

**A Self-guided Tour  
of the  
herbs and native plants  
in the Church Hill Senior Center Garden**



Please use the following pages to learn more about the native plants and culinary herbs located in the garden. Take a moment to stroll through the garden, identify each plant and learn about its beneficial uses. Also note the planting tips provided so that you can provide the proper environment in your garden for each plant to thrive. Enjoy your visit and please contact us if you have any questions.

Members of the Church Hill Senior Center Garden

## Native Perennials



Common name: Aromatic Aster

Botanical name: *Aster oblongifolius*

Location in garden: front sign bed

A native US wildflower, this late summer, fall blooming beauty prefers full sun. Will thrive in average and clay soils. Once established, it is drought tolerant. Pinch back any flower buds that form until after the beginning of July.

Mature plant will be up to a height of 3 feet and will spread to be 3 feet wide. Flowers are a magnet for all of the butterflies and remaining pollinators that are still present in the fall. It is also “deer resistant” – meaning that deer would prefer to eat something else in the garden besides this plant.



Common name: Butterfly weed

Botanical name: *Asclepias tuberosa*

Location in garden: front sign bed

An eye popping, orange native wildflower, one of the showiest “weeds” you will ever have in your garden. Does best in full sun and requires minimum water once established. A favorite food of the monarch butterfly caterpillar – a good alternative to milkweed if your garden does not have a lot of moisture. Late to wake

up in the spring, so learn to recognize the emerging foliage. Mature size is 1 ½ feet tall and wide. Bloom provides nectar for all types of adult butterflies.

## Native Perennials



Common name: False Blue Indigo

Botanical name: *Baptisia australis*

Location in garden: bed number 2

An earlier blooming perennial, this tall, clump forming plant will add structure to your garden.

Does best in full sun, but will tolerate part shade.

Will form a clump 3 ½ feet high by 3 feet wide. Deep

blue violet blooms will give way to large black seed pods –providing late summer and fall interest. Both blooms and pods are good for cut flower arrangements.



Common name: Threadleaf blue star

Botanical name: *Amsonia hubrichtii*

Location in garden: front sign bed

The delicate five petal blossoms of this native plant are only one of its attractions. The fine, needle-like foliage stays a nice green, even with minimal water, and then turns a stunning yellow copper in the fall. Plant in full sun to part shade. Mature plant size is 3 feet by 3 feet giving a nice shrub like appearance. Chosen as a “Perennial Plant of the Year” by the Perennial Plant

Association for its ease of care, disease and pest resistance, and multiple season interest.

## Native Perennials



Common name: Purple coneflower

Botanical name: *Echinacea purpurea*

Location in garden: bed number one

A summer blooming butterfly magnet, purple coneflower will delight you with its ease of care. Plant in full sun ( where flowering is best ). Tolerates poor soil and low moisture. Average height is 3 feet with a single plant width of 2 feet. Leave the aging cone heads in the garden in the fall to attract goldfinches

that love to feed off of the seed.



Common name: Tennessee coneflower

Botanical name: *Echinacea tennesseensis*

Location in garden: front sign bed

A native wildflower of Tennessee, this coneflower is known for its distinctive upturned petal rays which follow the direction of the sun. Plant in full sun and not too fertile soil – its stems stay stronger when soil condition is poor. Will tolerate dry sites when established. Mature height is 2 feet with a spread of 1 ½ feet. As happened in our garden, it will hybridize with other coneflowers and the resulting plants will

be a mixture of the species. Keep separate if you want succeeding generations to be true.

## Native Perennials



Common name: Yarrow

Botanical name: *Achillea millefolium*

Location in garden: bed number one

Despised by many as a weed, yarrow is one of the best blooming native plants to attract pollinators to your garden. Tolerant of poor dry soils, it blooms best in full sun. Since it self-sows rapidly (thus its 'weedy' reputation), it is best used as a ground cover. Mature height with bloom is up to three feet, width of one plant up to 2 feet. True native has

white/pink bloom, named cultivars increase the color selection for use in the home garden. To slow spread, remove spent flower heads before they drop seed.



