

# Guide to Using the Native Plants Found on the Hempstead Plains

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## Guide to Using the Native Plants Found on the Hempstead Plains

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## Why Choose Native Plants?

Just stop and close your eyes. Imagine the tall grasses gently blowing in the breeze as birds flutter about gathering food for nestlings, and butterflies dance among the wildflowers.

Such was the land of the Hempstead Plains, the only naturally occurring prairie east of the Allegheny Mountains that once ranged across 60,000 acres on Long Island from Queens to Suffolk counties.

Today only a fraction remains, but the Hempstead Plains is not alone in its dilemma. Grasslands worldwide are in jeopardy as acreage is altered or developed. Exotic plants, some of which are invasive, are crowding out our native grasses and wildflowers.

Thankfully, the remedy is easy, painless, and extremely attractive. Instead of non-native plants, consider those that have called Long Island home for centuries. Native species like those found at the Hempstead Plains are not only lovely for landscaping, but they tend to be easy to care for, having adapted to our climate and soil. As an extra bonus, other species like birds and butterflies will benefit from our choice.

Let's all make a contribution to the environment and preserve our natural heritage by creating a little bit of the native landscape on our own properties. Learn how on these pages!

### **For more information:**

*Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications.



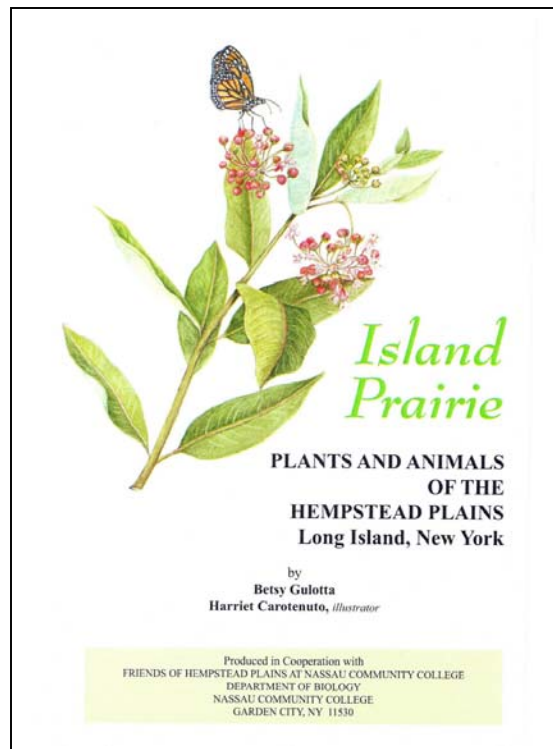
## PLANTS

Plants are the basic living component of any habitat and are critical to the survival of all animal life in the habitat. Only plants can combine chemical nutrients, water and carbon dioxide with energy from the sun to make the living tissue that forms the basis of the food chain. This process, called photosynthesis, is what permits life on earth.

Different types of plants are found in different habitats. The most common plants on prairies are grasses and forbs, both of which are flowering plants belonging to the Division Angiospermae. Grasses are monocots, belonging to the family Poaceae, and are characterized by narrow leaves with parallel veins and small, inconspicuous flowers. Forbs are dicots and include broad-leaved herbaceous flowering plants in many different families. Today's Hempstead Plains is dominated by these kinds of plants (with some occasional small trees and shrubs).

Prairies or grasslands are among the most important biomes in the world. They cover an enormous area and house the major photosynthetic producers of the biological world. In addition, they have been employed and manipulated by humans for centuries to provide food. Of the fifteen major crops that feed the world's human population, ten are grasses. This is perhaps why grasslands are the most rapidly vanishing habitat and why so few prairies still exist. It explains why it is so very important to preserve and protect what remains of the original Hempstead Plains.

Excerpted from *Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications. Order a copy at <http://friendsofhp.org/friends-new.html>



## GRASSES:

### **Big Bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii***

The Hempstead Plains is a tall grass prairie, so it makes sense that a grass called big bluestem makes itself quite at home on our site. Growing to heights between 4 and 8 feet, it's no surprise that it could be considered one of our more ubiquitous prairie plants.

This species does justice to the residential landscape as well. With its clump form, the bluish green foliage is low growing in spring, but starts reaching towards the sky beginning in summer, as coloring turns to a rich bronze red. But the show doesn't stop with autumn – tan leaves provide lovely winter interest, particularly when set against a snowy backdrop.



Big bluestem requires full sun and moist to dry soils, becoming drought tolerant once established. Avoid overwatering or overfertilizing as the plant will become top heavy and floppy. If clumps become too large, divide and plant in spring.

Foliage and seeds provide both food and cover for many birds, particularly sparrows, as well as butterflies. It is a larval host plant for Delaware skipper and dusted skipper butterflies.

### **References and more information:**

Butterflies and Moths of North America: [Delaware skipper](#), [dusted skipper](#)

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase big bluestem:**

[American Beauties  
Prairie Nursery](#)

## **Broomsedge, *Andropogon virginicus***

Forming graceful clumps alongside other bunch grasses on the Hempstead Plains, broomsedge can be easily confused with little bluestem. The foliage, color and form are similar in both species, yet closer examination shows that broomsedge has a coarser texture with wider leaves. It is also somewhat taller, standing around 4 feet high.



Broomsedge presents the gardener with another native grass option. Its moderate height provides a choice between shorter and taller species. Attractive foliage offers beauty not only in summer but also beyond as the plant takes on orange hues in fall, fading to a soft tan in winter. October features feathery seed heads that are almost luminescent in the sunlight.

Gardeners will find broomsedge an easy plant to maintain. It does best in full sun but can adapt to a little shade. Well-drained soils are necessary, and the species is comfortable on dry or sandy soils. Once established, broomsedge is very drought resistant.

Broomsedge provides shelter and food for several species. During warm months, it is a larval host plant for the Zabulon skipper butterfly; come fall, it offers a late season feast for birds, as it is one of the last grasses on the Hempstead Plains to set seed.

Broomsedge may be a little hard to find in garden centers or through online retailers, but it is well worth the effort of locating!

### **References and more information:**

#### [Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

*Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications.

