



NEBRASKA STATEWIDE
Arboretum

GREAT PLANTS

2019 GREATPLANTS GARDENER

NEBRASKA STATEWIDE ARBORETUM

We plant Nebrasks for healthy homes, vibrant communities and a resilient environment.



Aromatic Aster

Perennial of the Year

*Symphyotrichum
oblongifolium*

Height: 2-4 feet high
Spread: 2-3 feet wide
Sun: full sun
Soil: dry to medium

A native of the plains with narrow leaves and a dramatic abundance of sky-blue flowers September into October. Leaves are crowded along stiffly branched stems, forming a dense, bushy plant that looks good planted in mass or as a hedge. It prefers hot and dry conditions, thrives in poor soils with a high pH and is one of the last wildflowers to bloom before heavy frost.

A Focus on Mother Nature— from Me to She

Bob Henrickson, GreatPlants® Coordinator

What do gardeners want? A stronger connection with nature, according to the 2019 Garden Trends Report. The trend is a movement from the Me to the She generation, with a focus on Mother Nature. The strongest motivation to save the natural world is to love it; and with our own fate so closely tied to our environment, caring for it in turn nurtures ourselves.

Another trend is gardeners' recognition of the "thinning of the insect world." Recent years have seen an emphasis on saving bees. In coming years we need to extend that care to all beneficial insects by planting more natives that provide the pollen and nectar native insects rely on. While Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* warned of bird die-off from pesticides in the 1960s, that threat continues for bees and other pollinators, 40 percent of which risk global extinction.

More people are gardening, and more money is being spent on lawn and garden plants and products, than ever before. The average household set a spending record of \$503, up nearly \$100 over the previous year. Millennials gardeners aged 18-34 were a major part of that increase, and they make up almost a third of gardening households.

Is the money being spent on native plants and more beneficial landscape practices? We hope so, and landscape architects back that up, saying their most frequent requests are for sustainable

Mother Nature continued inside



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designs with an emphasis on native plants. Another hopeful sign is that more than a fourth of 18-34 year olds are volunteering, higher than the national average.

We do have some habits to break—overzealous mowing, manicuring and overmanagement of our landscapes. Our landscapes need less lawn monoculture and more beneficial diversity, for ourselves as well as all the creatures who depend on them. We have other habits to break as well. Nearly 90 percent of adults spend over 22 hours a day inside or in vehicles and most children spend less than an hour a day outside, half as much as their parents did when they were young.

Gardening has a lot to offer at every age; it teaches responsibility, healthy choices, patience, trust, confidence, stewardship and delayed gratification. With a third of our food wasted annually, the simple act of composting (which can be as easy as digging a hole or throwing it under shrubs) can reduce household waste by almost 40 percent.

What else can we do? We hope gardeners will move toward more prairie-style landscapes and toward less-managed woodland gardens. By planting multi-layered landscapes with large shade trees, small understory trees, shrubs and diverse ground layers, we can provide food, shelter and nesting for songbirds, beneficial insects and other critters that conventional landscapes cannot. And in the process bring year-round interest that will encourage us to step outside and learn from the natural world as our gardens change from one season to another.

Our gardens don't have to be massive to make a difference. Even a very small prairie planting, connected to those of

our neighbors, can benefit wildlife that depend on grassland habitats. Our love of nature can give us an emotional, physical and spiritual incentive to keep planting and, importantly, shore up our planet's diminishing biodiversity.



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Vernal Witchhazel

Shrub of the Year

Hamamelis vernalis

Height: 10-12 feet high
 Spread: 8-10 feet wide
 Sun: full sun to part shade
 Soil: tolerates clay, very adaptable

This large, multi-stemmed shrub is the first shrub to bloom, often flowering in late winter. Unusual small ribbon-like flowers with curled and crinkled petals are often hidden by persistent winter foliage. Their spicy fragrance is intoxicating. Emerging foliage is an attractive bronzy-red that matures to dark green, then rich butter yellow in late fall. Its layered branching is attractive in winter. It grows naturally in woodlands and forest margins and is a perfect plant to grow in the shade of tall trees and as a screen or tall hedge. It flowers most abundantly in sun; in part shade it will have a more open habit. Prefers well-drained, rich organic soils and protection from wind.



Pennsylvania Sedge

Grass of the Year

Carex pensylvanica

Height: 6 inches high
 Spread: 12-18 inches wide
 Sun: part to full shade
 Soil: tolerates clay

Soft, thread-like leaves form dense, emerald green tufts. Spreads slowly for a hardy groundcover that controls erosion, crowds out weeds and doesn't need cutting back in spring. The bright green foliage remains attractive into winter. In late March, whitish-green flower spikes form on wiry stems, held just above the foliage like shiny water droplets. Later they create interesting seedheads. Perfect for wet or dry shade and its fine texture combines well with broad-leaved shade plants. An ideal shady lawn alternative for areas void of foot traffic, or as an accent plant among spring bulbs or woodland ephemerals.