Common name: Black-eyed Susan

Botanical name: *Rudbeckia fulgida*

Location in garden: front sign bed and bed one

An eastern native wildflower, this cheery yellow flower blooms in mid to late summer. Tolerant of many soil types and drought resistant. Height may reach 2 ½ feet with the same size width. This is

another seed head that the goldfinches adore so don't cut back spent blooms until the birds have picked the seeds clean. Foliage at the base of the plant is evergreen throughout winter so it is always easy to tell where the plant is located in the garden.

## Native Perennials



Common name: Wandflower

Botanical name: *Gaura lindheimeri*

Location in garden: front sign bed

This graceful, airy plant will catch each breeze in your garden and seem to dance on the wind. The flower stalks grow 2 ½ to 4 feet high with an almost continual bloom time from late spring into fall since the flowers tend to open one by one. Spread is 3 feet. It does not like soggy soils, and its

long taproot makes it drought tolerant. Unlike most perennials, clumps do not tolerate dividing. Let self-sow for additional plants.



Common name: Bee balm

Botanical name: *Monarda didyma*

Location in garden: Beds 3, 5, and 17

Native to the eastern US, this plant is available in the original red bloom variety and a multiple of color cultivars. Growing up to 3 ½ feet high with a spread of 2 feet,

it does well in full sun to part shade. It is a magnet for butterflies, moths and hummingbirds. The leaves have a pleasant minty fragrance. Some varieties are prone to powdery mildew during hot, humid weather, so plant the resistant cultivars. Needs a little moisture to be at its best. In perfect soil conditions, will spread rapidly and form a dense ground cover, but our long, hot summers seem to keep it in check.

## Ornamental Native Grasses



Common name: Sea Oats

Botanical name: *Chasmanthium latifolium*

Location in garden: front sign bed

This native grass is normally found along river or sea shores, but it is equally at home in the average soil garden. Tolerant of poor soils and moisture conditions – only its mature height being restricted with dry conditions. Plant in full sun or part shade. Mature height of 4 feet with a width of 3 feet. Seed heads are great for use in flower arrangements. Self-sows readily, so trim back heads before they drop if you do not want additional clumps in your garden.



Common name: Shenandoah Switch Grass

Botanical name: *Panicum virgatum*  
'Shenandoah'

Location in garden: front sign bed

This named cultivar of our native switch grass positively glows when its red tipped blades are backlit by the afternoon sun.

Plant in full sun. It will mature to a height of 5 feet and form a clump about three feet wide. Birds love its small seed head. Not an aggressive grass – it stays put especially if confined by edging. Great winter interest plant for the garden. Trim back in early spring before new growth emerges.

## Native Shrubs



Common name: American beautyberry

Botanical name: *Callicarpa americana*

Location in garden: front sign bed

An unassuming green shrub with small pinkish blooms in early summer, but when fall arrives, it “pops” with brilliant amethyst berries. The leaves drop and the garden has a stunning fall backdrop. Mature height is 6 feet with a 6

foot spread, but you want to trim back in early spring to about 1/3 of its height in order to get maximum berry production on new growth. Late to leaf out in spring so give it some time to come back to life. Bluebirds will eat the berries in fall.



Common name: Ninebark

Botanical name: *Physocarpus opulifolius*

Location in the garden: front sign bed

This eastern US native shrub is known for its beautiful peeling bark which strips off to reveal several layers. Pollinators love its early spring blooms. Mature height may

reach 10 feet with a 5 to 10 foot width. We have the dwarf cultivar ‘Nana’ in the garden because of space limitations. Tolerates full sun to shade. Named cultivars have different leaf color. A great shrub for the landscape – use in place of the nonnative invasive spireas.

## Native Shrubs



Common name: Shrubby St. Johnswort

Botanical name: *Hypericum frondosum*  
'Sunburst' cultivar

Location in garden: front sign bed

This shrub is native to the southeastern US. It has a neat, mounding growth habit with a 3 foot by 3 foot spread. Beautiful blue gray foliage holds its color throughout the growth

season. Two inch yellow blooms blanket the shrub from midsummer on. Bees are highly attracted to the blossoms. Does best in full sun. Drought tolerant once established.