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

## **Indian Grass, *Sorghastrum nutans***

Picture a swath of grasses soaring nine feet into the sky. Rather incredible image, isn't it? Most likely that was the scene right here on the Hempstead Plains in colonial times when Indian grass reached such stature.

Today, this grass is a bit lower, with a top height of approximately six feet. Slender, blue-green leaves emerge in spring, followed by golden yellow and orange flowers in August, later replaced by feathery seed heads in fall.



Indian grass needs full to part sun, is flexible about soil conditions, and tolerates drought. Rich, moist soils are not recommended since stalks have a tendency to flop over. With a clump form, it may need occasional dividing in spring.

Indian grass has both ornamental and wildlife benefits. In terms of appearance, mass plantings are beautiful when space allows, or use it as a striking specimen plant. Wildlife like birds and small mammals will be thankful for both food and shelter the grass provides. Additionally, the flowers attract butterflies and it is a larval host plant for the pepper and salt skipper butterfly.

### **References and more information:**

#### [Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

*Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications.

#### [The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase Indian grass:**

[American Beauties](#)

[Prairie Nursery](#)

[Sunlight Gardens](#)

## **Little Bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium***

Few grasses say “prairie” more than little bluestem. Also called alkali grass or desert saltgrass, this member of the Poaceae family is found throughout most of the United States including the Hempstead Plains where it has made itself at home for centuries.

But little bluestem is equally comfortable and useful in the home garden setting. This bunchgrass features thin, 1/16-1/4” wide leaves giving a fine texture. It is generally between 18-24” tall and grass clumps can be up to 1 foot in diameter.



Howard F. Schwartz, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org

Foliage begins as bluish green but is most spectacular in the fall when it becomes reddish-tan. At the same time, the white, feathery seed heads offer a sense of luminescence in the autumn sunlight. The tan foliage continues to offer beauty throughout the winter.

Little bluestem is an easy plant to care for, generally adapting to a variety of soil types except overly moist conditions. It is tolerant of sun to part shade, drought, and is frequently used for erosion control.

Plant the grass with other late season bloomers like black-eyed Susans or goldenrod. The grass looks best planted as groups. The only caveat is that due to its ability to reseed, it may not be a good choice in very small gardens.

The seeds offer winter food for a variety of birds and small mammals. It is also the larval host for dusted, Indian, and crossline skipper butterflies.

### **References and more information:**

Butterflies and Moths of North America: [dusted skipper](#), [Indian skipper](#), [crossline skipper](#)

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center’s Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

**Where to purchase little bluestem:** [American Beauties](#), [Niche Gardens](#), [Prairie Nursery](#), [Sunlight Gardens](#)



### **Pennsylvania Sedge, *Carex pensylvanica***

As an alternative to water-hogging turfgrass, consider the attractive foliage of Pennsylvania sedge. Its slender, arching leaves grow to approximately 9" tall, first appearing in a bright green during spring and summer, and turning tan in fall.

This perennial sedge is an excellent groundcover, growing in clumps up to 15" wide, which can be divided in spring. Light requirements are flexible, as the plant adapts to full sun to part shade, and it prefers moist, well-drained soils but can handle drier conditions.



Plant Pennsylvania sedge in masses with woodland plants. Its foliage, flowers, and seeds offer both food and shelter for various birds, pollinators and small mammals.

### **References and more information:**

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase Pennsylvania sedge:**

[American Beauties](#)  
[Sunlight Gardens](#)



## **Switchgrass, *Panicum virgatum***

One of the most prominent tallgrass prairie species, and common on the Hempstead Plains, switchgrass is just as beautiful in the garden, plus it's a carefree and easy plant.



Forming dense clumps between 2-3 feet wide, the leaves are slim, glossy and bluish green in spring through summer. Before flowering, the plant stands around 3 feet tall but when light purple flower heads emerge in late summer, it may reach up to 6 feet. Tan, feathery seed heads develop in fall, as the foliage turns golden brown.



An unfinicky plant, switchgrass grows in sun to part shade, dry to wet soil. It can be a heavy self-seeder – great if there is adequate room, but a characteristic to be mindful of in smaller spaces. Clumps can be divided in spring.

Switchgrass looks terrific in groups of three for a mass planting with wildflowers like asters, and its tan foliage provides striking winter interest especially in snow. Wildlife also appreciates the look! Seeds offer food for many bird species, plus flowers attract butterflies. Additionally, it is a larval host plant for the Delaware skipper butterfly.

### **References and more information:**

#### [Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications.

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

#### [The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase switchgrass:**

[American Beauties](#), [Niche Gardens](#), [Prairie Nursery](#), [Sunlight Gardens](#)

## **FORBS:**

### **Birdsfoot Violet, *Viola pedata***

Three centuries ago, the lavender hue of birdsfoot violet carpeted the Hempstead Plains, drawing the attention of early settlers. In honor of such historical significance, it was named Nassau County's official flower in 1980. Even horticultural experts offer praise for little plant, calling birdsfoot violet "one of our prettiest native flowers."



Showy, 1" flowers emerge in spring. Although the common color scheme is violet with orange stamens, there are white and two-color varieties. A clumping perennial, it is a low grower at 3-5" tall, and features delicately divided leaves that appear as a bird's foot, the inspiration for its common name and a way to tell it apart from other violets.

Although adapted to full sun on the prairie, like most of its relatives, birdsfoot violet does well in part shade and requires well-drained or even sandy soils, making it a perfect choice for rock gardens.

Besides its aesthetic value, the plant offers up pollen and nectar for butterflies, bees, and birds. Furthermore, it is a larval host plant for the regal fritillary butterfly.

### **References and more information:**

[Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase birdsfoot violet:**

[Prairie Nursery](#)  
[Sunlight Gardens](#)

## **Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta***

Black-eyed Susans may be visitors from midwestern prairies, but there's no question that they do well on the Hempstead Plains, and are considered a favorite plant by gardeners and wildlife alike.



A single flower sits on top of 24-36" tall stems, shining with its golden rays that encircle a dark brown center. As a biennial, it begins life as a rosette of hairy, dark green leaves in the first year, with 3" wide blooms forming in mid-summer of the following year. The dark centers are attractive seed heads that provide structure to the fall and winter garden scene.

