



# Native Plant Care and Maintenance Guide

## for "Arkansas Native Plants List for Supporting Pollinators"

Native plants provide important habitat for pollinators, including butterflies, moths, bees, birds, flies, and beetles. Native wildlife co-evolved with native plants and rely on them for food, shelter, and as host plants for breeding. Once established, native plants require less maintenance. They are also adapted to the local climate and soils, so they require less water and no fertilizer.



This guide was curated by the Arkansas Monarch Conservation Partnership and is meant to complement the "Arkansas Native Plants List for Supporting Pollinators" to help Arkansans garden with native plants in more formal settings.

**Native plants provide the most benefit to pollinators while improving soil health, increasing water infiltration, and supporting biodiversity.**

### General Native Plant Maintenance Tips:

- Native plants generally require less water than non-natives; however newly-planted plugs should be watered consistently during the first year to establish strong roots.
- Native plants generally require no artificial fertilization. They tend to become "leggy" and out-grow their natural support system when heavily fertilized.
  - In the home garden, consider segregating native plants away from non-natives that require heavy fertilization. If this is not possible, be prepared to use artificial support in some cases.
- When gardening for monarchs and other pollinators, do not apply any systemic or contact pesticides on native plants, including those labeled as "natural" or "organic."
  - If insect control is required on ornamental non-natives, do not use systemic pesticides; apply only contact pesticides in early evening when many pollinators are not active. Apply pesticides judiciously to target specific pests on specific plants (such as Japanese beetles on roses); do not "broadcast" pesticides across the entire landscape.
- When attracting monarchs and pollinators to native plants that serve as "hosts" to caterpillars and other larvae, remember to expect leaf damage.
  - The plants and insects have evolved together and the damage is typically cosmetic only and will not destroy the plant's viability. Plants, such as milkweeds, can be stripped of all leaves by caterpillars. To maintain the appearance of the garden, you can plant milkweeds in with non-host plants to disguise damage.



## Understanding Basal Leaf Structure:

To maintain a more controlled appearance in home gardens, spent foliage and blooms may be removed from native plants in some cases. The key to proper maintenance is understanding basal leaf structure.

Basal leaves are those that appear at ground level. Some species maintain the basal leaf structure throughout the growing season while others lose the basal leaves as the flower stalk appears. Spent flower stalks on plants that maintain basal leaf structure may be pruned at any time during the growing season. Spent flower stalks on plants that do not maintain basal leaf structure should generally not be removed until late winter (February).

Removing the stalk too early can leave a portal that allow water to directly access the roots and freeze in colder weather, possibly killing the plant. This photo shows two different species in late fall. The plant on the left displays a typical basal leaf structure; the plant on the right is an example without basal leaf structure.



## Additional Resources:

With increased popularity and awareness of the importance of native gardening, there are many resources, tools, and guides available to help with plant selection and gardening tips.

- The Arkansas Native Plant Society has excellent resources including semi-annual meetings and their Know Your Natives blog.  
<https://anps.org/blog/>
- National Wildlife Federation's Native Plant Finder:  
<https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>
- For additional recommended plant lists and tips, visit the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center website. Browse by state or see lists designed for specific animals. Remember, to check to see if a plant species is native to where you live in Arkansas.  
<https://www.wildflower.org/collections/>
- For gardening tips, recommended plant lists, landscape plans, and native seed vendors that have species suitable for Arkansas, visit the Missouri Prairie Foundation's Grow Native! website.  
<https://www.moprairie.org/GrowNative>



### ***Aesculus pavia* (red buckeye):**

Slow-growing small tree can reach 6 to 20 feet tall. Grows in full sun to shade, medium to moist soil. In woodland settings, it can be used as an understory shrub. Grows largest in full sun. Blooms in April and serves as important nectar source for early migrating hummingbirds. Will drop leaves in summer during periods of drought. Forms shiny, brown, inedible nuts in a thick husk. The nuts must not be allowed to dry out if you intend to grow seedlings. The plants can be susceptible to scale.



