

NATIVE PLANTS

Text and Photos by Pamela Harwood



Acer rubrum



Eupatorium purpureum



Aster divaricatus



Lobelia cardinalis



Vaccinium corymbosum

Despite one of the few snowfalls we've had this winter, we had great attendance at the March 2nd Roundtable, and I thank Rick Bogusch, the Manager of Bridge Gardens and an HAH board member, for being on hand to share his knowledge and answer questions. Although Bridge Gardens does not have a dedicated section for native plants, he has increasingly incorporated them in the borders. Attendees agreed that a mix of natives and exotics is their preference.

It can be a challenge determining what we consider a "native" plant: is it just native to the East End, Long Island, New York State, the Northeast, or North America? I used a variety of sources to get listings and found that there is a lack of consistency and thoroughness regarding which plants are included in each category. Hard copies of 2 lists were provided: one is from the Native Plant Center in Valhalla, NY and is for the Northeast region, and the other and more specific listing is from PlantNative.Org and is for Long Island, Delaware, and Southern New Jersey. This list gives common names, Latin names, height, ideal conditions, and other comments. Interestingly, other than berries, there are not many fruits and perhaps no vegetables native to Long Island other than the wild greens we think of as weeds.

We went around the table and identified which natives we had in our own gardens and which ones offer some standout features. The most common natives in our attendee gardens are *Acer rubrum* (red maple), *Juniperus virginiana* (Eastern red cedar), *Prunus serotina* (wild black cherry), *Clethra alnifolia* (sweet pepperbush), *Hamamelis virginiana* (American witch hazel), *Vaccinium corymbosum* (highbush blueberry), various *Asclepias* (butterfly milkweed), *Rudbeckia hirta* (black-eyed Susan), *Echinacea* (purple coneflower), *Lobelia cardinalis* (cardinal flower), *Lobelia siphilitica*, *Solidago* (goldenrod), and *Lindera benzoin* (spicebush), to name a few. Regarding this latter plant, I brought up the fact that many gardeners do not realize that many plants, including many natives, are "dioecious," meaning a male and a female are required to have both flowers and fruits. Many growers and nurseries do not identify this on the labels of the plants they sell. Attendees received lists of dioecious native plants of Long Island and the Northeast.

Of course, what roundtable would be complete without a discussion of which plants are eaten by deer and rabbits and which are mostly not eaten. Rick mentioned that local deer ignore *Ilex opaca* or American holly. This broadleaf evergreen grows 15-30 feet, likes full sun to part shade, and has striking red berries beloved by birds. This is great news because all other hollies are susceptible to deer in the winter months. A few other natives that deer tend to leave alone are *Arisaema triphyllum* (Jack-in-the-Pulpit), *Podophyllum peltatum* (mayapple), *Polygonatum biflorum* (Solomon's seal), and native ferns and grasses. But unfortunately, most native plants are eaten by deer.

Here is my own experience of "pros and cons" of native plants:

PROS: Require little watering; no fertilizer necessary (although Rick pointed out that he always gives even new natives a start in life with regular watering and fertilizing); feeds wildlife like birds, caterpillars, butterflies and other insects; don't need winter protection; reseed (also see cons). **CON(CERN)S:** Some who plant natives, especially landscapers, still use fertilizers; natives are not necessarily deer resistant; still subject to insect infestations and disease (aphid eggs on *Asclepias* and rust on *Solidago* (goldenrod), cankers on black cherries); many do not have showy blooms; many do not bloom until late summer or fall; insects and caterpillars destroy host plants as they feed on them (example: parsley and dill from swallowtail caterpillars; *Asclepias* from monarch caterpillar); they must be planted in the conditions in which they were meant to thrive, e.g. dry soil in full sun or moist and rich soil of the woodland floor; limited evergreens, such as Eastern Red Cedar (subject to apple-cedar rust), Atlantic White Cedar, American Holly, Pines; and some are invasive, such as trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*) and they reseed; can be floppy.

BOOKS IN THE HAH LIBRARY

Long Island Native Plants for Landscaping: A Source Book by Karen Blumer; [Native Perennials: North American Beauties](#) by Brooklyn Botanic Garden; [Native Plants of the Northeast: A Guide for Gardening and Conservation](#) by Donald J. Leopold; [Native Plants for North American Gardens](#) by Allan M. Armitage; **HAH LIBRARY FILES:** "Native"

WEBSITES FOR INFORMATION

<https://www.peconicestuary.org/whatyoucando/peconic-friendlyplantdatabase> (individual photos and info, but no one listing)
<https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>
<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/the-best-plants-and-trees-to-plant-for-birds-a-starter-list/>
<https://www.ecobeneficial.com>

NURSERIES AND PLACES TO VISIT: Most of our local nurseries now offer some native plants. Jay Hunt noted that NYBG has 5 acres of native plants.