Norway Spruce

Evergreen of the Year

Picea abies

Height: 40-55 feet high
 Spread: 25-30 feet wide
 Sun: full sun to part shade
 Soil: prefers moist, well-drained soils until established

This large, pyramidal evergreen grows rapidly. Dark green needles point forward along twigs, making it less prickly than Colorado spruce. With age, upper branches become pendulous, hanging down like skirts. Long 9" cones also hang downward. Shallow, spreading roots benefit from organic mulch to conserve moisture and moderate soil temperature. Adaptable to clay, rocky, dry soils, alkaline pH and seasonal drought once established.



Sweet Birch

Tree of the Year

Betula lenta

Height: 30-40 feet high
 Spread: 25-30 feet wide
 Sun: full sun to part shade
 Soil: prefers rich, moist soils

Noted for its exceptional yellow fall color—the best of all the birches—sweet birch is pyramidal in youth and becomes more rounded with age. Handsome, reddish-brown bark is similar to that of cherry trees. It bears attractive catkins before leaves appear in April. Leaves and inner bark have a fragrant, wintergreen scent when bruised. Birch beer is traditionally made from its bark. It grows best in moist, fertile soils with a northerly aspect; native to the Appalachians. Tolerant of alkaline soils and resistant to bronze birch borer.



An Aster for Every Garden

Bob Henrickson, GreatPlants Coordinator

Asters are some of the best plants for pollinators, in part because they're not single flowers but a flat disk (think landing platform) with tiny tubular flowers that produce an abundance of late season nectar for migrating butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects, as well as seeds for winter birds.

There's an aster for almost any spot in the garden, from full sun to shade, from poor, dry soil to wet sites. Since many of the taller asters can end up with bare, leafless stems at the base of plants, combining them with ornamental grasses helps hide their "bare legs." Late season grasses like switchgrass, big bluestem and Indiangrass are perfect companions. Tall asters can also be cut back by a third or more anytime from spring to early summer to create bushier, more floriferous plants.

The common name aster is applied to a number of different genera. Most true asters are now classified as *Symphyotrichum*, with a few exceptions as noted below.

Aromatic Asters

The aromatic asters (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*, as shown on the cover) include some wonderful cultivars. Many of them are actually "nativars" that were selected, rather than developed, from native populations because of specific ornamental characteristics.

'Dream of Beauty' was introduced in 1960 by the legendary plantsman Claude Barr. This hard-working native plains aster was almost lost in the trade until Bluebird Nursery started propagating and selling it. Its pink daisies have burnt orange centers. It grows 1' high and can handle drought and a wide range of soils, including clay. Its spreading, compact habit makes it an excellent groundcover for a garden wall or along a pathway.

'Fanny' is one of the last asters to flower, usually in October and November. It makes a nice 2-3' clump smothered with purple-blue flowers September and October. It forms vigorous colonies and is a butterfly delight.

'Raydon's Favorite' is one of our most reliable native perennials. It's a 2-3' high mounding plant with masses of



Aromatic aster

There is great variety even within the aromatic asters.

violet-blue, daisy-like flowers mid to late autumn that deserves more planting.

'October Skies' creates a low mound of bushy foliage covered in truly sky-blue flowers September to October. It's a bushier, bluer sister of 'Raydon's Favorite' that's tolerant of drought and poor soils.

Aster All Stars

Aster 'Alert', *Symphyotrichum novi-belgii*. This New York aster has richly colored purplish-red flowers on a compact but dense mound. It makes an excellent accent with fall sedum, grasses, or anywhere you need a splash of late season color; and it grows just 15" high. It has performed well throughout Nebraska, from its eastern to western borders.

'Wood's' aster, *Symphyotrichum dumosus*, is a compact aster to 15" high that includes pink, purple and blue selections. Mildew- and rust-resistant foliage makes it excellent for the front of the fall border or for low-growing prairie gardens, where it can intermingle with low grasses and other plants.

Asters for Wet Areas

Flat-topped aster, *Doellingeria umbellata*, is native to moist meadows and can grow to 5' high. It's topped with a plethora of small, starry white flowers and attracts a wide array of pollinators.



'Woods Purple' aster

New England aster, *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*, includes a variety of great cultivars. 'Alma Potschke' grows 3-4' tall with rosy red flowers. 'Purple Dome' grows to 2' and is covered in bright purple flowers in early fall.

Drought-buster Asters

Smooth aster, *Symphyotrichum laevis*, has sky blue flowers on 4' plants that remain upright. The selection 'Bluebird' has smooth, blue-green foliage and stems that resist lacebugs.

Fendler's aster, *Symphyotrichum fendleri*, includes the white-flowering GreatPlants® selection 'My Antonia', one of the best for rock gardens as it is native to open, sandy, often rocky soils, eroded limestone or sandstone outcrops. It's extremely drought-tolerant. The stiff,

Asters continued on next page



Fendler's aster

Asters continued from previous page

upright stems reach 12-18" high. Narrow summer foliage is thick and shiny.