Black-eyed Susans grow in sun to part shade, requiring moist to dry soils; they may be drought tolerant in some situations. Plants reseed with ease – terrific for large areas but a characteristic to be aware of for small space gardeners. As a testament to the species' popularity, a wide variety of cultivars are available.

People aren't the only species fond of this classic summertime flower – pollinators such as butterflies are equally enthralled. Come fall and winter, birds show that they too like black-eyed Susans for the abundant food found in seed heads.

### **References and more information:**

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase black-eyed Susans:**

[Prairie Nursery](#)

Also widely available at many garden centers and nurseries.

**Blue Vervain, *Verbena hastata***

On the Hempstead Plains, blue vervain grows in slightly moister areas next to big bluestem grass. The plant sends up deep blue, long and slender flower spikes that form a candelabra of blooms in mid-to late summer. The plant grows between 3-6 feet in height, reaching the taller range when planted in full sun (however, it can tolerate some shade). Plant this biennial in moist soils – it is perfect along streams or ponds.

Blue vervain is a favorite among pollinators, particularly bumblebees. It also attracts birds, and is a larval host plant the common buckeye moth.

**References and more information:**

[Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

**Where to purchase blue vervain:**

[Prairie Nursery](#)

[Niche Gardens](#)



John Cardina, The Ohio State University, Bugwood.org

## **Butterflyweed, *Asclepias tuberosa***

Butterflyweed is one of the most striking prairie wildflowers decorating the Hempstead Plains. Despite the word “weed” in its name, butterflyweed can be an attractive, important plant in the garden as well as on the prairie. A member of the milkweed family, it is a late bloomer but very much worth the wait.



Growing up to 36” tall, the plant displays 2” wide, flat or slightly curved flower heads in bright orange starting in mid-summer. Other colors are available thanks to cultivars on the market, and all look grand set apart from the dark green, alternate, lance-shaped foliage. After flowering, brown seed pods form which in addition to providing food for many species, offer autumn interest to the garden.

Full sun is best for butterflyweed but fear not if you have some shade, as other *Asclepias* species are suitable. The plant does nicely in well-drained or even sandy soils (again, if you have moist soil look into other *Asclepias* species), plus is drought tolerant.

Insect pests are usually not a problem though aphids may make themselves at home. If that’s the case, do not spray pesticides, as it will interrupt the natural processes of your ecosystem. Rather, dislodge by spraying plants with a strong jet of water. Better yet, learn to tolerate aphids as they provide food for predatory insects like ladybugs.

The joy of butterflyweed is apparent in its common name – the flowers are a magnet for pollinators like butterflies, and are a significant food source for monarch butterfly caterpillars. Yet another reason to avoid pesticide use!

### **References and more information:**

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center’s Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase butterflyweed:**

[American Beauties](#), [Prairie Nursery](#), [Sunshine Farm and Gardens](#) (scroll down on web page)

### **Common Milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca***

Compared to its more flamboyant and popular cousin butterflyweed, the common milkweed may first seem like a wallflower. However, this lovely flower offers beauty with a heady fragrance, and should be invited into suitable landscapes.

Common milkweed is scattered throughout the Hempstead Plains. Growing alongside the grasses and other wildflowers, the plant rises to heights between 2-6 feet. It features large (up to 7" long), paddle-shaped leaves in soft gray, and round, fragrant flower clusters in shades of dusty rose and lavender gracing the plant in July through August. Come fall, flowers give way to architecturally striking grayish green seedpods.



Plant common milkweed in full sun with well-drained, sandy soils. It can be an aggressive species making it somewhat difficult to maintain in some garden situations. However, if creating a habitat in difficult soil conditions, or trying to provide erosion control, this wildflower may be a perfect option.

Common milkweed is a favorite among pollinating insects and is particularly important to monarch butterflies as a food source for caterpillars. Though it may be hard to locate a garden center or online resource for this lovely plant, the rewards are worth it!

#### **References and more information:**

[Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

*Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

[United States Department of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

## **Common Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium***

Though a floral survey completed on the Hempstead Plains noted common yarrow's presence, uncertainty remains as to its native status. Nevertheless, this perennial has charmed gardeners for years and deserves mention as a welcome addition in a prairie, wildflower garden, or even mixed with turf.



Mary Ellen (Mel) Harte, Bugwood.org

Large, compact flower clusters adorn stems that commonly grow 1-2 feet high but sometimes reach 3 feet. The fragrant blossoms emerge in mid-summer and are usually white or pink, though considering the plant's popularity, many cultivars now exist offering gardeners a range of colors. Foliage is also attractive with dark green, 3-5" long alternate, compound leaves possessing a delicate fern-like texture.

Common yarrow does best in full sun but may tolerate a little shade. It adapts to poor soils and is rather drought tolerant. Thanks in part to its mat-like growth habit, self-seeding ability, and unfussy nature, the plant has proven to be an attractive, effective and water-wise alternative to lawn in some areas.

### **References and more information:**

*Armitage's Garden Perennials: A Color Encyclopedia* by Allen M. Armitage, published 2000 by Timber Press.

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

### **Where to purchase common yarrow:**

[Sunlight Gardens](#)

Also widely available at garden centers and nurseries.



## **Evening Primrose, *Oenothera biennis***

Evening primrose serves an important function on the Hempstead Plains, offering nighttime pollinators a food source. As its scientific name suggests, this wildflower is a biennial, and as suggested by its common name, blooms in the evening. Simply a rosette of lance-shaped foliage in its first year, the plant reaches heights between 2-6 feet by its second year. The arrival of summer ushers in the highlight of the species: a covering of 1-2" diameter, lemon scented, yellow flowers that open at dusk. Alas, one is not meant to admire the blooms for long; flowers close around noon the following day.



Joy Viola, Northeastern University, Bugwood.org

Full sun is best for evening primrose and it can handle dry, rocky, sandy and infertile soils. In fact, it thrives in disturbed areas and may not be as vibrant in a yard with rich soils. Furthermore, the plant can be aggressive thus limiting its use in more manicured settings. But for a wildflower garden or in a location too demanding for other plants, evening primrose can be an excellent choice. Try to install evening primrose close to patios or decks in order to enjoy their flowers over an outdoor summer dinner.