### ***Amorpha canescens* (lead-plant):**

Small to medium-sized flowering deciduous shrub can reach 3 to 4 feet. Grows in full to medium sun and medium to dry soil. Will tolerate shade but branches will sprawl looking for light. Blooms in mid-summer. Nitrogen-fixing legume and often browsed by deer. Very deep tap root; can be difficult to transplant. Can die back to the ground in cold winters but will re-appear in spring. Tends to become woody with age. For best performance, prune back to the ground every 2 to 3 years to maintain shape and encourage flowering. Can be late to "leaf out" in spring. Seedlings may take 4 years to reach maturity and bloom. Can also be propagated by greenwood or hardwood cutting. Early settlers believed the presence of the plant indicated lead ore deposits.

### **Amsonia: Bluestars**

***A. hubrichtii* (Ouachita bluestar or Arkansas bluestar):**

***A. illustris* (Shining bluestar or Ozark bluestar):**

***A. tabernaemontana* (Bluestar)**

Medium-sized perennials growing 2 to 4 feet tall. Will tolerate full sun in moist soil conditions. Otherwise best in partial shade. Full shade causes the stems to sprawl. Blooms in summer. Very hardy and disease-free. Take off the top third including any seed-heads in spring after flowering. Alternatively, can cut back to half to control size. Sap can cause skin irritation or burns. Aggressively self-seeds if not controlled. Seeds germinate quickly but plant will not flower until the second year. Foliage may turn a pretty yellow or rust in the fall. Clumps should be divided every 5 years.

### ***Aristolochia tomentosa* (Dutchman's pipevine):**

Woody, deciduous twining vine that requires support. Vines can reach 30 feet. Tolerate average soil conditions but prefers rich, moist soil. Can provide dense summer cover for porches, trellises, arbors, etc. as a substitute for non-native wisteria. Can be cut back in winter to control growth.



## Asclepias: Milkweeds

- A. incarnata* (swamp milkweed)
- A. sullivantii* (prairie milkweed)
- A. syriaca* (common milkweed)
- A. tuberosa* (butterfly milkweed)
- A. viridis* (antelope horn milkweed)

Deciduous perennial plants. Typically bloom late spring to summer. Tolerate average soil conditions. Excellent nectar source. Serves as larval host plants for monarch butterfly caterpillars. Caterpillar browsing can be severe, including stripping all leaves. This will not kill the plant. Cut back spent blooms and branching plants to encourage new leaf growth and new blooms. Plants will re-bloom in about a month. Do not prune in fall or winter; cut back dead stalks in early spring.

Heavy oleander aphid infestation is typical. Insecticides will harm the monarch caterpillars. Washing aphids off with a hard stream of water can also wash off monarch eggs and caterpillars. The best solution is to monitor plants daily and not let aphid infestation get severe. Some gardeners choose to remove aphids by hand; they are easy to smash. However, others choose to let other beneficial insects take care of the aphids. Either approach is acceptable.



## *Baptisia alba v. macrophylla* (wild white indigo):

Herbaceous, long-lived perennial growing between 2 to 4 feet tall that blooms in spring. Prefers full sun and average soil but will grow in partial shade (where it may need artificial support). Deep tap root makes the plant drought tolerant and appropriate for xeriscaping. Cut back by one-third after flowering to keep from flopping over and to remove seed-heads to avoid aggressive self-seeding. Foliage will return after pruning. Cut back to the ground after killing frost.

## *Callirhoe involucrata* (wine cup or purple poppy mallow):

Low-growing perennial (less than 1 foot tall) that send out runners that form a mat and can spread up to 3 feet wide. Prefers full sun and well-drained soil. Blooms in summer. Drought tolerant due to a deep tap root which also makes it difficult to transplant. Can prune back in spring to control spread of runners or use grow-through plant supports. Excellent rock garden plant and for spilling over garden walls.