Heath aster, *Symphyotrichum ericoides*, is another favorite native with deep green stems and leaves. It is



covered with small, usually-white flowers in late summer. Drought-tolerant when established, it grows 2-3' high and wide. One of my favorite asters!

Prairie aster, *Symphyotrichum turbinellum*, is especially lovely with its panicles of lavender flowers on well-branched, wiry stems to about 4' high. Usually found in rocky open wooded

areas, this tough native is easy to grow and long-lived. The flowers seem to float on air, resting atop the thin stems in October.

Sky blue aster, *Symphyotrichum oolentangiense*, is a native for sandy, clay or rocky soils. It forms a mound of basal foliage 3' high; has stiff, unbranched flowering stalks; and light blue flowers.

Upland white aster, *Solidago ptarmicoides*, forms bushy plants to 18" high with creamy white flowers in August. This Dakota native grows in sandy soils or on limestone rocky barrens. In the garden all it needs is a hot, sunny location, perfect for a rock garden. This long-lived native plant is overlooked, plan on planting it... you'll be glad you did.

Shade-loving Asters

Big-leaved aster, *Eurybia macrophylla*, slowly spreads to form a groundcover with pale 1" blossoms on upright stems 1-2' feet high. Large leaves up to 6" long make this Minnesota native stand out.

Calico aster, *Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*, is drought-tolerant and adaptable to many soil types. Tiny flowers



bloom profusely for an extended period, often right up to the first hard freeze. It has thousands of red-centered white flowers per plant, a butterfly's dream, and provides a big burst of color in part shade. 'Lady in Black' is a 3-4' mound with purplish-black leaves and it's a larval host plant for several butterflies and moths, including Harris's checkerspot and pearl crescent butterflies.

Heart-leaved aster, *Symphyotrichum cordifolium*, has clouds of tiny blue flowers in early fall. A great naturalizer for shady woodland spots that grows 2-3' high and wide.

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Conserving Dwarf Chinkapin Oaks

Bob Henrickson,
GreatPlants Coordinator

Dwarf chinkapin oak, *Quercus prinoides*, is one of the best shrub oaks for landscaping or conservation plantings. It isn't as well-known as its larger relatives, chinkapin and chestnut oak, but it deserves attention for a number of reasons. Many people don't have room for a large-growing oak, but still want the rugged adaptability and seasonal beauty only oaks can provide. Dwarf chinkapin oak can be used as a unique, small specimen tree in the landscape or as a tall shrub in wildlife plantings, shelterbelts and shrub borders.

Native in much of the central and eastern United States, dwarf chinkapin oak occurs in the U.S. from southeast Nebraska to central Texas, east to northern Florida and the Appalachians. It's rare even throughout its native range, and is listed as imperiled in eight states and vulnerable in five more.

Nebraska is fortunate to have a rare native population of it thriving on the rocky, calcareous soils of its southeastern border in Richardson County. Thanks to the generosity of the property owner, Arboretum staff have been allowed access to collect acorns for propagation and distribution to local and national wholesale growers interested in preserving this rare species.

This native stand, surrounded by pristine oak-hickory woods, has been threatened by encroaching eastern redcedar. But a Nebraska Forest Service project—involving landowners, neighbors and volunteers interested in landscape conservation—helped remove the cedars, and a prescribed fire on the adjacent prairie and woodland invigorated the oaks to form new sprouts.

The height of this tree rarely exceeds 15-20 feet, with a similar width. It takes a few years to get established but is well worth the wait. The narrow leaves resemble those of chinkapin oak—lustrous, dark green, thick and leathery, often with wavy margins. In fall they turn yellow-brown to bronze, sometimes blazing orange-red, before dropping in fall. In early spring the emerging foliage and abundant male catkins are at eye level, easy to observe and enjoy. The yellow-green catkins add another season



The U.S. National Champion for dwarf chinkapin oak, standing a little over 25 feet high, is located on private property near Salem, Nebraska.

of interest for the oak. In fall the show continues with abundant clusters of tasty half inch acorns that change from green to yellow with brown vertical stripes.

Acorns can form on trees just 3-4 feet high and, unlike many oaks, they produce a good crop of acorns almost every year. The acorns, low in tannins, are smaller and less bitter than most acorns and a favorite of blue jays, turkey, deer, raccoons and squirrels.

It can be grown as a large many-stemmed shrub with picturesque branching or easily pruned into a single trunk to expose its gray, flaky bark. It grows best in full sun and deep, well-drained soils but will also thrive in clay and poor soils. It can tolerate high winds, extreme drought and has been hardy to minus 40 degrees. Dwarf chinkapin oak will often produce suckers and can form thickets if sprouts are encouraged by top pruning. This spreading rhizomatous habit is a trait developed to help a plant rejuvenate after fire has killed the top stems. It has almost no insect or disease problems, although a minimal amount of powdery mildew may appear on trees planted in too much shade.

