. The Piedmont Master Gardeners Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting this work, which brings the resources of Virginia’s land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of our community. Learn more at piedmontmastergardeners.org.

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