Like many things in gardening, herbs are controversial. Even the pronunciation of word has provoked spirited discussion. To use or drop the H, is largely a geographical preference. The English usually saying Herb, Americans often prefer Erb. Compiling a list of herbs is also largely a matter of definition. In our garden, we believe that herbs are any plants with leaves, seeds, or flowers used for flavoring, food, medicine, or perfume or parts of such a plant as used in cooking. The plants discussed here are those used for culinary purposes. While the medicinal and religious uses have been documented since Greek and Roman times, the healing and spiritual properties of herbs will be ignored here and left to others.

Our herb gardens were completed this year and constructed to allow for contemplation and enjoyment of the colors, scents, textures and flavors of the plants discussed here. We have planted annual (one season), biennial (two season) and perennial (returning each year) herbs.

Since herbs are often cultivated varieties of wild plants, they are usually tough and do not need pampering. They are seldom bothered by insects and need only marginal conditions to thrive; often preferring dry, sandy or rocky soils. Herbs have been used for uncounted centuries in almost all cultures and their flavors often characterize the cooking and ethnic identity of many countries. Many of the plants we are growing originate in the southern European countries near the Mediterranean Sea, especially Italy, Greece, and France.

Herbs are used fresh or dried. Fresh herbs are much more aromatic and flavorful, but jars of dried herbs are found in nearly every kitchen in America. Drying is easy and requires only hanging in an area away from moisture and sunlight until they are crispy. Strip the dried leaves from stems and store in jars or plastic bags.

| Name              | A/B/P | Height  | Bloom time  | Bloom color   | Foliage color | Scent         |
|-------------------|-------|---------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Artichoke         | TP    | 60"     | Summer      | Blue          | Silver        | N/A           |
| Basil             | A     | 18"-24" | Summer      | White to pink | Green purple  | Spicy         |
| Bee Balm          | P     | 36"     | Summer      | White to red  | Green         | Mint          |
| Borage            | A     | 24"     | Summer      | Blue          | Silver green  | N/A           |
| Calendula         | A     | 18"     | Summer      | Yellow/orange | Gray green    | N/A           |
| Cayenne           | A     | 30"     | Summer      | White         | Green         | N/A           |
| Catnip            | P     | 24"     | Summer      | Blue          | Green         | mint          |
| Chives            | P     | 12"     | Spring      | White         | Green         | Onion         |
| Comfrey           | P     | 36"     | Summer      | Pink          | Green         | N/A           |
| Curry plant       | P     | 12"     | Summer      | Yellow        | Gray          | N/A           |
| Dill              | A     | 24"     | Spring      | Yellow        | Green         |               |
| Echinacea         | P     | 24"     | Summer      | Purple        | Green         | N/A           |
| Fennel            | P     | 36"+    | Summer      | Yellow        | Green         | Anise         |
| Garlic            | P     | 30"     | Summer      | White         | Green         |               |
| Geranium, Scented | P     | 30"     | Late Summer | Pink          | Green         | Many types    |
| Hyssop            | P     | 24"     | Summer      | Purple        | Green         | Anise         |
| Lavender          | P     | 12-24"  | Summer      | Lavender      | Gray Green    |               |
| Lemon Verbena     | TP    | 24"+    | Summer      | White         | Green         | Lemon, citrus |
| Lovage            | P     | 60"     | Summer      | Yellow        | Green         | Celery        |
| Marjoram          | TP    | 12"     | Summer      | White         | Gray Green    |               |
| Oregano           | P     | 18"     | Spring      | Pink          | Green         |               |
| Parsley           | B     | 16"     | Spring      | White         | Green         |               |
| Rosemary          | TP    | 30"     | Summer      | Pink          | Green         | Pine          |
| Sage              | P     | 30"     | Summer      | Various       | Gray          |               |
| Salad Burnet      | P     | 12"     | Summer      | Pink          | Green         | Cucumber      |
| Santolina         | P     | 24"     | Summer      | Yellow        | Gray          |               |
| Tarragon French   | P     | 30"     |             |               | Green         | Anise         |
| Thyme             | P     | 12":    | Summer      | Pink          | Green         |               |
| Walking Onion     | P     | 24"     | Spring      | White         | Green         | Onion         |