Dwarf chinkapin oak is a small tree that can help satisfy the demand for new trees that are native, ornamental and compact. While many properties don't have room to plant a large oak, almost any yard has room for a dwarf chinkapin.



More Shrubby Oaks for Small Landscapes (and wildlife)



Wavyleaf oak above in Lincoln.
Gambel oak below and opposite are growing at the Kimball Arboretum in western Nebraska.

Greg Morgenson, Woody Plants Research Specialist, North Dakota State University
Woody Plants Selection and Improvement Program

We have harsh conditions here in Bismarck. Temperatures can drop to -40°F and it's a semi-arid environment with strong winds, low humidity and high soil pH. Besides growing dwarf chinkapin oak, mentioned on the previous page, a few other shrubby oaks have proven hardy in our northern gardens. Desert live oak and gambel oak, in particular, should be planted more often in the arid western high plains.

Desert Live Oak

Desert live oak, *Quercus turbinella*, is native to CO, NM, AR and UT and is similar to dwarf chinkapin in size, multi-stemmed growth habit and tolerance of high pH soils. Its holly-like foliage, however, is much smaller, somewhat blue and prickly at the ends, which deters browsing. It's hardy to at least -25°F. Wavyleaf oak, *Q. undulata*, is one of its hybrids.



every two years, and often on plants just 3-4 feet high. It's an excellent wildlife plant that will sucker to form thickets.

Bear oaks planted by Nebraska Game & Parks about 16 years ago at a lake in southeast Nebraska are doing well. Growing without irrigation in a mix of brome and fescue, some of them are now 8-10' feet high.



Gambel Oak

Rocky Mountain native gambel oak, *Quercus gambelii*, has adapted to high plains conditions, including -35 °F temperatures. Foliage is similar to white oak but smaller and more deeply lobed. Acorns are quickly eaten by squirrels and blue jays.

Bear Oak

Bear oak, *Quercus ilicifolia*, is a multi-stemmed red oak that grows 10-20 feet high. Its foliage is marcescent and remains until the growth of new buds in spring causes it to drop. It produces an abundance of acorns

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Balm for the Bees

Jan Rigganbach, garden columnist,
midwestgardening.com

We were riding the historic Boone and Scenic Valley Railroad in north-central Iowa one year in early August with some of our grandchildren. The steam engine was fun and the scenery was beautiful, but what really caught my eye were the lavender blossoms of native beebalm (*Monarda fistulosa*) lining both sides of the tracks. I came home from that trip determined to plant some in my own garden for a dependable show July through September.

With bees in decline and pleas for gardeners to help, it should be no surprise that a plant called beebalm is enjoying increased popularity. No matter which of the many species and cultivars you choose, this hardy perennial has a lot going for it. Bees love the flowers, of course, and so do butterflies, hummingbirds and hummingbird moths. The blossoms blanket the garden with color for weeks, blooming in an array of variety-specific colors including violet, purple, pink, red, rose, lavender or white. Beebalm has no serious insect pests. It is unperturbed by the toxic juglone produced by nearby walnut trees. And beebalm has mint-scented foliage that rabbits and deer usually avoid.

If you haven't bought beebalm plants for a while, you're in for a pleasant surprise. Some older cultivars grew up to 4 feet tall and were often prone to powdery mildew, leaving the foliage looking like it had been dusted with baby powder. Infected leaves were distorted—or dropped off. The foliage usually looked so ratty that cutting it back to the ground was the only remedy.

That's what happened every year with the Cambridge Scarlet beebalm I grew in my country garden. I'd cut the plants to the ground and settle for fresh but much shorter foliage for the rest of the season.

Today, however, it's easy to find varieties that are highly resistant to mildew. And they come in a much wider range of

sizes. There are even some that grow only 10 or 12 inches tall, well-suited for a small garden or container.

In my city garden I'm enjoying a dwarf beebalm called Balmy Purple. Its reddish-purple flowers bloom for months, right up until a hard freeze. Most of the time, its dark-green foliage is unmarred. Sometimes, with the cool nights of autumn, I've seen a bit of powdery mildew, but never enough to be an eyesore.

Last spring I planted another beebalm that is only a bit taller. It's Pardon My Cerise, with cherry-red flowers.

If you prefer a tall variety, some good choices for mildew resistance are red-flowered Jacob Cline, burgundy-red Raspberry Wine, and deep-toned Purple Rooster. All three are spectacular. The rhizomes of these taller varieties, though, do spread faster. The plants require more frequent division to make certain that they get the good air circulation that helps keep the foliage healthy.

Full sun is usually recommended, but I think beebalm seems to appreciate a little shade in the afternoon. The plants like good drainage, but they aren't particularly drought-tolerant. A perfect



Monarda as pollinators see it: UV light of a beebalm. Photo by Craig Burrows, cpburrows.com/independent-work. Below left: Beebalm seedheads in winter.

spot would be a slope where rainwater from the downspout runs through but doesn't linger. Mulching helps conserve needed moisture. Water in dry weather; plants grown in dry soil are more likely to develop mildew.

