



## Hummingbird Hill Native Plant Nursery

### March/April 2023 Newsletter

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Happy Spring! Our plants have emerged from dormancy, their fresh green shoots inspiring excitement for the growing season. Looking at our natives in their pots, we curiously wonder where each will be planted this year. Perhaps some will find a home in urban habitat corridors in Charlottesville, while others are planted along a woodland's edge in rural Greene County... In either case, the wildlife will certainly be happy to have them around! We look forward to seeing you this year!

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*Creating a*



# HABITAT CORRIDOR

**in a Dry Location**



One of the first steps to creating a habitat corridor is to develop a good understanding of the soil moisture on your property. Virginia receives around 40 inches of rain per year, but not all soils have the capability of holding this moisture in the same way. Loam, clay, and sandy soils each retain moisture differently, and the varying elevations, slopes, and depressions of the landscape also greatly affect the soil's water holding capacity. Here, we take a look at which native plant species thrive in the driest of sites.

### **LOCATING DRY AREAS OF THE PROPERTY**

Dry locations can often be found on hillsides, banks, and slopes; parts of the property with harsh southern exposure; and rocky areas – or spots with thin or sandy soil. In an urban setting, extremely dry conditions can also occur near the sidewalk or pavement. Lawn grass may struggle to grow in dry areas of your yard, leaving bare patches and indicating a change in soil moisture.

## INDICATOR SPECIES

Not sure if your area qualifies as a spot with dry soil moisture? Looking for indicator species can help to solve this problem. The plant species that grow in a specific area, whether native or non-native, can say a great deal about the soil. In dry areas, you may find non-native naturalized or invasive species like Common Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and Chinese Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*).

Look for natives also! Often times, native plants are better adapted to dry sites than non-natives and lawn grass. When the lawn grass struggles or dies off, this lessens competition for the natives and, even in urban settings, some native species can take hold. When converting a dry area of lawn into a habitat corridor, a few native species you may find include Common Ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*), Dwarf Cinquefoil (*Potentilla canadensis*), Arrow-leaved Violet (*Viola sagittata*), and Indian Tobacco (*Lobelia inflata*). These natives should be left undisturbed and incorporated into your new habitat corridor.

Young tree seedlings may consist of species like Pines (*Pinus sp.*), Oaks (*Quercus sp.*), and Eastern Red Cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*).



Above: Dwarf Cinquefoil, a native groundcover that indicates dry soil moisture.

Below: the basal leaves and flowers of Indian Tobacco



## NATIVE GRASSES

Habitat corridors in dry areas should have a large quantity of grasses, which make up the backbone and structure of the corridor while providing great benefits for wildlife. Some of these grass species may come in on their own over time, depending on the location of the site. Others may benefit from being introduced through planting. The majority of grasses that grow in dry areas are warm season grasses, which do much of their growing and gaining height during the warm months and proceed to flower and set seed in late summer and autumn. They are pollinated by wind, and, unlike many non-native grasses, most of these native grasses are clump-forming, an essential structure for wildlife. The clumping habit provides open spaces near the base of the grass where birds, small mammals, and other wildlife can move around and find shelter. This also readily supplies space at ground level for other native herbaceous species to grow and seek sunlight.

In areas without much moisture, the most dominant grasses are usually Broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*) and Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). These companion plants often grow in a mixed formation in dry meadows and on slopes, reaching three to four feet tall. During winter, their golden, coppery color is apparent, creating structure in the meadow as Field Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos feed upon their prolific fluffy seeds. Although both are species of dry habitats, Little Bluestem is most tolerant of the harshest conditions.

In a habitat corridor, taller grasses like Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) may be mixed in with Broomsedge and Little Bluestem. Indian Grass' feathery bronze plumes of seedheads appear in September and November, later than many other grasses. In the summertime, native bumble bee queens use the grass stalks as a nesting site.

Shorter grasses are interspersed in the lower levels of the planting. These include native species like Poverty Oatgrass (*Danthonia spicata*), a cool season grass, and Purple Lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*). In late summer and fall, the showy panicles of Purple Lovegrass appear, creating a visual pink haze, while its foliage is used as a host plant for caterpillars of the native Zebulon skipper butterfly. Later in the winter, during windy conditions, its seedheads break off from the main plant, rolling across the ground to spread seeds to new locations. This habit has provided this grass with another common name of Tumblegrass.