### *Ceanothus americanus* (New Jersey tea):

Compact deciduous shrub growing to 3 or 4 feet tall. Full sun to light shade in medium to dry soil. Blooms spring to summer. Drought tolerant with deep roots that make transplanting difficult. Can be browsed by rabbits. Stems become woody with age with decreased blooms. Blooms on new growth and will tolerate severe pruning. Can be planted 2 to 3 feet apart to create a low-growing hedge.

### *Cephalanthus occidentalis* (buttonbush):

Deciduous shrub growing 6 to 12 feet in sun to light shade and moist soil. Excellent around ponds and streams and rain gardens. Will tolerate shallow standing water. Blooms in summer. May prune in early spring to desired shape. If plants grow too tall and wide, cut back almost to the ground in late winter/early spring. Remove seed heads early to prevent aggressive self-seeding.



### *Cercis canadensis* (eastern redbud):

Deciduous, fast-growing, multi-trunked tree up to 30 feet in height. Blooms best in full sun in medium soil but will grow and bloom in partial shade. Normally an understory tree, so in full sun needs plenty of moisture with regular watering. Blooms in spring. Prune when young to shape. Prune out dead branches in winter. Remove shoots that sprout at ground level. To restrict growth and size, selectively prune top and roots. Strong self-seeder, so watch for and pull seedlings.

### *Conoclinium coelestinum* (blue mistflower):

Herbaceous perennial growing from 1.5 to 3 feet in sun to part shade and medium to moist soil. Blooms August through November. Spreads aggressively through both rhizomes and self-seeding. When grown in a small area, will have to be controlled by pulling new "starts" and removing seed heads. Can divide clumps in early spring. Can shear in early summer by one third to one half to control flopping stems.

### *Coreopsis lanceolata* (lanceleaf coreopsis or tickseed):

Herbaceous perennial growing from 16 to 24 inches in sun to light shade and medium to dry soil. Blooms in May and June. Individual plants may not be reliable perennials but it self-sows readily and will continue to replace itself with volunteer seedlings. Plants may be cut back in August to control size. Does not form basal growth so do not prune again until early spring when dead stalks may be cut back.





## *Dalea purpurea* (purple prairie clover):

Long-lived perennial growing from 1 to 3 feet in full sun and average soil. Will not tolerate shade. Drought resistant with deep tap roots. Blooms in summer. Browsed by rabbits. Excellent rock garden plant. Seed can be planted in spring on bare ground; does not need cold stratification. Young plants are slow to mature. Mature plants do not like to be disturbed once established.

## *Echinacea*: Coneflowers

### *E. pallida* (pale purple coneflower):

Perennial growing from 2 to 3 feet in sun or light shade and dry soil. Blooms in early summer. Deadhead (remove spent blooms) as needed to encourage new blooms and keep a tidy appearance. Will self-seed. Divide clumps every 4 years for best performance. Forms a basal leaf structure that may remain through mild winters. Can remove spent flower stalks in fall.



### *E. purpurea* (purple coneflower):

Perennial growing 2 to 3 feet in sun or medium shade and medium to moist soil. Blooms in late summer after *E. pallida*. Deadhead to encourage new blooms and keep a tidy appearance. Will get "leggy" in fertile soil. Cutting back by half when the plant is 1 foot tall will delay blooming for a couple of weeks. If you prune some plants and leave others, it will provide for a longer bloom period in the garden. Will self-seed. Forms a basal leaf structure that may remain through mild winters. Can remove spent flower stalks in fall.



## *Eryngium yuccifolium* (rattlesnake master):

Herbaceous perennial growing 3 to 4 feet tall in full sun and dry to medium soils. Will not tolerate poor drainage. Blooms in summer. Will self-seed. Drought tolerant and difficult to transplant due to deep root systems. May be slow to flower; possibly in second to third season. After blooming, a plant will gradually die down, but one or more offsets will develop at its base. Thus, a small clump of plants will eventually form. Cut seed heads before they mature to avoid seed dispersal or leave seed heads on for winter interest. In fertile soil, the plants will tend to grow taller and flop over. They can be difficult to stake; the solution is to plant in mass so individual plants support each other. Also a good companion for native grass which will take some excess resources away and keep the plant shorter.



