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Parker River *National Wildlife Refuge* **Native Plant Garden**

Welcome to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge Native Plant Garden project. We hope to educate our community about the benefits of growing a natural garden, free from non-native plants. All of the plants in our garden can be found on Plum Island. As soil type, temperature and water availability vary between different habitats, some plants may not be suitable to grow in your own yard. Check with your local native landscaper for more information.

So what exactly is a “native” plant? Generally, “native” means that the plants lived in the area before European settlement began. “Exotic” plants are plants from other countries and even other parts of North America. Non-native plants (exotic) can easily spread from gardens to surrounding natural areas. Plants with aggressive root systems, such as the turf lily, can creep unnoticed across yards until you are surrounded by new sprouts. The bright red berries of Asiatic bittersweet and other exotic plants can be distributed for many miles by songbirds.

There are many benefits to growing your garden and landscape naturally. Garden cost and maintenance can be substantially less for native gardens. Natural landscaping minimizes the need for environmentally detrimental pesticides and fertilizers. Because natural landscaping does not typically require frequent mowing, it can also reduce noise pollution, and the emission of air-polluting substances. It virtually eliminates the need to use water for irrigation as is required for turf grass lawns. You can also attract local wildlife to your yard.



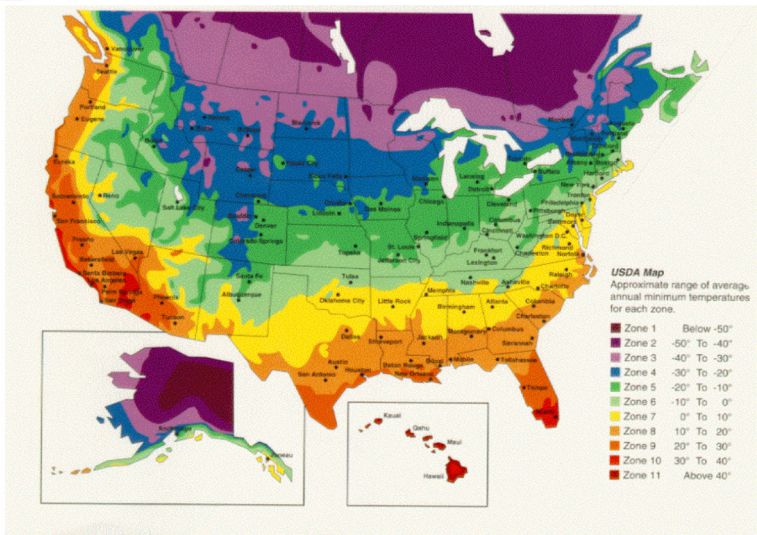
This garden was provided through a grant from Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management. PJC & Company Ecological Landscaping and Nunan’s Nursery participated in the project.



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USDA Hardiness Zone Map





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Northern Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)



Growing:

This shrub grows throughout most of North America and is hardy through zone 2. It is a perennial deciduous shrub or small tree that can grow as high as 40 feet. Bayberry thrives in poor dry soils. It prefers full sun to partial shade. Sometimes used as a large shrubby screen, Bayberry is ideal for use as a small tree. One or several clustered together provide excellent privacy and shade for decks or porches. The wax-covered berries have been used in candle making because of their pleasant scent.

Wildlife:

The waxy-coated fruit of this plant is particularly sought after by tree swallows during migration. Many other species of birds also eat the waxy-coated fruit, although in smaller quantities. White-tailed deer also browse on bayberry's twigs and foliage.



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Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)



Growing:

Black cherry, also known as “wild cherry”, is usually a small tree, although it can sometimes grow up to 80 feet tall. It can live up to 150 years! It is found in a wide variety of soils and is not very tolerant of shade. Black cherry is one of the largest cherries, and is a favorite wildlife plant. Although it can grow just about anywhere, it does prefer rich, moist, well-drained soils and grows best in zones three to nine.

Wildlife:

This is a very important food and shelter plant for songbirds as they migrate through Plum Island. Resident animals, such as wild turkey, grouse, New England cottontail rabbit, eastern chipmunk, raccoons, skunks, and white-tailed deer also depend on this plant for food and shelter.



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Beach Plum (*Prunus maritima*)



Growing:

The Beach Plum is a pleasant seaside shrub tolerant of both salt spray and sandy soils. It grows six to ten feet high or can be carefully pruned in a manner similar to bonsai. Sun is the first requirement for growing beach plums successfully. It grows best in zones three to six.