Besides offering flowers that attract night pollinators like moths, hummingbirds visit the blooms before closing. Evening primrose seeds also feed a variety of birds. It may be hard to locate a garden center or online resource for this lovely plant, but the rewards are worth it!

### **References and more information:**

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

[The Lady Bird Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

[United States Department of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

## **New England Aster, *Aster novae-angliae***

Though New England aster may not be a plant naturally found on the Hempstead Plains, it is a common native plant in the northeast and offers wonderful benefits for wildlife.



Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources - Forestry Archive, Bugwood.org

As a member of one of the largest families of flowering plants, New England aster grows to 24-60” tall. When other wildflowers’ glory is waning, this perennial is coming into its prime with small, daisy-like blooms in purples and rosy pinks with yellow centers that light up the green, linear foliage.

New England aster is best in full to part sun with moist soil conditions. Several cultivars are available offering various plant heights, flower colors, and growth habits.

The abundant blooms not only brighten our spirits as summer fades but also provides important late season nectar to several pollinator species like butterflies. Additionally, New England aster is a larval host plant for the pearl crescent butterfly.

### **References and more information:**

#### [Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase New England aster:**

[American Beauties](#) (scroll down web page for aster selections)

[Prairie Nursery](#)

[Sunlight Gardens](#)

Also widely available at garden centers and nurseries.

## **Rough Goldenrod, *Solidago rugosa***

Just when you thought the garden was ready to end the season, along comes rough goldenrod with its bright, late season blooms.

A native plant found on the Hempstead Plains and in similar ecosystems, goldenrods were generally ignored on their home turf in years past, but embraced in Europe.

Perhaps part of the indifference is due to bad publicity: goldenrods are frequently faulted as the cause for autumn hay fever while the actual culprit is ragweed.



Mary Ellen (Mel) Harte, Bugwood.org

Pardoned for this misunderstanding, it's time for us to enjoy the beauty of this wildflower. Rough goldenrod is a clump-forming perennial, reaching heights between 24-72" tall. From late September to October the pendulous, golden yellow flower clusters emerge and offer a stunning contrast to the fall color displayed by trees and shrubs, while coordinating with the hues of native grasses.

Rough goldenrod prefers moist to dry soils in sun to part sun. Though generally pest-free, goldenrods may sometimes be bothered by fungal diseases called rust. To prevent an outbreak, simply keep plants in bright sunlight with well-drained soil and ensure they have adequate spacing for good air circulation. Rough goldenrod can sometimes be aggressive in a smaller space, but cultivars offer more relaxed growing habits along with varying heights.

As a late season bloomer, rough goldenrod provides a vital nectar source to pollinators like butterflies. Flowers give way to seeds that are relished by various birds like sparrows, juncos, and finches.

### **References and more information:**

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase rough goldenrod:**

[American Beauties](#)  
[Niche Gardens](#)

## **Wild Indigo, *Baptisia tinctoria***

Like its relative blue false indigo (*B. australis*), wild indigo was once valued by Native Americans to create yellow and blue dyes. Today, we simply enjoy this species for not only its beauty but also for its nitrogen fixing abilities in soil.



With a height and spread ranging between 2-3 feet, this perennial almost takes on a shrub-like appearance with silvery green foliage. In early summer, it sends up tall flower stalks of yellow blooms, similar in shape to those produced by pea plants. Later in the season, indigo-blue fruit appears while stems take on similar coloring in fall.

Tolerant of poor soils, plant wild indigo in full sun or bright shady areas. Though it needs some time to establish a root system, specimens will become drought tolerant and are generally free of pest problems.

The delicate yellow blooms are very attractive to butterflies and other pollinators. Additionally, wild indigo is a larval host plant for the rare frosted elphin and wild indigo duskywing butterflies.

### **References and more information:**

Butterflies and Moths of North America: [frosted elphin](#), [wild indigo duskywing](#)

*Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes* by Allan M. Armitage, second edition published 1997 by Stipes Publishing.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

### **Where to purchase wild indigo:**

[Niche Gardens](#)

## TREES AND SHRUBS:

### Eastern Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*

Although trees are generally not associated with tall grass prairies, the Hempstead Plains has a few species scattered along the landscape. One of those is the native eastern red cedar.



Keith Kanoti, Maine Forest Service, Bugwood.org

While the tree's form can take on an irregular shape in some regions and grow between 33-65 feet tall, Long Islanders are more familiar with a shorter, tight columnar appearance. Its green foliage is evergreen and aromatic; the shredding, brown bark is attractive as it peeks out beyond the foliage. Commonly mistaken for berries, female trees produce 1/4" cones, first in a pale green color, then taking on a blue hue and a waxy covering as the growing season progresses.

Eastern red cedar is a tough tree, able to handle conditions that other species cannot, tolerating infertile sandy soils in sunny conditions. It makes an excellent windbreak, and produces more cones when male and female trees are planted together. To prevent the spread of a fungal disease, avoid planting near crabapple trees.

Eastern red cedar is a boon for wildlife with approximately 80 bird species alone feeding on its cones – in fact, it is the source for the cedar waxwing's common name. With a dense crown and year-round foliage, the tree provides excellent shelter particularly during in cold winter months.

### References and more information:

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Michael A. Dirr, published 1997 by Timber Press.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### Where to purchase eastern red cedar:

[American Beauties](#)

Also widely available at many garden centers and nurseries.

## **Elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis***

Found not only at the Hempstead Plains but also decorating roadsides and moist ditches, the elderberry's dense thickets of arching stems are an attractive combination of form and function.



Elderberry grows in a broad, rounded shape, reaching 5-12 feet tall, with large compound leaves. June and July mark the emergence of creamy, fragrant flowers arranged in flat-topped clusters up to 10" wide. By autumn the flowers are replaced with small, dark purple or black berries.

Elderberry is perfect for somewhat moist soils with full sun exposure, though it is adaptable to a little shade. Be warned that this species can become quite large in a short amount of time – a useful characteristic for a privacy hedge though gardeners may still want to keep their pruners at the ready!