### *Eupatorium perfoliatum* (common boneset):

Herbaceous perennial in the aster family growing from 3 to 6 feet in sun to medium shade in moist soil. Prefers consistent moisture. Blooms in late summer and early fall. Deadhead to avoid aggressive seeding. Plants may get very tall and leggy; cut back in early spring to promote bushier growth. Good for rain gardens. Deer resistant. Clumps can be divided in early spring or fall for propagation.

### *Eutrochium purpureum* (Joe Pye weed):

Herbaceous perennial in the aster family growing from 5 to 7 feet in partial sun to shade. Prefers moist soil. Blooms in late summer to early fall. The most shade tolerant of Joe Pye weeds. Deer resistant. Cut to the ground in late winter. Low germination rate for seed so propagation by stem cuttings is suggested. Subject to powdery mildew and rust if crowded.



### *Glandularia canadensis* (rose vervain):

Low-growing herbaceous perennial growing from 6 to 18 inches in full sun and dry soil. Needs well-drained soil; subject to powdery mildew and root rot in moist conditions. Blooms in summer. Forms a mat, spreading through rooted stems. Cut back hard in mid-summer. Deadhead regularly to encourage a longer bloom period. Cut back dead foliage after threat of winter freeze has passed.

"If half of American lawns were replaced with native plants, we would create the equivalent of a 20 million acre national park - nine times bigger than Yellowstone, or 100 times bigger than Shenandoah National Park."

- Doug Tallamy

### *Helianthus*: Sunflowers:

Note: All sunflowers may be allelopathic and may suppress growth in other plants.

#### *H. angustifolius* (narrow-leaved sunflower):

Perennial sunflower growing from 3 to 6 feet in sun to part shade and medium to moist soil. Blooms from September to frost. Can cut back in June so it will be bushier; will also delay blooming. Artificial support may be needed in garden settings. One of a few sunflowers that doesn't spread by rhizomes.

#### *H. divaricatus* (woodland sunflower):

Perennial sunflower growing from 2 to 6 feet in full or partial sun. Tolerates moist soil. Blooms summer to fall. Will form colonies through rhizomes and may be considered aggressive in small gardens.



## *Liatris: Blazing-Stars*

### *L. aspera* (tall blazing-star):

Herbaceous perennial growing from 2 to 3 feet tall. Best in full sun but will tolerate shade and grows best in moderate to dry soil. Drought tolerant with a large tap root; difficult to transplant. Deer resistant. Blooms in very late summer and fall. Offsets may develop a short distance from the mother plant and create colonies. Stays dormant late in the spring. Will sprawl in fertile, moist soils. Cut back in early spring to keep upright or plan to stake especially in garden soil. Leave stalks standing over the winter and cut back to about 2 inches from the soil in late spring.



### *L. pycnostachya* (prairie gayfeather):

Herbaceous perennial that may perform as a biennial in some situations. Grows from 2 to 5 feet in sun and dry to medium soil. May die off in soil that remains too wet in winter. Blooms in late summer. Normally too tall for home gardens with normal moisture levels; falls over or bends around itself. Will need staking unless it is cut back in late spring to control size.

## *Lindera benzoin* (spice bush):

Deciduous fast-growing shrub grows from 6 to 12 feet tall. Prefers sun will tolerate shade but habit becomes open and sparse. Prefers average well-drained soil and will tolerate moist soil. Mature plants bloom in early spring followed by red fruit in fall. Will tolerate hard pruning to control size. Dioecious – meaning that male and female flowers are on separate plants. Both will flower but only females growing in the presence of males will produce fruit. Most nurseries will not be able to verify males vs females at sale. Flowers on male plants are “showier” and fluffy with pollen. But it is difficult to tell unless you have male and female flowers side by side.

## *Monardas: Beebalm*

### *M. bradburiana* (Bradbury's bee balm or eastern bee balm):

Herbaceous perennial growing 1 to 2 feet tall in sun or partial shade and dry to medium soils. Needs good air circulation, but is less susceptible to powdery mildew than other bee balms. Bloom in summer and deadhead to extend the blooming period. Will bloom more vigorously if divided in spring or fall every 3 to 4 years.