Note: Native grasses are deer resistant and a good choice for those planting in areas of high deer pressure.

# G R A S S E S

Purple Lovegrass  
(*Eragrostis spectabilis*)



Broomsedge  
(*Andropogon virginicus*)



Indian Grass  
(*Sorghastrum nutans*)



**SHORT**  
(1-2 ft)



Host plant for  
Zebulon Skipper  
caterpillars



**MID-HEIGHT**  
(3-4 ft)



Seeds used by  
Dark-eyed Juncos

**TALL**  
(4-6 ft)

Bumble bee queens  
use stalks  
for nesting  
sites



## FORBS

Intermingling among the grasses in a habitat corridor are native flowering forbs. Because of the lack of water, the majority of species in these dry environments are relatively short. They don't have resources to waste on growing tall with thick, lush leaves. Instead, they put their energy into ensuring they can bloom and set seed.

Let's take a look at some of the perennial species adapted to these dry sites:



**SMALL'S RAGWORT**  
(*Packera anonyma*)

Grows 1-2 ft tall with daisy-like flowers blooming in May-June. Flowers are used by various small native bees and flies. Deer resistant.



**WILD STRAWBERRY**  
(*Fragaria virginiana*)

A groundcover that grows 4-7" tall and spreads by runners. Flowers in April-June. Birds and turtles feed on the fruit. Deer resistant.



**SLENDER MOUNTAIN MINT**  
(*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*)

Flowers in June-August, attracting a large array of pollinators. Grows 2-3 ft tall. Narrow leaves and a bushy habit. Deer resistant.



**FROST ASTER**  
(*Symphyotrichum pilosum*)

Grows 2-3 ft tall. Flowers prolifically in Sept-Nov. Thin leaves and a bushy structure. Host plant for Pearl Crescent butterfly caterpillars.



**WILD BASIL**  
(*Clinopodium vulgare*)

Tubular flowers bloom with an airy habit in July-Sept. Native bumblebees are the blooms' primary visitors. Grows 1 ft tall. Deer resistant.



**GREY GOLDENROD**  
(*Solidago nemoralis*)

Grows 1-2 ft tall. Non-aggressive. Blooms in Aug-Oct. Visitors include native bees, beetles, wasps, flies, moths, & butterflies. Deer resistant.



**MARYLAND GOLDEN ASTER**  
(*Chrysopsis mariana*)

Aster-like flowers bloom in August-October. Flowers are primarily visited by long-tongued bees, especially cuckoo bees. Grows 1-2 ft tall. Deer resistant.



**BUTTERFLYWEED**  
(*Asclepias tuberosa*)

Flowers in May-August. Grows 1-2 ft tall. A host plant for Monarch butterfly and Milkweed Tussock Moth caterpillars. Deer resistant.



**YARROW**  
(*Achillea borealis*)

Flat-topped flowers bloom in June-Sept. Visited by many insects, including native solitary wasps. Foliage finely dissected and fragrant. Grows 2-3 ft tall. Deer resistant.



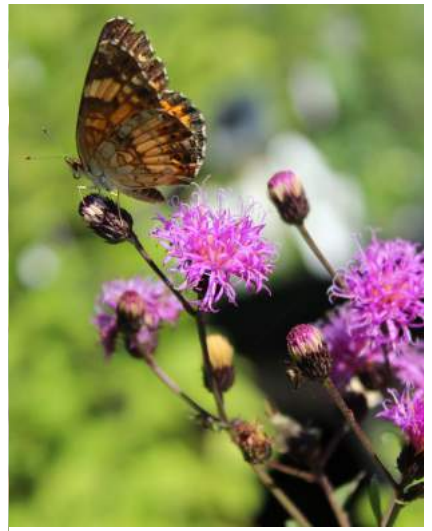
**SLENDER GOLDENROD**  
(*Solidago erecta*)

Flowers bloom in a wand-like structure in August-October. Non-aggressive. Grows 2-3 ft tall. Used by many native insects, including Goldenrod Crab Spiders.



**LOW ST. ANDREW'S CROSS**  
(*Hypericum hypericoides* ssp. *multicaule*)

4-petaled, cross-shaped flowers bloom in May-August. Woody stems. Leaves are light green. Grows 6-12" tall. White-throated Sparrows feed upon the seeds. Deer resistant.



