United States Botanic Garden
National Garden

Regional Garden

Discover a Wealth of Biodiversity

The Mid-Atlantic region hosts an uncommon richness of plant species resulting from its patchwork of intergrading habitats. The reason lies in its location, i.e., "mid"-way between the colder Northeast and warmer Southeast, and between the colder continental regions on the West and the moderated coastal climate on the East. Ranges of many plant species from these outlying regions overlap in the Mid-Atlantic states. Featured here are hundreds of species and varieties of plants native to the Coastal Plain and Piedmont Regions, from New Jersey to North Carolina.

A Tumultuous Geologic History

The origin of the distinct Coastal Plain and Piedmont Regions dates from 250 million years ago when Europe and Africa collided with the east coast of North America. This tectonic event pushed up Himalayan-sized mountains and folded much of the former sea floor into rocky ridges. As these ancient mountains, now known as the Appalachians, were worn and rounded by wind and water, the sediments were carried eastward to form a broad Coastal Plain. Just west of the plain lies the zone of folded rock known as the Piedmont. The boundary between the two regions is recognized by the "fall line," a place of whitewater rapids and waterfalls where rivers are actively carving through the exposed bedrock.

Right Plant for the Right Place

Contributing to the biodiversity within the Coastal Plain and Piedmont are the wide variety of plant habitats, each with its own distinctive geologic substrate, soil type, soil chemistry, seasonal moisture and temperature variation, and exposure to sun and wind. As you stroll the Regional Garden notice that the plantings vary. Care has been taken to accurately represent some of the many habitats and plant associations found in the Mid-Atlantic, and naturally occurring plant varieties with wildlife value are well represented.

Become a Savvy Gardener

If you see plants you would like to try at home, note their nearby companions and the attributes of their site—are they growing near the stream or upslope? Is it sunny or shady? Placing plants in similar sites in your garden will encourage success. Look for ferns, azaleas, coral bells, and bleeding hearts in the shade. Look for switchgrass, butterfly weed, coneflowers, and asters in the sun. Nearer the stream are sweet bay, willow, New York ironweed, carnivorous plants, and Virginia sweetspire.

Going Native

Some native plants grow well only under certain conditions. For example, those that occur in bogs need constant moisture and acidic conditions. Those that are adapted to pinelands and other fire-prone areas benefit from the accompanying nutrient renewal, seed-stimulating heat, and thinning effect. For a successful native plant garden:

- Be sure to read up on the native plants you purchase to understand their requirements; many are easy to grow, but some require specific conditions.
- Make sure you buy plants from reputable nurseries; never purchase wild-collected plants.
- Rejoice in the birds, bees, and other pollinators who will call your garden home and benefit from its nectar, pollen, seed resources, and reduced use of chemicals.

Outstanding Plants in the Regional Garden

Presented here is a garden that draws its inspiration from nature and is designed to satisfy the gardener and garden lover. As with any garden, over time the Regional Garden will evolve as plants mature, compete for space, and succumb or thrive in the changing conditions. See it now and then return to watch our garden grow!

Selected Plants

Coastal Plain	Notes
Pinus palustris (longleaf pine)	Wet to dry soils; fire-dependent; excellent timber (heartwood pine).
Pinus serotina (pond pine)	Survives periodic inundation and fires; commercial source for turpentine.
Ilex vomitoria (yaupon holly)	Wet to dry soils; caffeine source; used by Native Americans to prepare ceremonial "black drink.
Cyrilla racemiflora (swamp titi)	Native from South America to Virginia; important bee pasture/ honey plant in Georgia.
Clethra alnifolia (summersweet, sweet pepperbush)	Moist habitats; important ornamental garden plant; attractive to pollinators.
Callicarpa americana (American beautyberry)	Moist soils; adaptable garden plant with late-summer purple berries, relished by birds.
Ctenium aromaticum (toothache grass)	Rhizomes have citrus fragrance; chewed by Native Americans to numb mouth and ease dental pain.
Fothergilla gardenii (dwarf witchalder)	Native to Pocosin region of eastern North Carolina; uncommon in nature but now a popular garden plant; outstanding fall foliage.
Dionaea muscipula (Venus flytrap)	Carolina native of wet pinelands; insectivorous.

Piedmont	Notes
Tilia americana (American linden, basswood)	Moist to drier soils; wood commonly used for carving; soothing tea can be made from inflorescence.
Hamamelis virginiana (witch hazel)	Winter bloomer; explosive release of seeds; source of astringent; moist soil.
Quercus velutina (black oak)	Once an important source of quercitron, a yellow dye/tanning compound.
Juniperus virginiana (Eastern redcedar)	Wood (cedar) from this dryland conifer used for pencils, lining closets, etc.; provides food for cedar waxwing and nesting sites for many birds.
Asclepias tuberosa (butterfly weed)	Larval host for monarch butterfly; important nectar source for many butterflies; found in dry, sunny habitats.
Ceanothus americanus (New Jersey tea)	Used as tea substitute in Revolutionary times; hummingbirds feed on tiny insects that pollinate the flowers.
Panicum virgatum (switchgrass)	Native grass; popular ornamental plant worldwide; receiving much attention as a possible source of ethanol.

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