Planting elderberry is like inviting a variety of beautiful wildlife to an all-you-can-eat buffet. The flowers are an excellent source of nectar for pollinators like butterflies, while birds relish the berries in fall. Plus, thanks to its dense growth, elderberry offers wonderful shelter and nesting habitat.

### **References and more information:**

*Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Michael A. Dirr, published 1997 by Timber Press.

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase elderberry:**

[American Beauties](#)

## **Highbush Blueberry, *Vaccinium corymbosum***

Blueberries are the ubiquitous fruit of summer, but did you know that these same berries we put in muffins and pies also play an important role in the environment? Highbush blueberry, a species found along bogs and fields, provides a tasty meal for the wildlife on the Hempstead Plains.



Scott NeSmith, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org

Highbush blueberry is a shrub that may grow up to 13 feet in width and height when planted in optimal conditions. It features smooth oval leaves – green during spring and summer, but putting on a glorious show of fall color as they turn orange and red. In spring it produces small, delicate, white, bell-shaped blooms in dense clusters, which lead to the familiar blue berries in July through September.

Although blueberries can grow in a little shade, plant them in full sun for the best fruit set with acidic, well-drained soil. As the plant is a slow grower, place them in locations where other species will not out compete for sun and water.

Highbush blueberry serves a number of uses in the landscape. It possesses lovely features in its foliage, flowers and berries and is the perfect choice as an ornamental plant or an addition to a vegetable garden. However, the shrub's greatest asset is its importance to wildlife. The flowers are a favorite nectar source for pollinators while the berries attract small mammals and up to 30 bird species including robins, bluebirds, catbirds, mockingbirds, brown thrashers and cardinals.

### **References and more information:**

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Michael A. Dirr, published 1997 by Timber Press.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase highbush blueberry:**

[American Beauties](#)

**Northern Arrowwood, *Viburnum dentatum* var. *lucidum***

The northern arrowwood found growing on the Hempstead Plains is not only ecologically significant but culturally as well. Native Americans used the shrub's strong stems for arrow shafts and a number of animal species rely on its foliage, fruit and form for survival.



The Dow Gardens Archive, Dow Gardens, Bugwood.org

Northern arrowwood creates a dense thicket, usually 5 feet tall but sometimes reaching heights up to 10-12 feet. Dense, flat-topped, white flower clusters form in May and June, giving way to deep bluish black berry clusters in the fall. The spring and summer's shiny, green foliage follows this lead, turning shades of yellow, purple and red.

Northern arrowwood is generally easy to care for and free of most pest problems. It is excellent in sunny areas with moist soils or along woodland borders. Thanks to its dense form, the shrub also makes a great privacy hedge.

The dark berries provide food for many birds and small mammals, while the plant also offers shelter and protection. Its flowers attract not only pollinators like butterflies but also hummingbirds. Plus, northern arrowwood is a larval host for spring azure butterflies.

**References and more information:**

[Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Michael A. Dirr, published 1997 by Timber Press.

[Floridata](#)

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

**Where to purchase northern arrowwood:**

[American Beauties](#)



### **Northern Blackberry, *Rubus allegheniensis***

Northern blackberry is scattered around the Hempstead Plains, forming dense thickets of thorny stems. It is a rather short, stout shrub, growing approximately 3-6 feet high, but twice as large in width. Its dark green compound foliage takes on rich fall colors in orange, red and purple hues. Loose, white flower clusters in June set the stage for the formation of thimble-shaped black berries in late summer and fall.



As an unfussy plant, northern blackberry can be planted in moist soils with sun or shade. Its form can be useful in creating a privacy hedge but locate the plant where people will not come into regular contact with the prickles along its stems.

Those same prickles actually are beneficial for birds and small mammals that may seek shelter and protection in the thickets of northern blackberry. Plus, thanks to heavy fruit production, such species can take advantage of an enormous – and tasty! – source of food.

### **References and more information:**

*Island Prairie: Plants and Animals of the Hempstead Plains* by Betsy Gulotta, published 2008 by Whittier Publications.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase northern blackberry:**

Frequently available at garden centers.

## Staghorn Sumac, *Rhus typhina*

Staghorn sumac, so named because its velvety branches resemble deer antlers, needs a good publicity agent. This small tree found around the Hempstead Plains is frequently regarded as a weed but underneath that term lies a beautiful, easy, and ecologically beneficial plant.



The Dow Gardens Archive, Dow Gardens, Bugwood.org

As a tree, staghorn sumac can reach up to 15-25 feet but we frequently see it in a smaller form, with several plants creating thickets. It possesses a beautiful, twisting branching pattern with large, arching foliage that greets spring and summer with green, changing to vivid red and orange in the fall. Though the female plant's summer flowers may not be particularly conspicuous, their end result is – come fall, red, pyramidal seed clusters are perched on branches.

Staghorn sumac is fast growing, drought tolerant, easy to care for, and generally pest free. It is best in sunny areas, and can adapt to dry or gravelly soils. Selective pruning is useful to highlight the architectural branching pattern, making this so-called weed into a highly ornamental specimen. Conversely, allowing thickets to form is an excellent naturalized alternative.

The seed heads attract numerous bird species such as robins, mockingbirds, and catbirds that, along with small mammals, rely on staghorn sumac as an emergency food source in cold winter months.

It may be hard to locate a garden center or online resource for this lovely plant, but the rewards are worth it!

### References and more information:

*Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Michael A. Dirr, published 1997 by Timber Press.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

## **White Ash, *Fraxinus americana***

Though trees are not generally considered prairie plants, a few dot the landscape and the Hempstead Plains is no exception. One such shade tree found on the Plains is the white ash.



Richard Webb, Self-employed horticulturist, Bugwood.org

Standing up to 80 feet tall, the white ash takes on a rounded crown once mature, but is more pyramidal when young. Compound leaves range between 8 to 15” long and turn magnificent shades of purple, red, orange, or yellow in the fall.

White ash and the many cultivars now available make for an outstanding shade tree when planted in good conditions – sun to part sun and moist, well-drained soil. Avoid planting in dry or wet soils.

