

News Release



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PLANTNEBRASKA ANNOUNCES 2026 GREATPLANTS OF THE GREAT PLAINS SELECTIONS

LINCOLN, Neb. (Jan. 5, 2026) -- The goal of the GreatPlants for the Great Plains program is to assist gardeners in their quest to discover new or overlooked plants that deserve to be planted more. The 2026 GreatPlants of the Year were voted on by members of the Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association (NNLA) -- represented by nursery professionals, landscape designers and horticulture educators.

This year's GreatPlants selections (a joint program of PlantNebraska -- formerly Nebraska Statewide Arboretum -- and NNLA) offer gardeners and landscapers tree, shrub and perennial choices that are proven to be resilient in Nebraska's challenging climate and beneficial to the environment.

Here are the 2026 GreatPlants selections:

Tree of the Year: Northern Pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) -- The northern pecan is the largest of the hickories, maturing at 75-100 feet tall with a rounded, spreading crown. Its leaves are odd-pinnate and compound, with each leaf containing 9-17 pointed leaflets, creating a dappled shade effect in the summer. The medium-green leaves turn yellow-green in late summer and then yellow-brown in the fall. The tree produces both male and female flowers, with the female flowers giving way to sweet, edible nuts. Each nut is encased in a thin husk, which then splits open in four sections as it ripens in the fall. For the best nut crop, it's recommended that at least two different varieties be planted for cross-pollination. Northern pecan trees thrive best in rich, moist, well-drained soils in full sun. When planting, the location should be selected carefully, as the tree's deep taproot makes it difficult to transplant.

Shrub of the Year: Common Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) -- This deciduous shrub has a broad, rounded habit and typically grows 6-12 feet tall. Clusters of small, scented, green-yellow flowers bloom along the branches in early spring before the leaves emerge. The shrub produces dioecious flowers (male and female flowers on separate plants), with the male flowers larger and showier than the female ones. The female flowers give way to bright red berries, which mature in the fall and provide sustenance for birds and other wildlife (but are really only noticeable once the plant drops its leaves). Spicebush is also a larval host for the spicebush swallowtail butterfly, which feeds on its leaves. Easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in part shade, spicebush's warm yellow fall color is more vibrant if the plant receives more sunshine (in full sun, the shrub requires more water, however). It can also tolerate full shade, but its habit will become more open and wide-spreading.

Perennial of the Year: Culver's Root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*) -- This native perennial typically grows to 4-7 feet tall, with long spikes of tiny, tube-like white flowers (often with a pinkish or lavender blush) that open from

the bottom up during the early summer. In full bloom, the spikey flowers resemble elegant candelabra atop strong, upright stems with lance-shaped leaves. Easily grown in average, medium-to-wet, well-drained soil in full sun (or light shade), Culver's root makes a good addition to a rain garden. It can take several years to establish itself in the garden, but once it does, it's well-worth the wait. Its blooms are long-lasting, especially if the spent spikes are deadheaded. Cutting back the plants after flowering also stimulates another late summer or fall bloom.

For more information about the 2026 GreatPlants and a full list of GreatPlants selections since 1998, visit plantnebraska.org/great-plants.

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PlantNebraska is a 501(c)3 nonprofit founded in 1978 that plants Nebraska for healthy people, vibrant communities and a resilient environment. We do this through tree planting, garden making, education and community building. We value our partnerships with our more than 100 affiliate sites throughout the state, more than 1,200 members and with the Nebraska Forest Service and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska. Over the last 30 years we've distributed more than \$10 million in grant funds to communities across the state to help make Nebraska a place where everyone wants to live, work, and play.