Balm for Us as well

Bob Henrickson, GreatPlants Coordinator

Besides its merit as an ornamental and pollinator plant, beebalm has much more to offer. Its scented leaves are similar in flavor to thyme and can be dried for use as a tea or spice. It has high concentrations of thymol, a strong antiseptic that can soothe a sore throat or decrease congestion. The Pawnee used blossoms as an eye wash and for respiratory problems. Are pollinators attracted to these same "germ-destroying" characteristics? Possibly.



Milkweeds: Beauties, Beasts, Beneficials

Jim Locklear, Director of Conservation at
Lauritzen Gardens, lauritzengardens.org

Some plants should be in every garden. Others should be kept out at all costs. The milkweeds qualify on both counts.

The milkweeds (genus *Asclepias*) are a large group of plants, with some 120 species in the Americas and Africa. We have 17 species here in Nebraska, occurring in a wide variety of natural plant communities from woodlands to prairies to wetlands.

Two of our native species in particular have proven their merit as garden plants, being both beautiful and well-behaved.

Butterfly milkweed (*A. tuberosa*) is the best-known and most widely-grown. A showy wildflower in its native prairie habitat, butterfly milkweed also makes an outstanding garden perennial. Its popularity is due to its prolific clusters of bright red-orange flowers which smother the rounded, 1-2' tall plants. Not only are its orange tones (sometimes ranging to yellow) uncommon among garden perennials, the flowering season of butterfly milkweed comes toward the end of the early summer rush, when many gardens are entering the doldrums. On top of all this, butterfly milkweed is a butterfly magnet, bringing even more color and animation to the garden.

Swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*) is less commonly cultivated, but more gardeners are discovering its attributes. It has a different growth form than butterfly milkweed, with slender, willowy stems that can reach 5' in height, topped with clusters of fragrant, purplish-red flowers. As the name implies, the native habitat of swamp milkweed is wet, marshy sites, but it adapts very well to typical gardens and residential landscapes. It also is highly attractive to butterflies, as well as bees and wasps.

If these two milkweeds are just not enough for you, consider showy milkweed (*A. speciosa*), Sullivant's milkweed (*A. sullivantii*) and antelope-horn or spider milkweed (*A. viridis*). Each of these Nebraska natives has their own distinctive character and beauty and though strong growers they are not particularly aggressive, especially if grown in a prairie planting where grasses can help keep



them in check. You can buy plants of butterfly and swamp milkweed at most garden centers and nurseries, but the others are more commonly offered by mail order nurseries specializing in prairie plants.

Excepting these, the rest of our milkweeds are not recommended as garden plants, unless milkweeds are the only thing you want in your garden. Some are especially adept at taking advantage of disturbed habitat like roadsides and agricultural land, and would swamp a flower bed like Husker fans on O Street.

While a number should be kept at arm's length from the garden, all of our milkweeds are worth getting to know up close in the wild. Milkweed flowers are among the wonders of the natural world, rivaled in complexity only by the orchids. As with the orchids, the pollination biology of milkweeds is fascinating, with milkweed flowers designed to snag the foot of a visiting butterfly, wasp or other insect so that it picks up a "sack" of pollen to carry to another flower.

Whether you bring them into your garden, or enjoy them in the wild, milkweeds are a beautiful and fascinating part of the rich flora of Nebraska.



Two images of swamp milkweed above; Sullivant's milkweed; and two photos of butterfly milkweed opposite.

More Milkweeds Please

Kyle Johnson, EverWild Greenspaces,
everwildgs.com

A lot of our native plants could use some help in the marketing department. Many examples come to mind, but anything with the word “weed” in its name definitely has the deck stacked against it. Milkweed is one of my favorite native perennials suffering from this misfortune.

In spite of its unflattering namesake, milkweed (*Asclepias*) has been receiving a lot of positive attention due to it being the critical food source of the monarch butterfly. As a result, it is becoming more commonly available in the trade and more favored in landscapes. That’s a good thing. However, not all milkweeds are created equal. Some can be very aggressive when they aren’t confined by the dense roots of prairie grasses they’re accustomed to in the wild. It’s important to identify the exact species so you can find a good fit for your garden—because there is a milkweed for almost every landscape.

The best and most common milkweeds for planted landscapes are mentioned opposite—butterfly and swamp milkweed. Butterfly milkweed is typically short-lived, so plan on letting it reseed itself if you want it to stick around. And though swamp milkweed, as its name suggests, prefers wet conditions, has surprised me by the dry conditions it can tolerate. It turns a beautiful purple in fall, an extra bonus, and it is highly favored by monarchs.

The small stature and beautiful flowers of spider milkweed (*A. viridis*), also mentioned opposite, quickly endeared this little plant to me. It’s a fantastic accent mixed with short grasses, sedges

and groundcovers. Since it’s so modest, it can get easily lost among taller plants, so I like to put it toward the front of the bed or in the border.