**Artichoke, Globe** The Artichoke is a perennial plant originally from the Mediterranean area. It is widely cultivated in temperate areas of California. The flowering head is eaten before opening. The blossom is an attractive purple/blue resembling a large thistle. In Tennessee, the plant does not reliably fruit or flower the first year. There are newer varieties that can be grown from seed here and are supposed to fruit the first year. Our plants were purchased, but are producing large blooms during the first season.

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**Basil** The garden contains several varieties of basil. The most distinctive is the Opal or Amethyst types. These have purple foliage and are an attractive plant in flower gardens as well as herb gardens. It is a culinary herb widely used in Italian cooking, but there are varieties available from the Far East as well.

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**Monarda or Bee Balm** is a most attractive plant for hummingbirds and butterflies and will draw them to your garden in masses. Flower colors vary considerably. We have a red and purple variety in the garden. They are easy to grow and are not troubled by pests, but powdery mildew is often a problem. The scent is a pleasant minty odor. Like most mints, it prefers moist soil conditions.

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**Calendula** These flowers are easy to grow and are available in colors of yellow to bright orange. They easily self-seed and flower over a long period from early summer to fall. The plant is known as a pot marigold and may be lifted and kept alive during the winter months in a bright window. The flower petals are edible and give a saffron color to rice.

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**Cayenne Pepper** The pepper pods are thin and elongated and are ready to harvest when they are bright red. We have found them to be an excellent companion plant for cucumbers. They are HOT. The pods are easily dried for culinary use and provide a nice zip to herbal vinegars. The plants will get three feet high and may need staking. Excellent for flower gardens as well as herb gardens.



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**Catnip** Easily established and grown from seed. If you are a cat lover, this is the herb for you. The dried foliage and flowers are incorporated into cat toys. Cats tend to leave outdoor plants alone unless leaves are crushed or damaged. The plants are not bothered by drought or poor soil conditions. Late season flowering is encouraged by a heavy haircut in the mid-summer. Some enjoy the dried leaves as a tea.



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**Chives** The onion flavor of chives is familiar to most. There are also varieties that have a distinctive garlic flavor. It is easily grown from division or seed and will grow for many years unless standing in water. The flowers may be dried and incorporated into floral arrangements.



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**Comfrey** A wildly popular herbal plant in the 60s and 70s, comfrey is no longer recommended for human or animal consumption. It is an attractive plant with purple/blue flowers – performing best when given ample moisture. It is not bothered by insect pests. Its past promoters recommend it as a compost pile addition, but it is best enjoyed as a garden plant.



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**Curry Plant** The common name is a misnomer. No part of the plant is used in curry powder, which is really a blend of many spices. While not useful in Indian cuisine, the plant does have attractive yellow flower that can be dried for floral arrangements. It belongs to the same family as strawflowers. It can be a perennial in our area if provided some winter protection.



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**Dill** is a familiar herb used in cooking as well as pickling. It is easily grown and can be used fresh or dried. It self-sows easily, but does not like to be transplanted. We prefer to let it pick its own location.



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**Echinacea or Purple Coneflower** This plant is treated as an ornamental in our garden. It self-seeds readily and can spread rapidly if not contained. The seed heads are a favorite of many birds including the common goldfinch. We leave the heads in the fall for their winter enjoyment. It is a native prairie plant that is not fussy about soil or moisture conditions.



**Fennel** There are two distinct types of fennel. We have the bronze foliage ornamental type. It is not particularly useful as an herb, but does provide a unique colored and textured foliage. The Florence fennel is the bulbing variety that has a distinctive anise taste. Seeds are commonly used in Italian sausage. It will become quite tall unless the flower stalks are removed.



