

Native Intelligence

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Have you seen any stinkbugs lately? Stinkbugs are non-native, extremely invasive insects. Their native range is China, Japan and Korea. But they aren't invasive there, because their natural enemies exist there, but when they came over here, by accident, in a shipping crate from China, just the stinkbugs came, and their natural enemies did not come, and so they are exploding out of control.

The stinkbug invasion is a very good example of what non-native invasive insects can do. Unfortunately, the same thing happens with plants.

Everyone is familiar with English ivy, which is, as its name implies, native to England. It is absolutely not native to the United States. In fact, here in Frederick County, Maryland, it has become invasive, and can take over your yard. If you let it.

English ivy is just one of many non-native invasive plants that have come here from other places, sometimes because people emigrating from those other places wanted to bring them along, and sometimes by accident.

Non-native invasive plants often crowd out native plants that our native wildlife – native bees and native butterflies – need for their survival. For example, without native paw paw trees, the zebra swallowtail butterfly will become extinct, because female swallowtails can lay their eggs only on paw paws.

Native plants are uniquely adapted to local conditions, and match the finest cultivated plants in beauty. Once established, native plants need no fertilizer, watering or pesticides. Think of it...native plants survived here for many millennia, without fertilizer, without pesticides and without being watered except by the rain.

Native plants are sustainable. Sustainability saves time and money and helps the environment, by reducing harmful fertilizer run-off that threatens the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay.

Bees, including our native bees, face survival issues these days. No one knows for sure what is causing colony collapse, but we do know that bees are extremely sensitive to pesticides. Using native plants that do not require fertilizer or pesticides will help support our bee populations.

So, what is the homeowner and gardener to do? Plant native plants and trees. But how?

Follow this simple plan:

Step 1: Learn which plants are native to this area. The Maryland Native Plant Society (www.mdflora.org) can help.

Step 2: Find a good source for native plants. Contact the Frederick County Master Gardener office, or search online.

Step 3: Decide which native plants you like and want in your yard. There are hundreds of native ground covers, grasses, ferns, flowers, shrubs and trees. Native trees include dogwoods, redbuds and paw paws. Native flowers include black-eyed Susans, native columbine, bee balm and Virginia bluebells, to name just a few.

Step 4: Identify the plants in your yard that are not native. This is easy, using a few plant guides you can find in the library.

Once you know which plants in your yard are not native, and which native plants you want to add, you're ready to begin. But you do not have to remove all of the non-native plants at once.

Consider this plan: Every year, remove 2 non-native plants (beginning with the invasive ones), and replace them with 4 native plants. If you do this every year for 5 years, you will have removed 10 invasive species, and planted 20 native plants.

Removing plants is fun and easy, and children often like to participate in the process. Just dig and pull them out.

Planting the new native plants is easy as well. Follow the instructions that come with each plant. The instructions will include what conditions each plant needs, in terms of sunlight, soil and watering.

If you spend the few hours that it will take to do this each spring, you will have accomplished a lot. So please take action. It's a simple plan – just remove 2 non-native plants every year, and replace them with 4 native plants. What could be easier?

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit www.frederick.umd.edu/mg or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, (301) 600-1596. University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, gender, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, or national origin.



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Black Eyed Susan Rustic Dwarf-IL Extension



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