Besides offering shade and beautiful fall color, white ash also makes important contributions to the environment. Its branches and foliage provide shelter, and birds feed on the seeds. White ash is also the larval host for eastern tiger swallowtail, hickory hairstreak, mourning cloak and viceroy butterflies.

### **References and more information:**

Butterflies and Moths of North America: [eastern tiger swallowtail](#), [hickory hairstreak](#), [mourning cloak](#), [viceroy](#)

*Durr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Michael A. Durr, published 1997 by Timber Press.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Native Plant Database](#)

*Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation* by Donald J. Leopold, published 2005 by Timber Press.

### **Where to purchase white ash:**

White ash is frequently available at garden centers and nurseries.

## **Wild Black Cherry, *Prunus serotina***

The wild black cherry has a long history as a lovely ornamental plant – early settlers as far back as 1629 appreciated its beauty so much that the tree was one of the earliest to be introduced to English gardens. Here at the Hempstead Plains, we can enjoy not only its good looks, but also appreciate wild black cherry’s role in sustaining the prairie landscape.



Barbara Tokarska-Guzik, University of Silesia, Bugwood.org

Pendulous branches give a pyramidal or conical shape to the tree, which if left untended, can be up to 50 feet tall. New spring foliage is bright green, sometimes with a bronze hue, and takes on yellow and red shades in the fall. Drooping, white flower clusters between 4-6” long emerge in spring. Come fall, small, red or black fruit replaces flowers.

Though it can certainly take over parts of the landscape if not kept in check, wild black cherry is an excellent addition to a naturalized garden. It is adaptable to both sun or shade, and moist or dry soil, as long as it is well-drained. As with many of its relatives, the tree sometimes has disease or insect pest problems.

Between its fruit, flowers and foliage, the wild black cherry is an important link in the food chain. Blooms are an excellent nectar source for pollinators and its foliage feeds the larva of eastern tiger swallowtail and viceroy butterflies. Birds not only feed on the fruit, but may actually gorge themselves – some reports have observed robins eating so much that they cannot fly!

### **References and more information:**

Butterflies and Moths of North America: [eastern tiger swallowtail](#), [viceroy](#)

*Coastal Plants from Cape Cod to Cape Canaveral* by Irene H. Stuckey and Lisa Lofland Gould, published 2000 by the University of North Carolina Press.

*Dirr’s Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Michael A. Dirr, published 1997 by Timber Press.

[The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center’s Native Plant Database](#)

### **Where to purchase wild black cherry:**

Wild black cherry is frequently available at garden centers and nurseries.

## How to Incorporate Native Plants into the Landscape

Ready to get started? Welcome native plants along with birds and other wildlife to your landscape with these easy “how-to” directions.

- Create a prairie landscape
- Plant a bird garden
- Plant a butterfly garden
- Help out pollinators
- Protect your natural habitat



## Create a Prairie Landscape

Prairies like the Hempstead Plains are not only important ecosystems, but also offer the property owner a serene, beautiful, and creative alternative to common landscape designs. They are easy to incorporate into the landscape and can range in size from raised beds to a complete turf replacement.



When planning a design, be sure to take into account the location. In general, prairie species do best in sunny areas with well-drained or even dry soils. Select a variety of wildflower and grass species but be sure to include the occasional shrub or shade tree as space permits.

To imitate nature, group plants by species and arrange in curving, irregular lines to create swaths of color and texture. Consider plant heights and bloom times so that all species can be showcased properly.

Many prairie species are available in small pots or as seeds. Installing small plants in pots with roughly one square foot per plant to allow for growing room offers a more “instant” landscape, but seeds may be a more economical choice in larger areas. Most prairie plants are drought tolerant but will need irrigation as they become established; follow the grower’s recommendations for irrigation and fertilization.



While planting up a garden bed is beautiful, consider expanding this model for a real statement by eliminating labor and chemical-intensive turf grass and opting for a prairie instead!

First, clear off turf either with a sod cutter or by repeated tilling. Alternatively, cover the planting area in autumn with black plastic held in place with lumber; remove plastic and till in spring. Install plants or spread seed per grower’s recommendations.

Weeds and other competing vegetation are a concern when establishing a prairie, so remove remaining vegetation and monitor regularly.

No matter what size, by creating a prairie landscape and restricting pesticide use, property owners can do their part to help native plants, as well as attract birds, butterflies, and other pollinators.

Of course, the best way to learn more about prairie landscaping is to visit one! Join [Friends of Hempstead Plains](#) on one of our workshops or nature walks to see the beautiful

plants that make up Long Island's only tall grass prairie. You are also welcome to participate in our exciting restoration and management projects!

**For more information on creating a prairie landscape:**

*Creating Natural Landscapes* by Ortho Books, published 2003 by Meredith Publishing.

*Going Native: Biodiversity in Our Own Backyards*, published 1996 by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

*The Natural Lawn and Alternatives*, second edition published 1995 by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

[Prairie Nursery](#)

*Wildflower Gardens: 60 Spectacular Plants and How to Grow Them in Your Garden* published 1999 by Brooklyn Botanic Garden.



## Plant a Bird Garden

What could be more beautiful than visits from finches, robins, and cardinals? Think of stepping outside, or just watching from the window, to appreciate the charms and songs of catbirds, blue jays, and mockingbirds, or marveling as the iridescent plumage of ruby-throated hummingbirds catch the sunlight.



Eastern meadowlark

Such a scene is not restricted to parks or wildlife sanctuaries. By making a few adjustments to the landscape, even a small property can begin to attract birds.

Food, water, shelter and a place to raise young are the four basic necessities birds require. While birdhouses and birdfeeders are certainly useful, an even better idea is to take a cue from nature and offer our avian friends these four things by adding native plants to the landscape.

The Hempstead Plains is host to many natives that are available to homeowners and landscape designers through garden centers and online retailers.



Red-winged black bird: Shari Romar

Grasses like big and little bluestem, broomsedge and Indian grass provide shelter with their dense, arching foliage, and autumn seeds help birds fatten up as they prepare for winter. Similarly, several shrubs produce plump, nutritious fruit relished by birds -- northern blackberry, highbush blueberry and northern arrowwood's colorful berries are consumed in late summer to fall while staghorn sumac fruit are saved for a late winter meal. The shrubs' branches and foliage are also great nesting spots for birds.