Although most people are familiar with common or “ditch” milkweed (*A. syriaca*), it can be quite a brute. Better alternatives are purple (*A. purpurascens*) or showy (*A. speciosa*) milkweed. Both can still wander when unopposed, so place them among plenty of grasses or other tall, robust, fibrous-rooted perennials to keep their rhizomatous root systems from overwhelming your landscape.

For particularly dry settings, broadleaf (*A. latifolia*) or sand milkweeds (*A. arenaria*) would be fitting and unusual selections. Warning: these and many other species can be difficult to find or purchase.

Antelope horns (*A. asperula*) and whorled milkweeds (*A. verticillata*) are popular with monarchs and easy to grow, but I would avoid planting them in an urban landscape. They tend to be too aggressive for most situations.

Almost all milkweed species love plenty of sunlight, so your options are very limited if you have a shady landscape. Poke milkweed (*A. exaltata*) is the only Midwest-native milkweed that prefers shade. It can reach up to 6’ tall, so it is best planted toward the back.



From top to bottom:
blossom of purple milkweed;
caterpillars on the very narrow foliage of
whorled milkweed;
broadleaf milkweed before bloom;
green blossom of green or spider milkweed.

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Winter Green— Persistent Foliage

Karma Larsen, GreatPlants Editor

“Spring is too far away to comfort even by anticipation, and winter long ago lost the charm of novelty. This is the very three a.m. of the calendar.” Joseph Wood Krutch

Summer has an abundance of green. But deep into winter, the landscape has muted into tans, browns and grays. Windbreaks of pine and juniper offer periodic lines of green in the country, but even the smallest hint of green can draw our eye in a small landscape—a low groundcover edging a dormant lawn, ivy climbing a gray tree trunk, the surprisingly persistent foliage of coralbells.



For all the effort we put into selecting colorful blossoms for the summer, that long gray period mid-winter deserves at least as much attention. And surprisingly, there are lots of plants that do retain foliage and color into winter. We may select and plant them for other qualities, but many of our standard garden plants aren't just one-season beauties. By giving them a place more visible from pathways and windows and by placing them to best effect—in the right combination, the right place or with the right backdrop—they'll reward us with garden green, even through a dusting of snow.

Groundcovers like hens and chicks, periwinkle, lamium and sedum will remain green all winter. Thyme, sweet woodruff, pachysandra and germander will stay green for a good portion of it. Plants like coralbells, *Bergenia*, lenten rose and foam flower (*Tiarella*) will

retain their original foliage colors, from chartreuse to green to purple. For silvery green foliage, there's *Artemisia*, yarrow, lamb's ear, lavender, dianthus and yucca.

Many of the sedges go straight through the winter without changing color. Plantain-leaved sedge (*Carex plantaginea*) is a great example. Its large, straplike leaves remain green even under

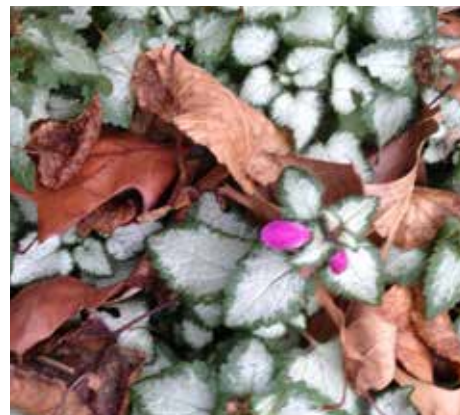


heavy snow. Other evergreen or semi-evergreen sedges include bristleleaf, Pennsylvania and oak sedge (*Carex eburnea*, *pennsylvanica* and *albicans*).

Shrubs with persistent foliage include meserve holly, rhododendron, St. Johns wort, sumac (gro-low) and cotoneaster, some of which offer the bonus of bright berries.

And while it isn't green, the foliage of many plants turns a mix of purple and green, which also shows up well against snow, mulch or soil. A whole host of plants turn beautiful shades of purple in winter. Prairie smoke is a low-lying native that is worth growing for winter foliage alone—beyond its delicate pink flowers. Columbine, coralbells, creeping mahonia, penstemon, hepatica and many other plants take on various shades of maroon to purple.

Winter colors tend to be subtle but the more variety and texture in the landscape, the more you'll want to get outdoors—and that's worth planning for. More photos of plants at: pinterest.com/nearboretum/winter-persistent-foliage.



Top left: foliage of lenten rose in January. From left: December photos of columbine, plantain-leaved sedge with snow; yarrow, *Bergenia* and *Lamium*.

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To report potential emerald ash borer, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture at 402-471-2351.

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Layering the Landscape for Wildlife Appeal

Justin Evertson, Green Infrastructure Coordinator

With native habitats shrinking, our home landscapes are increasingly important for sustaining wildlife, including birds, amphibians, pollinators and other beneficial insects. In terms of

year-round value, the backbone of wildlife habitat is our native trees and shrubs. Since they evolved along with native wildlife, they are most likely to be tied to their life cycles and most likely to adapt to changes in climate over time.