**Garlic** is one of the most commonly cultivated kitchen herbs. There are several varieties that produce different sized cloves. Flavor ranges from mild to intense, with the largest cloves, elephant garlic, having a mild flavor and poor storage. Propagation is from the individual cloves or from the small bulblets formed as part of the flower.



**Scented Geraniums** are a very Victorian plant. They are mostly cultivated by cuttings. Seeds are available, but are not really worth the effort as they tend to germinate slowly and unreliably. There are a huge number of scents and different foliage available. The smell is largely an individual recognition. What smells like apple may seem very different to another person. The plants are very sensitive to frost -- attention to the weather is needed to time taking cuttings for propagation indoors over the winter.



**Hyssop** is not used as a kitchen herb. In our garden, its principal use is as a magnet for pollinators. It is an attractive upright plant, with pleasant flowers. Bees and butterflies flock to the plant. It needs to have a midsummer haircut to continue flowering into fall. Its foliage has a pleasant minty aroma.



**Lavender** Garden lavenders reliably live through Tennessee winters as long as it is not too wet. Do not cut back the prior years foliage as it starts growing late in Spring. The seed heads are used in potpourri, as a moth repellent and also as in ingredient in herbs de provence. We have several varieties in the garden, and all seem reliable. Good drainage is the key to good production.



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**Lemon Verbena** is a tropical shrub. It has a wonderful lemon scent and is very useful in cooking and potpourri. It is possible to propagate by rooting cuttings, but they always seem to drop their leaves during the low winter light conditions. Our plant is very vigorous and we intend to save and dry leaves for winter use.



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**Lovage** This herb will attain an immense size. I have grown plants over 6 feet tall. The seed head towers above most gardens. It has an intense celery flavor. When flowering, the remainder of the plant withers as the plant's energy all goes to the seed bearing structure. The plant does not dry well, but may be popped in the blender with a small amount of water and the pulp frozen for later use.



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**Marjoram** has an intense flavor that I love in chicken soup. The plants must be cut back when the knot form at the top of the plant. It is easily dried, but is a one season wonder in Tennessee.



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**Oregano** is a familiar pizza herb that is rampant and quickly spreads. It dries quickly and easily. It is also useful in herbal vinegars. Like many herbs, it thrives in poor rocky soils as long as it is well drained and does not have standing water.



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**Parsley** Two varieties are being grown in our garden. Both are biennial. Most familiar is the curled leaf parsley. This is the usual supermarket variety. The other, Flat Leafed Italian is more vigorous and flavorful. The plants overwinter well, but rapidly run to seed the following year.



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**Rosemary** is one of my favorite herbs. There are types that are hardy in Tennessee, but many will require winter protection. Small plants may be repotted and brought inside for the winter. It has a clean evergreen scent. In frost-free areas, the plants can get as tall as 6 feet with beautiful flowers. It is widely used when preparing lamb and a secret ingredient in Sheboygan bratwurst.



**Sage** We have several varieties of sage in the garden. Pineapple sage has beautiful red flowers that are very attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies. We also have a large format white sage. The common gray sage is also included in the collection. It is often used in pork sausage. The flavor is much better fresh, but it can be dried, usually being powdered after it is completely dry. Most will overwinter, but the plants become gangly the second year. Sage was considered a sacred herb by Native Americans and was used in religious ceremonies.

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**Santolina** has an attractive gray foliage with yellow flowers. It provides nice contrast in flower as well as herb gardens. It can be heavily clipped and is often used as a border plant in knot herb gardens.

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Don't waste your time buying tarragon seed. The plant will be vastly inferior Russian tarragon. French tarragon is only propagated by cuttings or root division. It has a wonderful anise flavor and makes the distinctive tarragon vinegar. I cram as much green material into the jar as possible when making the vinegar. It is also a necessity for hollandaise sauce.

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**Thyme** is quite a hardy perennial and we have several types in the garden. The Lime Thyme has a distinct flavor but hates wet feet. Propagation is usually by division rather than seeds. Oil of thyme (thymol) is a common ingredient in mouthwash due to its antiseptic properties. Flowers are light blue/purple color and occur during most of the summer. It has intense flavor and is often used in beef stews.