Wildflowers are always a welcome addition to any landscape. Species such as butterflyweed lure hummingbirds to feed on nectar, while seedeaters like finches feast on the abundant seed heads of black-eyed Susans.

Remember that birds need shelter in cold winter months and eastern red cedar is a terrific option. Its dense, evergreen foliage protects birds on chilly days and the small, blue cones (commonly referred to as berries) are a favorite food of many songbirds attracting upwards of 80 species including the stunning cedar waxwing.

Don't forget that even insects are needed for a healthy ecosystem and, in turn, healthy birds. Native plants lure insects that are an important summer food, especially for breeding adults and growing chicks.



To supply water, add a birdbath or water feature like a small pond. Birds are attracted to the sound of running water, and even a simple drip system can do the trick (plus, avoiding still water helps prevent mosquito larvae from developing). Place rocks around edges since birds need less than 2” of water for drinking and bathing. Come cold winter months, install a heater to keep water from freezing. Surprising as it may sound, water is extremely important in winter, not only for drinking but also for bathing – clean feathers do a better job of insulating from the cold.



Eastern bluebird

To make the landscape even more attractive and safer for avian visitors, keep cats indoors so that they do not scare or prey upon birds.

By offering shelter, food, water and a place to raise young, even a small yard far from nature can begin to look like a wonderful sanctuary. By installing native plants, like those on the Hempstead Plains, we can create mini-ecosystems that help our environment in the wake of increasing habitat loss. As an extra bonus, native plants are not only beautiful but many are also easy to care for since they are adapted to our region.

**For more information:**

*Attracting Birds, Butterflies and Other Backyard Wildlife* by David Mizejewski, published 2004 by Creative Homeowner.

*The Bird Garden: A Comprehensive Guide to Attracting Birds to Your Backyard Throughout the Year* by Stephen W. Kress, published 1995 by DK Publishing.

*Bird Gardens: Welcoming Wild Birds to Your Yard* Stephen W. Kress, editor, published 1998 by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

*Living With Wildlife: Create Wildlife Habitat No Matter Where You Live* by Marilyn and Ron Leys, published 2000 by Krause Publications.

## Plant a Butterfly Garden

There's just something special about butterflies and moths -- those delicate wings with coloring that varies from muted to spectacular, along with the sense of peace and calm they bring to a landscape. As butterfly and moth watching has become more popular over recent years, many have found that these important insects are easy to welcome into a landscape by making simple gardening modifications.



Carole Ryder

But before learning how to attract butterflies and moths, we must first understand a little bit about their life cycle. The most recognizable form is the adult – a winged insect with a tongue-like structure called a proboscis that extracts nectar from flowers. After mating, females choose specific plants on which to lay their eggs. This plant choice is very important – once the eggs hatch, hungry larvae (caterpillars) emerge, some of which are picky eaters and only eat certain plants (for instance, the monarch butterfly caterpillar only eats plants in the milkweed family).

Caterpillars become larger as they feed in preparation for the next life stage. Mature caterpillars build a cocoon around themselves. While enclosed in this shelter, their entire shape changes into the adult form – a butterfly or moth.

To attract butterflies and moths, provide food for both the larval and adult stages. Native plants, like many of those at the Hempstead Plains, are the best choice and several are available at garden centers and online retailers. For best results, imitate nature by installing plants in groups instead of single plantings scattered alone.

Butterflies and moths require nectar provided by plants including:

- Birdsfoot violet
- Black-eyed Susans
- Butterflyweed
- Common milkweed
- Common yarrow
- Goldenrod
- Elderberry
- Evening primrose – great for moths at night!
- Highbush blueberry
- Indian grass
- New England aster
- Northern arrowwood
- Switchgrass
- Wild black cherry
- Wild indigo



Shari Romar

Don't forget those hungry caterpillars, and let them to feast on plants! Native larval host plants (and their associated butterfly/moth species) include:

- Blue vervain – common buckeye moth
- Birdsfoot violet – regal fritillary butterfly
- Butterflyweed – monarch butterfly
- Broomsedge – Zabulon skipper butterfly
- Common milkweed – monarch butterfly
- Indian grass – pepper and salt skipper butterfly
- Little bluestem – dusted, Indian, and crossline skipper butterflies
- Northern arrowwood – spring azure butterfly
- Switchgrass – Delaware skipper butterfly
- White ash – eastern swallowtail, hairstreak, mourning cloak, and viceroy butterflies
- Wild black cherry – eastern tiger swallowtail and viceroy butterflies
- Wild indigo – frosted elphin and wild indigo duskywing butterflies

In addition to offering food, clear away a small, sunny area for a shallow pool of water where the insects can get salts and nutrients from the soil, and warm themselves in the morning for a full day of flying from flower to flower.

Inviting butterflies and moths into the landscape helps plants cross-pollinate, which in turn helps the environment. But be sure not to compromise the ecosystem you've created by spraying pesticides that can harm or even kill butterflies and moths, as well as other beneficial insects. Instead, just let nature do its job!

**For more information:**

*Attracting Birds, Butterflies and Other Backyard Wildlife* by David Mizejewski, published 2004 by Creative Homeowner.

*Living With Wildlife: Create Wildlife Habitat No Matter Where You Live* by Marilyn and Ron Leys, published 2000 by Krause Publications.

## Help Out Pollinators

Though bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds often get most the credit as plant pollinators, many other, often unnoticed, species also help out – even flies and beetles!

No matter who does the work, one thing is certain: we rely on ALL pollinators, and not just for pretty flowers and honey. They pollinate crops to the tune of nearly \$20 billion annually just in the United States alone; even the clothing you're wearing right now once needed pollinators to visit cotton plants.

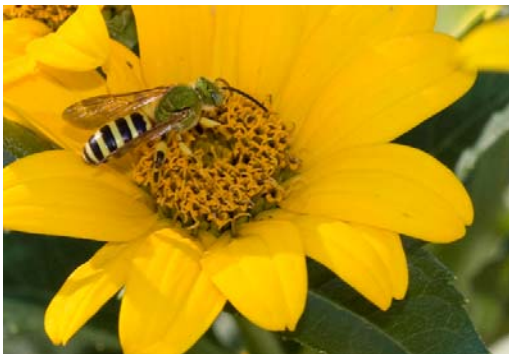
Life depends on pollinators – yet they are in serious trouble.