### *M. fistulosa* (wild bergamot):

Herbaceous perennial growing 3 to 4 feet tall in sun or partial shade and dry to medium soils. Blooms in late summer. Cut back by half in spring for more manageable plants. Deadhead back to lateral flower buds after flowering to prolong bloom. Foliage declines after flowering. Usually does not get powdery mildew until after flowering so cut back after flowering to get new clean foliage at base of plant. Discard diseased foliage. Will bloom more vigorously if divided in spring or fall every 2 to 3 years.



## *Penstemon digitalis* (foxglove beardtongue):

Short-lived perennial growing 2 to 3 feet in sun to medium shade and medium to moist soil. Blooms in May. Deadhead to a lateral leaf after flowering and later cut down to new basal growth as stems decline. Drought tolerant when established but may be short-lived. Keep a supply of seeds to sow for new plants.



## *Phlox*: Phlox

### *P. divaricata* (woodland phlox):

Herbaceous perennial ground cover that forms mats growing up to 1 foot tall in partial to full shade and medium soils. Semi-evergreen in some conditions. Blooms in spring. Susceptible to powdery mildew. Cut back after flowering. May be browsed by rabbits.

### *P. paniculata* (garden phlox):

Herbaceous perennial growing 2 to 4 feet tall in full sun to part shade and medium soils. Needs to be watered during dry weather. Blooms in summer. Needs good air circulation to avoid powdery mildew. May need staking. Deadhead to prolong bloom period. Cut plants to ground after killing frost.

## *Pycnanthemum*: Mountain Mints

### *P. muticum*: (clustered mountain-mint):

Herbaceous perennial growing 1 to 3 feet tall in sun and medium to moist soils. Blooms in late summer to fall. Best blooms in full sun. Not as aggressive spreader as true mints may still need control in small gardens. Control spreading with steel edging or spading. Shallow root system; may propagate by digging and dividing clumps.

### *P. tenuifolium* (slender mountain mint):

Herbaceous perennial growing 2 to 3 feet tall in sun and medium to moist soils. Blooms in late summer to fall. Not as aggressive spreader as true mints may still need control in small gardens. Control spreading with steel edging or spading. Tolerates dryness, but not as drought tolerant as other mountain mints. Water if leaves develop a yellow tinge during long periods of drought. May be more aggressive in moist soils.

## Garden Certification Programs

Several organizations offer certification programs for gardens. This can be especially rewarding when so much effort has been expended to create a haven for wildlife. Each program has its set of guidelines, but all are aimed at helping put much-needed habitat for wildlife on the ground.

- Arkansas Audubon Society's Bird-Friendly Yard Certification Program
- Arkansas Wild Spaces (Jefferson, Lonoke, Pulaski, and Saline counties)
- Homegrown National Park
- National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat Program
- Monarch Watch Waystation Program



## Rudbeckia: Yellow Coneflower

### *R. fulgida* (black-eyed Susan):

Herbaceous perennial that forms clumps, growing 2 to 3 feet tall in full sun and medium to dry soil. Blooms in late summer to fall. Deadhead to encourage additional bloom. Prefers consistent soil moisture. Spreads by rhizomes and benefits from division every 3 or 4 years. Will self-seed. Grows with a basal rosette so remove flower stalks after blooms are spent. Deer resistant.

### *R. hirta* (black-eyed Susan):

Short-lived perennial that may perform as an annual or biennial. Grows from 1 to 3 feet tall in full to partial shade and medium to dry soil. Blooms summer to fall. Deadhead to prolong bloom period. Self-sows readily. Because it is short-lived, you need to leave some seed heads for self-sowing.

## *Salvia azurea* (Azure blue sage):

Herbaceous perennial growing 3 to 5 feet in full sun and dry to medium soil. Blooms late summer to fall. Cut back to 1/2 in late spring to encourage bushier growth and stronger stems. Needs consistent moisture to prolong flowering throughout the summer. Responds well to deadheading. If foliage gets unsightly, can trim it back and it will return. Cut back stems after flowering is complete. Deer resistant.