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**Walking Onions** They must have wandered far and wide since they are known as Welsh or Egyptian walking onions. Propagation is from the top sets. The stalks fall and the sets start new plants for the following year. In Tennessee, they are usually used as Spring Onions and are found in most of our local early Spring farmers markets.



## The Benefits of Native Plants

We are fortunate to live in an area that still maintains a large amount of “wild” open space. But if you take a closer look at that space, you will see the dangers associated with introducing invasive foreign species into a thriving ecosystem. It is impossible to miss the kudzu and English ivy smothered trees and shrubs and wooded areas overrun by royal paulownia trees, mimosa and Bradford pears. Look more closely and see the thickets of nandina and privet displacing the underbrush and the Japanese cogon grass and vinca smothering out the wildflowers. A lot of these plant species invading the south were introduced as garden plants – luring the unsuspecting gardener with bright showy blooms and strong growth. But these factors, along with the lack of natural pests, (the bugs don’t recognize these species as a source of food) has led to an ever increasing percentage of our native landscape to be swallowed up by these invaders.

What does it matter as long as they are pretty? It throws a perfectly balanced system into total chaos and leads to the demise of plants, bugs, birds, fish, and mammals. Over time, each geographical region became host to a variety of plants that were best suited for the particular climate of the area. These “natives” were able to withstand the weather patterns – even if they were quite variable and ranged from drought to flood. More importantly, the native plant species were hosts to the variety of bugs that inhabit the region – a source of food and shelter to complete their life cycle. The bugs are the major diet of the native songbirds – allowing the birds to have enough energy to lay eggs and raise their young. And although the bugs may eat the plants, the birds and other “good” predatory insects eat enough of the bugs so that permanent damage is not done. Add the next layer of this thriving ecosystem – the mammals, both large and small, that inhabit the same space. They too utilize the native plants for both food and shelter – relying on the foliage, bark and wood if they are herbivores, or the berries and insects lurking within the plants if they are omnivores.

Native plants are those that evolved naturally in North America. More specifically, native plants are those that were growing naturally in the area before humans introduced plants from distant places. In eastern and central North America, native plants typically grew in communities with species adapted to similar soil, moisture, and weather conditions.

Landscaping with native plants has several appealing factors.

Native plants have evolved and adapted to local conditions over thousands of years. They are vigorous and hardy, so can survive winter cold and summer heat. Once established, they require no irrigation or fertilization. They are resistant to most pests and diseases. Thus, native plants suit today's interest in "low-maintenance" gardening and landscaping.

Many people think that native plants are “weeds” and lead to unruly and untamed landscapes. However, it is easy to incorporate natives into a planned bed – leading to a landscape delighting in the flights of butterflies, the trills of songbirds and the beauty of blooms that appear whether or not the weather cooperates.

Each native plant species is a member of a community that includes other plants, animals and microorganisms. The natural balance keeps each species in check, allowing it to thrive in conditions where it is suited, but preventing it from running amok. Thus, native species rarely become invasive, as plants introduced from other areas can be.

Native plants provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies and other desirable wildlife. Many help to enrich the soil. Their root systems help rainfall percolate into the soil, reducing erosion and runoff. This improves water quality.

The diversity of native plants includes interesting flowers and foliage. Native shrubs and trees provide a variety of heights, shapes and textures in the landscape. Many provide winter interest through their bark or seed pods.

Another dimension of native plants is their historical and cultural interest. Some plants played a significant role in Native American culture, or in the European exploration and settlement. Many species have reported value as food or medicine. Others have been used for cordage, textiles, dyestuffs, or similar domestic purposes. Native plants can provide children and adults with a tangible link to the past.

We are not asking that you abandon all non- native plants in your landscape – only those that can become invasive and harmful to the local environment. Imagine a world without the beauty of butterflies, without the sound of early morning and late afternoon bird song, and without the great biodiversity that awaits discovery in a natural landscape. So next time you are considering putting in a new garden bed, or replacing a plant that has lived out its lifespan, please consider “going native” so that all of us – from smallest organism to large – may benefit.