Wildlife:

The fruit of the plant is eaten by grosbeaks, jays, cardinals, raccoons, rabbits, and foxes. The dense thickets formed by the plants also provide valuable shelter to wildlife.

Plum Island was named after the many beach plums that grow throughout this narrow barrier island. Along with other animals, humans also enjoy the sweetness of the fruit. Beach plum jelly is the most common way to prepare this seasonal delicacy.



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Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*)



Growing:

The Pennsylvania sedge is a cool-season, low growing, colony-forming sedge that develops in relatively short clusters and resembles a lush carpet when fully grown. It requires well-drained soil, but can exist in a wide range of soil types from sandy loams to clay (and silty clay) loams. It does well in full sun, but can tolerate shade. The best zones for this plant are four through eight.

Wildlife:

This plant is very popular with various animals for many different reasons. It supplies nesting materials for many kinds of ducks, grouse and squirrels. Wild turkeys, rails, and several species of ducks also feed on its seeds.



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Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)



Growing:

Bearberry is a member of the heath family. This trailing, low growing evergreen shrub is found in cool temperate regions. This plant can grow in a wide range of soils, but is commonly found on well-drained soils with relatively low amounts of clay and silt. The bearberry grows best in full sun, but will tolerate partial shade.

Wildlife:

The fruit of the bearberry is eaten by grouse and thrashers. Its evergreen leaves are an important food source for deer during the winter when other fresh vegetation is scarce.



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Virginia Rose (*Rosa virginiana*)



Growing:

This sweet deceptively delicate rose is actually tougher than it looks. The Virginia rose can be planted in almost any soil from sandy to clay. This shrub is also good as a ground cover because it is low growing. It prefers full sun to light shade and can tolerate dry to moderate moisture regimes. For best result, plant in well-drained soil. No spraying, pruning or any other special maintenance is required!

Wildlife:

The Virginia rose is a terrific addition to the meadow, bird or butterfly garden. Its flowers are a good source of nectar for bees and its fruit is wonderful food for mockingbirds, catbirds, brown thrashers, American robins, eastern bluebirds, grouse, white-footed mice, and squirrels. Its foliage and young stem is favored by cottontail rabbits and deer.



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Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)



Growing:

The highbush blueberry is a perennial plant that thrives in acidic soils. Being a shallow-rooted plant, the blueberry bush requires open, porous soil. These shrubs can grow to be a height of five to ten feet at full maturity.

Wildlife:

Like humans, many different animals love the sweet fruit of the highbush blueberry. Grouse, wild turkey and songbirds, including tanagers and orioles, are attracted to its sugary berries. Foxes, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and white-tailed deer also browse on its twigs and foliage and eat the fruit itself.



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Lowbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*)



Growing:

Similar to its larger brother, the highbush blueberry, the lowbush is also a perennial. This blueberry can tolerate a little tougher conditions, and can withstand sandy or rocky soil. Although the lowbush blueberry usually grows no taller than two feet off the ground, it can spread fairly wide.

Wildlife:

Similar to the highbush, the lowbush is a very popular plant for wildlife. Grouse, turkeys, songbirds such as the bluebird, kingbird and scarlet tanager are all very fond of the fruit. Foxes, rabbits, squirrels and deer also browse on its twigs and foliage as well as its berries.



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Sweet Fern (*Comptonia peregrina*)



Growing:

Although fern is in the name, the sweet fern is not a fern at all, but actually a shrub in the same family as the bayberry. This low, open-branched plant is deciduous and grows best in dry, sandy or rocky soil. Although able to grow in a variety of conditions, it does best in loose and well-drained soil with full sun exposure. Like other members of the bayberry family, the sweet fern has a spicy fragrance.

Wildlife:

Sweet fern provides good cover for game birds and small mammals. Both the cottontail rabbit and the white-tailed deer browse on its foliage and branches. Ruffed grouse also feed on sweet fern buds.



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Other websites

If you are interested in starting your own native plant garden or learning more about wild flowers, here are some other websites you can check out.

Connecticut Botanical Society

<http://www.ct-botanical-society.org/garden/index.html>

Gardening for Wildlife

<http://www.enature.com/backyardwildlife/>

Wild Plant Photo Gallery

<http://www.missouriplants.com/index.html>

New England Wildflower Society

<http://www.newfs.org/>

Alternatives to Invasive Plants

http://www.earthworksboston.org/urbanwilds/UWinvasive_alt.htm

List of Native Plant Societies

http://michbotclub.org/links/native_plant_society.htm