**UPLAND IRONWEED**  
(*Vernonia glauca*)

Grows 4-5 ft tall with a bushy habit. Leaves are lance-shaped. Flowers in June-September, attracting many native butterflies. *Vernonia* species host 16 species of native caterpillars.

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The species listed in this article are native to dry sites in the Charlottesville/Albemarle area, where our nursery and many of our customers are located. We have made an effort to choose species that have a widespread range in Virginia. However, if you are from another part of Virginia, we encourage you to cross-reference these options to ensure that they are native to your county before planting. The best source for determining if a plant is native to your county is: [www.vaplantatlas.org](http://www.vaplantatlas.org)

## What's New At the Nursery

**WE ARE OPEN FOR THE YEAR!** Nursery appointments are available on Wednesdays through Saturdays. Please visit our website to sign up. We look forward to seeing you at the nursery!



Seedlings of the native species we are growing are germinating at the nursery. We currently grow all of the plants we offer at the nursery from local wild seeds we collect. This ensures our plants are suitable for the local climate and ecosystems.



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## **Frequently Asked** *Questions*

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### **Do you offer your plants to homeowners?**

Absolutely! Our plants are a great fit for anyone who is wishing to create habitat and restore areas of their property with native plants. Whether you have a small urban property or a large rural piece of land, we would love to have you visit the nursery! Business owners and organizations are also welcome.

**I have a small property. I'm not sure if it is large enough for a habitat corridor. Does the corridor need to be a certain size?**

Habitat corridors can be any size, from just a few square feet to many acres. No matter the size, they create habitat and useable space for both native plants and wildlife to dwell.

**What qualifies as a habitat corridor?**

Habitat corridors have a loose, meadow-like layout with both short and tall plants mixed throughout the planting. These areas are meant to create a safe place for native plants and wildlife, and they help to restore land to a more natural state. The species planted are truly native to the site and would naturally exist together in combination. The designated area serves an ecological function year round and dead stems are left upright in the planting, allowing plants to set seed.

Naturally-occurring natives that come in as volunteers at the site are encouraged and native wildlife is always welcome. The goal for a habitat corridor is to have an area thick with vegetation with little ground showing. Besides removing non-natives that come up in the planting, little maintenance is required, and the area should be left as undisturbed as possible.



Habitat corridors have a year-round function, and seedheads are left standing in the cold months.

**My property doesn't adjoin woods or a natural area. Can I still have a habitat corridor at my site?**

Yes! If there aren't other natural areas nearby, existing wildlife will certainly welcome a new piece of habitat. You may invite new wildlife into the area, while creating a seed source from which native plants can spread. Habitat corridors can be virtually anywhere: in areas where lawn used to grow, in front of a house, bordering a fence on the side of the property, along a woodland edge, etc. Anywhere where you would like to have an area of habitat that is beneficial to wildlife is a great spot to start!

**Why does Hummingbird Hill ask me not to put their plants in a garden setting?**

A very reasonable question! Since we grow these plants from local wild seed and always have only limited quantities of the plants we offer, we think it's important that these go where they will be of highest ecological value. And that place is in a habitat corridor, with a carefully-selected combination of plants that would naturally occur together in nature, planted in a meadow-like formation. Because gardens are a mix of plants (often native to other areas and differing habitats) arranged by height and often disrupted for pruning, weeding, managing, or rearranging, they are unable to fulfill a similar role as habitat corridors. For those passionate about gardening, we encourage having a designated habitat corridor in one or more sections of the property and gardening in other areas. We hope that all our clients will consider establishing a habitat corridor. Even a small one makes an ecological difference!