Over recent years, insect pollinator populations have drastically declined due to a number of factors including increased pesticide use, invasive plant and insect species, habitat loss, viruses, and modified plant cultivars.

Though the problem may seem daunting, the good news is that property owners can help save our pollinators simply by creating welcoming habitats. Many of the native plants at the Hempstead Plains provide the food pollinators require, plus they offer the property owner another benefit beyond beauty – native plants are frequently easier to care for since they have adapted to our climate and soils.



Shari Romar



Shari Romar

Look to nature as a guide when planning your pollinator habitat by installing plants in groups of the same species to create swaths through the landscape, and select a range of colors to attract different pollinators. Studies have shown that bees tend to prefer cool hues like blues and purples, but will visit flowers in white and yellow. Butterflies and hummingbirds generally gravitate toward red flowers. Nocturnal moths are attracted to sweet-smelling blooms in pale green and white shades. Limited research shows that beetles and flies may descend on a wide range of colors, but that beetles favor red, while flies like white and yellow.

Pollinators prefer to visit plants placed in sunny areas with well-drained soil, and sheltered from winds. Select plants with staggered bloom times so that food is available throughout the warm season. Additionally, since the sizes of pollinators vary – from hummingbirds to tiny flies – offer a variety of flower sizes to accommodate.

Some great native plants to consider include:

- Birdsfoot violet
- Black-eyed Susans
- Blue vervain
- Butterflyweed
- Common milkweed
- Elderberry
- Evening primrose – terrific for attracting nocturnal moths!
- Highbush blueberry
- Northern arrowwood
- Wild black cherry
- Wild indigo

To really help out pollinators, don't just offer food but also provide a home! Many pollinating insects are ground-nesters and simply need a cleared space of bare ground in a well-drained area or a sand pit, while wood-nesting species seek old logs or snags. Sites that offer the same necessities other birds require lure hummingbirds. If naturally occurring nesting habitats are not available, many can be created with sand or lumber and a little elbow grease.

Protect your growing ecosystem and the species that depend on it by avoiding or even eliminating pesticides from your maintenance routine.

Though the more recognizable pollinators may be most attractive and popular, remember that even the tiny hover fly still makes an important contribution to our landscape and the ecosystem.

**For more information:**

*Making Room for Native Pollinators: How to Create Habitat for Pollinator Insects on Golf Courses* by Matthew Shepard, published 2002 by the United States Golf Association and the Xerces Society.

*Pollinator Conservation Handbook* by Matthew Shepherd, Stephen L. Buchmann, Mace Vaughn and Scott Hoffman Black, published 2003 by the Xerces Society.

## **Protect Your Natural Habitat**

The ecosystem you've created maintains a delicate balance; each component is intertwined and depends on another component for survival.



When left alone, nature is usually able to function and regulate itself. Unfortunately, chemicals like pesticides may unravel the system by harming or killing beneficial insects like pollinators along with predators that consume unwanted insects.

Rather than reaching for a bottle or spray, use integrated pest management (IPM) techniques to maintain a robust environment.

Remember that strong, healthy plants are usually less tempting to insects and diseases than weak plants. Keep specimens growing vigorously by considering the species' light, water and soil requirements before planting. Avoid causing injury – and creating an entry point for harmful insects and diseases – by carefully transplanting and exercising caution when using equipment like lawn mowers around plants.

In many cases, pests simply cause visual damage and do not impair the health of landscape plants. Often, insects can simply be picked off plants by hand and dropped into a bucket of soapy water, or dislodged with a strong stream of water from a hose. Prune off and destroy damaged areas when appropriate.

Nature has many natural defenses against pests such as birds and ladybugs. Make them feel welcome by planting native plant species that create the foundation for a dynamic – and easy to care for – ecosystem.

### **Learn more about IPM at:**

The Interactive Plant Manager:  
[http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu/aes\\_ornamental.asp](http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu/aes_ornamental.asp)

New York State Integrated Pest Management Program:  
<http://nysipm.cornell.edu/>

## Plant Sources

Garden centers and nurseries carry an increasing assortment of native plants such as those on the Hempstead Plains. Be sure to request natives at your local store.

Below is a sampling of additional resources:

- American Beauties: <http://www.abnativeplants.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/home.home/index.htm>
- Native Seed Network: <http://www.nativeseednetwork.org/index>
- Niche Gardens: <http://www.nichegardens.com/index.html>
- Prairie Nursery: <http://www.prairienursery.com/store/>
- Sunlight Gardens: <http://www.sunlightgardens.com/index.html>
- Sunshine Farm and Gardens: <http://www.sunfarm.com/>



## What Else You Can Do to Help the Hempstead Plains

Interesting in doing more to preserve Long Island's native prairie?

- Encourage your friends, neighbors, and your town officials to use native plants
- Volunteer with Friends of Hempstead Plains to help restore this important tallgrass prairie
- Help Friends of Hempstead Plains' efforts to restore the prairie and educate other Long Islanders by making a donation
- Become a member of Friends of Hempstead Plains! [Click here for details.](http://www.friendsofhp.org)

Find out more by visiting our website at: [www.friendsofhp.org](http://www.friendsofhp.org)



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## About the Author

Shari Romar, horticulturalist, has worked with Friends of Hempstead Plains as a board member and volunteer, and created this resource to promote the use of native plants in the landscape. She has been a Technical Writer for the New York State Integrated Pest Management Program, an adjunct professor at Farmingdale State College, and Chair of Farmingdale State's Annual Garden Festival.



Currently Shari is completing a Master of Science in Environmental Studies at Green Mountain College, and creating NYCNatureNews.com ([www.nycnaturenews.com](http://www.nycnaturenews.com)), an online outdoor resource for the city and beyond, as her thesis project. She also holds a degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Farmingdale State College, and Liberal Arts from the New School for Social Research.