Almost all trees and shrubs provide



some food and shelter for wildlife. Low-branching species that form thickets provide some of the best shelter, offering excellent nesting habitat and escape from predators. Thickets can be a little wild, but grouping them together and confining them to a defined area surrounded by mowed turf or prairie grass will make them more manageable.

The wider the range of vertical layers in the landscape—overstory trees, understory trees, large shrubs, smaller shrubs and herbaceous groundcovers—the more varied the habitat it offers. Structural diversity broadens the appeal for both mammals and birds. Fruiting trees and shrubs are an incredibly important food source for a variety of mammals and birds, and tend to provide the longest-lasting nourishment.

Fruiting trees and shrubs are also important to insect pollinators—bees, butterflies and beetles. Before setting fruit, these plants had to flower and their flowers had to be visited by pollinators in order for fruits to form. Early-blooming species such as plum, crabapple and junberry are especially important to early season pollinators, particularly those that overwinter as adults. It's important to remember that prairie flowers and other garden perennials rarely start blooming before mid to late May, so flowering trees and shrubs are working overtime to sustain native pollinating insects early in the season.

Although there are well over 50 regionally native tree and shrub species

Layering continued on next page



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Layering continued from previous page



that can be considered for a wildlife-friendly, layered landscape in eastern Nebraska, here are a few of our favorites:

Valuable large-growing trees include bur, red and chinkapin oak, bitternut hickory, walnut, pecan, hackberry, elm,



The more layers, the more shelter. And the more diversity, the greater the appeal visually and as food sources year-round.

sycamore, sugar maple, coffeetree and tulip tree. Mid-height and understory trees include redbud, ironwood, buckeye, hawthorn, crabapple, black cherry and hornbeam.

Large shrubs to consider are blackhaw and cranberrybush viburnum, American plum, grey dogwood, elderberry and buttonbush, to name a few. Medium and small shrubs include snowberry, coralberry, gooseberry, currant, redbud dogwood, fragrant sumac and spicebush.

Finally, the bottom or ground-level layer of the wildlife friendly landscape should include a wide variety of native

herbaceous plants—both woodland types in shaded zones and prairie types in sunny areas. Plants for sun include silphiums, asters, goldenrods, coneflowers, gayfeathers, mountain mint, big bluestem, Indiangrass, switchgrass and little bluestem for just a start. Shade-tolerant plants include a variety of sedges, bloodroot, columbine, boneset, snakeroot, bellflowers and many others.

With hundreds of native plant species to choose from, deciding which to choose can seem overwhelming but don't overthink it, as almost every native plant is beneficial to wildlife on some level.



Plans grow and change, just like you

My mission is to help you at all stages and through the changes that life may bring. Contact me to discuss your personal financial plan.

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Acer truncatum, shantung maple
Aesculus glabra, Ohio buckeye
Amelanchier x grandiflora, serviceberry
Betula lenta, sweet birch
Carpinus caroliniana, American hornbeam
Carya ovata, shagbark hickory
Cladrastis kentukea, American yellowwood
Cornus alternifolia and *C. mas* (pagoda and corneliancherry dogwood)
Ginkgo biloba, ginkgo
Gymnocladus dioicus, Kentucky coffeetree
Liriodendron tulipifera, tuliptree
Ostrya virginiana, American hophornbeam
Platanus occidentalis, American sycamore
Quercus bicolor, *Q. ellipsoidalis*, *Q. macrocarpa*, *Q. muehlenbergii*, *Q. shumardii* and *Q. velutina* (swamp white, Hill's, bur, chinkapin, shumard and black oak)
Taxodium distichum, baldcypress



Shantung Maple
Acer truncatum



Ginkgo
Ginkgo biloba



Corneliancherry dogwood
Cornus alternifolia



Bur oak
Quercus macrocarpa



Serviceberry
Amelanchier x grandiflora

Conifers

Abies balsamea var. *phanerolepis*, concolor and *A. koreana* (balsam, concolor, Korean fir)
Larix kaempferi, Japanese larch
Picea abies, *glauca* and *P. omorika*, Norway, white and Serbian spruce
Pinus bungeana, *P. cembra*, *P. edulis*, *P. ponderosa*, *P. resinosa* and *P. strobiformis* (border, lacebark, Pinyon, Swiss stone, ponderosa and red pine)
Pseudotsuga menziesii var. *glauca*, Douglasfir