## How do you sell your plants? Do you offer seeds for purchase?

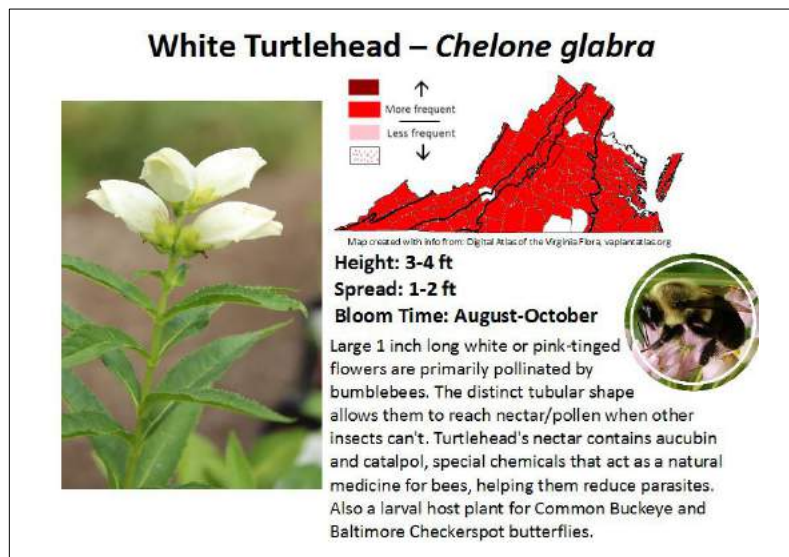
Our plants are available at our nursery location for purchase. Perennials are available in 1 quart/4 inch pots. We are excited to now be offering a small assortment of woody species grown from local seed. They are available in 1 gallon, 2 gallon, and 3 gallon pots, and we look forward to continuing to expand our selection of these. We don't currently offer seeds. As an affordable option for large projects, we have plug trays available which include 50 young plants per tray.

## Your nursery doesn't carry some species of plants that I've read about or that people commonly plant as natives. Why is that?

Key to our mission is that we offer only species native to our area of Virginia. This way, wildlife can use them, and they can also help create habitat and boost native plant populations. Unfortunately, it's very common to read or hear that a plant is simply "native," without any more information. Even if a source does go further and says, for example, that a plant is "native to the eastern U.S.," that doesn't mean that the plant is native to every one of the eastern states -- let alone to every part of every state. In fact, there are many plants native to some parts of Virginia but not to our area. Or, they may be only native to specialized habitats in our area (such as rock outcrops). Many plants that have become famous and are regularly sold as 'natives' do not actually occur here or wouldn't be suitable for local habitat corridors.

## How do you know if a plant is native to our local area?

Our main source is the county-level information on the Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora: [www.vaplantatlas.org](http://www.vaplantatlas.org). That info is the result of a vast field project conducted by botanists over many years. We believe it's the most precise source on the distribution of plants found in Virginia. We encourage everyone to use this as source. In addition, when recommending plants for a given site, we draw on our own field experience (particularly about plant associations and communities in differing habitats), the Flora of Virginia, and the DNR's list of plant communities. For those visiting the nursery, we are happy to answer any questions you may have about if a plant is native to your site.



We also have signs for each species we offer at the nursery, which includes a description of the plant and a map of the species' range in Virginia. The photo above right shows an example of this.

## You offer local genotype plants. What does that mean?

Local genotype plants are grown from seed that has been collected from wild plants in the local area. These plants are adapted to the climate and soil in this part of Virginia and will have similar characteristics as the wild populations of this species in the area. Native wildlife will be familiar with and able to use them, and they will also help increase genetic diversity among wild plant



populations. Most plants sold in the nursery trade are grown from commercial seeds and these species will have different traits than that of the same species found here in the wild.

### What area of Virginia are your plants suited for?

Our selection of plants is suitable to the following counties and cities within:

Albemarle, Amelia, Amherst, Appomattox, Augusta, Bedford, Botetourt, Buckingham, Campbell, Charlotte, Chesterfield, Culpeper, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greene, Louisa, Lunenburg, Madison, Nelson, Nottoway, Orange, Page, Powhatan, Prince Edward, Rappahannock, Roanoke, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Spotsylvania, Stafford, the Piedmont sections of Caroline, Henrico, and Hanover counties, and to the Richmond area.



If you live outside of this area, we are still very happy to offer advice and guidance on making a habitat corridor on your property. Please don't hesitate to email us and ask any questions you may have!

### How do I schedule a time to visit the nursery, and how do appointments work?

Appointment times are available Wednesdays through Saturdays. We have an online appointment form on our website for signing up. On this form, you can write times that work well for you and a description of your site conditions.

During your visit, we'll discuss your location and planting site with you, and offer you a list of plant species from our selection that are native to your specific property and provide ecological benefits in your habitat corridor. We encourage you to bring any information you may have about your project/plans when you visit. These include photos, descriptions, lists of natives you've identified on your property, and, of course, questions!

We look forward to seeing you at the nursery during the 2023 growing season!