## *Solidago*: Goldenrods

Note: Goldenrods are insect pollinated not wind pollinated. They have heavy, sticky pollen that is not windborne and does not cause allergy symptoms. They do bloom at the same time as ragweed which does have windborne pollen.

### *S. caesia* (wreath goldenrod):

Herbaceous perennial that grows 1 to 3 feet tall in full sun or partial shade and dry to medium soils. Blooms in early fall. Clump forming; not as aggressive as some other goldenrods. Deer resistant. Cut back to ground in late winter.

### *S. nemoralis* (gray or oldfield goldenrod):

Herbaceous perennial that grows 1 to 2 feet tall in full sun in dry, even rocky, soil. Blooms late summer to fall. Excellent for poor soil areas where other plants will not thrive. Spreads by both rhizomes and seeds. Seed heads can be removed. Root rot common in wet soils. Deer resistant. Cut back to ground in late winter.

### *S. petiolaris* (downy ragged goldenrod):

Herbaceous perennial that grows 1 to 4 feet tall in sun to partial shade and medium soil. Blooms summer to fall. Spreads by rhizomes or seed. Seed heads can be removed. Deer resistant. Cut back to ground in late winter.





## Symphyotrichum: Asters

### *S. novae-angliae* (New England aster):

Herbaceous perennial growing 3 to 6 feet in full sun and medium to moist soil. Performs best in moist soil. Blooms in late summer. Pinch back stems several times before mid-July to promote bushy growth, reduce height and delay flowering to fall. Self-seeds freely. May cut back to the ground after flowering to prevent seeding and to do away with spent and unsightly foliage. May require staking.

### *S. oblongifolium* (fragrant aster):

Herbaceous perennial growing 1 to 3 feet in sun to part shade and dry to moist soil. Blooms in fall. Cut back by no more than half in June to promote bushy growth and heavier blooms. After it goes dormant, wait to cut back to the basal rosette in early winter. Crown rot and aster wilt can be problems. Divide clumps every couple of years. Destroy any diseased plants.

## Vernonia: Ironweeds

Note: deadhead before seed set to avoid unwanted self-seeding.

### *V. arkansana* (Arkansas or curlytop ironweed):

Herbaceous perennial growing from 4 to 6 feet in sun and medium to moist soil. Taller growth occurs with moist soil. Blooms late summer. Overall plant height may be reduced by cutting back stems in late spring. Self-seeds so spent flowers may be removed to prevent aggressive growth. Can be propagated by stem cuttings. Good rain garden plant. Deer resistant.

### *V. baldwinii* (Baldwin's ironweed):

Herbaceous perennial growing from 3 to 5 feet in sun and dry to medium soils. Blooms late summer to fall. Overall plant height may be reduced by cutting back stems in late spring. Spreads by rhizomes with roots at about 1-foot depth. Will spread aggressively in moist garden soil but is more drought tolerant than other ironweeds. Deer resistant.

## Veronicastrum virginicum (Culver's root):

Herbaceous perennial growing 4 to 7 feet tall in full sun to light shade and medium to wet soils. Will tolerate dense shade but will flop over and require staking. May take several years to establish in the garden. Can propagate by root divisions in fall or early spring or by soft wood cuttings in late spring. Cut back to basal growth after flowering; will stimulate additional foliage growth and possibly a fall bloom. Deer resistant.



## Zizia aurea (golden alexanders):

Herbaceous perennial growing from 1 to 3 feet in sun to partial shade in medium soil. Blooms late spring and early summer. Is short-lived but will readily re-seed. May be considered aggressive in ideal conditions.



[www.ArkansasMonarchs.org](http://www.ArkansasMonarchs.org)



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*The Arkansas Monarch Conservation Partnership is a statewide collaborative of organizations and agencies who are committed working together for the creation, enhancement, and conservation of monarch and pollinator habitat in Arkansas.*