Douglasfir
Pseudotsuga menziesii var. *glauca*



Lacebark Pine
Pinus cembra

Shrubs

Aesculus parvifolia, bottlebrush buckeye
Amelanchier alnifolia 'Regent', serviceberry
Aronia melanocarpa, black chokeberry
Callicarpa dichotoma, purple beautyberry
Ceanothus americanus, New Jersey tea
Cephalanthus occidentalis, buttonbush
Corylus americana, American hazelnut
Euonymus atropurpurea, eastern wahoo,
Hamamelis vernalis, Common witchhazel
Heptacodium miconioides, seven-son flower
Hydrangea quercifolia, oakleaf hydrangea
Hypericum kalmianum, Kalm St. Johnswort
Mahonia repens, creeping mahonia
Prunus besseyi 'Pawnee Buttes', western sandcherry
Ribes odoratum, clove currant
Rosa glauca (*R. rubrifolia*), redleaf rose
Spiraea fritschiana, Korean spirea
Symphoricarpos x chenaultii, Chenault coralberry
Viburnum carlesii, *V. dentatum* var. *deamii*, *V. prunifolium* and *V. trilobum* (Redwing American cranberrybush, Koreanspice, Deam's arrowwood and blackhaw viburnum)



Bottlebrush buckeye
Aesculus parvifolia



Eastern wahoo
Euonymus atropurpurea



New Jersey tea
Ceanothus americanus



Oakleaf hydrangea
Hydrangea quercifolia

Grasses

Andropogon gerardii, big bluestem
Bouteloua curtipendula and *B. gracilis*, sideoats and blue grama
Calamagrostis brachytricha, Korean feather reed grass
Carex eburnea, *C. grayi*, *C. muskingumensis* and *pensylvanica*, bristle-leaf, Gray's, palm and Pennsylvania sedge
Eragrostis trichodes, sand lovegrass
Miscanthus sinensis v. *purpurascens* 'Autumn Red', miscanthus
Panicum virgatum, 'Dallas Blues', 'Northwind' and 'Shenandoah' switchgrass
Schizachyrium scoparium 'MinnBlueA', little bluestem
Sorghastrum nutans, Indiangrass
Sporobolus heterolepis and *S. wrightii*, prairie dropseed and giant sakaton



Indiangrass
Sorghastrum nutans



Palm sedge
Carex muskingumensis

More on these plants at plantnebraska.org

Perennials

Amorpha canescens, leadplant
Amsonia hubrichtii, narrowleaf bluestar
Anemone or *Pulsatilla patens*, pasque flower
Asclepias tuberosa, butterfly milkweed
Baptisia minor, dwarf blue indigo
Chelone lyonii, turtlehead
Echinacea species, coneflower
Eupatorium maculatum 'Gateway', Joe-Pye plant
Filipendula rubra 'Venusta', queen of the prairie
Geranium sanguineum, cranesbill
Geum triflorum, prairie smoke
Liatris ligulistylis, meadow blazing star
Oenothera macrocarpa var. *fremontii*, Fremont's primrose
Penstemon species, beardtongue
Phlox divaricata, woodland phlox
Polygonatum multiflorum 'Variegatum', variegated Solomon's seal
Pycnanthemum virginianum, Virginia mountain mint
Rudbeckia fulgida var. *speciosa*, showy black-eyed susan
Solidago rugosa 'Fireworks', goldenrod
Symphotrichum oblongifolium, aromatic aster
Thermopsis villosa, Carolina lupine



Narrowleaf bluestar
Amsonia hubrichtii



Meadow blazing star
Liatris ligulistylis



Coneflower
Echinacea species



Carolina lupine
Thermopsis villosa



Penstemon species

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Calylophus serrulatus 'Prairie Lode', sundrops
Caragana microphylla, Mongolian Silver Spires littleleaf peashrub
Clematis fremontii, *C. fruticosa* 'Mongolian Gold' and *C. tenuiloba* 'Pixie Parasols' (Fremont's, Mongolian Gold and Pixie Parasols clematis)
Dalea purpurea 'Stephanie', purple prairie clover
Dianthus 'Prairie Pink' and 'Wink'
Eupatorium 'Prairie Jewel'
Fallopia 'Lemon Lace', vine
Hibiscus moscheutos 'Pink Clouds'
Iris spuria 'Fontenelle' Spuria Iris
Juniperus virginiana 'Taylor', juniper
Liatris microcephala 'White Sprite' and *L. pycnostachya* 'Eureka', gayfeather
Monarda 'Prairie Gypsy'
Oenothera macrocarpa 'Comanche Campfire', primrose
Penstemon grandiflorus 'Prairie Snow', 'War Axe' and 'Prairie Splendor'
Populus tremuloides 'Prairie Gold', quaking aspen
Quercus prinoides, dwarf chinkapin oak
Scabiosa superba 'Mongolian Mist', pincushion flower
Scutellaria resinosa and *S. scoridifolia* 'Mongolian Skies', Smoky Hills and Mongolian Skies skullcap
Sedum tatarowinii 'Mongolian Stars', sedum
Solidago 'Wichita Mountains', goldenrod
Tradescantia tharpaii, dwarf spiderwort
Viburnum 'Copper Ridges' and 'Prairie Classic'



My Antonia aster
Aster fendleri



Spuria iris
Iris spuria 'Fontenelle'



Goldenrod
Solidago 'Wichita Mountains'



Eureka gayfeather
Liatris Eureka



Penstemon
'Prairie Splendor'



Beebalm
Monarda 'Prairie Gypsy'

