



You could enjoy Butterfly Weed in your flower garden as much as these Palamedes Swallowtails enjoy nectaring on it



Ornamental cherry trees may provide a great winter food supply for birds like these waxwings. Check with knowledgeable sources about invasiveness before buying

Brunswick Wildlife Native Plants: Got Green?

“Going green” is now cool. It’s not just reserved for conservations that include tree hugging, owls, granola, and hypermiling. “Going green” does not have a universal, all-encompassing meaning; however, portions of the total package are becoming clearer.

Going green is evolving but don’t wait. Grab an idea or two and implement. Going native is one easy way to start. Native plants that is.

Understanding invasive and exotic plants and an explanation of their possible impact on native plants and wildlife is a good place to start. Studying NC State University’s Going Native website (<http://www.ncsu.edu/goingnative/whygo/invspec.html>) is recommended. It defines a native plant as a species that existed in North American before European settlement.

Exotic plants are those not indigenous to our location, even if they are native to another habitat in North America. They may have arrived accidentally, been planted as ornamental or garden plants, or misguidedly introduced to improve wildlife habitat.

Exotics may become naturalized and invasive as they spread rapidly crowding out native plants and degrading wildlife habitat. Invasives reduce the diversity and number of insect prey, varieties of seeds and berries available for wildlife, and may introduce non-local pests and diseases.

Of course, many exotic plants are not invasive. Before introducing new plants to your yard, discuss their degree of invasiveness and potential negative impacts with a resource like those noted below or conduct Internet research.

Native plants, like the wax myrtles in my backyard, that become quickly established and spread rapidly are called “aggressive” not “invasive” and the gardener should know the degree of aggressiveness of native plants before introducing them.

A great example of native versus exotic is the Butterfly Weed (also called Orange Milkweed) and Butterfly Bush. Both are beautiful and attract butterflies and other beneficial insects. The weed is native and the bush, according to the NC Native Plant Society’s (NCNPS) website, is mildly invasive in that is considered “...a low threat to native plant communities in NC.” Butterfly Weeds propagated from seed may be found at nurseries. Please do not try to transplant from the wild because their rhizome-based root system makes success unlikely.

Another common plant-choice example is Lantana. Lantana is native to North Carolina; however you have little chance of seeing a native. Most lantana plants are probably one of over 100 cultivated species developed since the 18th century. In North Carolina, because our climate is too cold, lantana is considered a perennial and non-invasive. Conversely, in Florida, native lantana is endangered and introduced lantana is wildly invasive.

Above and beyond their beauty and ability to attract wildlife, the benefits of going native are many. Because native plants are well adapted to local soils, pests, temperature, and rainfall they require less maintenance. In other words, once established, savings in maintenance time and expense accrue because native plants generally do not require additional watering; provide a more balanced system to controls insects; and reduce the need to use fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides. Also, you can sleep well at night knowing you are not contributing to the spread of invasive plants into nearby natural habitat.

Co-organizers Laura Berkley and Cary Paynter of the newly formed Southeast Coast Chapter of NCNPS encourage others to join. According to Cary: “We are trying to catch up with the Piedmont and Mountain regions of the state where their wildflowers are known by many, grown by gardeners, and sold in most nurseries. Our coastal natives are every bit as beautiful with the added allure of being something new to most residents. Our motivation is the pure joy of getting to know these wonderful plants.”

For more information about the NCNPS’ Southeast Coast Chapter, go to their website at: <http://www.ncwildflower.org/index.php/chapters/secoast/>. The chapter will conduct a native plant walk on Sunday, September 12 on Bald Head Island led by Dr. Paul Hosier, Biology and Marine Biology professor at UNCW.

Dr. Hosier will focus on the role of geology in determining the Cape Fear area’s plant communities and species distribution. Contact Laura Berkley at lara@b-and-o.net for more

details regarding the BHI ferry and other trip information. Please register by email with Laura by September 5 to receive the discounted ferry rate.

There are two well-trained local experts that may assist. Alistair Glenn, the proprietor of Growing Wild Nursery in Burgaw, can help with finding native substitutes for exotic plants and with planning on how to populate native plant gardens while maximizing diversity for the size of the site.

Glenn sells plants at the Downtown Wilmington Farmer's Market and other places as announced on his website: <http://www.growingwildnursery.net/>. The website itself is rich with advice on choosing plants for attracting butterflies based on preferred larval hosts and attracting specific birds by food type.

Margaret Shelton, owner of Shelton Herb Farm, on Goodman Road near Leland is another great resource person. She has a MS in Biology and has as much plant knowledge of local native and exotic plants as I have found. She may be reached at the farm at 910-253-5964. She carries native herbs and some native plants and is looking to expand her inventory. Like Glenn, Shelton Herb Farms sells at the Downtown Wilmington Farmer's Market on Saturdays.

I've given examples of plant choices and hopefully passed on information to help your decision making process. At all times try to go native if possible and replace existing exotics, especially if they are trouble makers.

John Ennis



Lantana is a popular exotic (non-invasive in NC) that is loved by butterflies like this Long-tailed Skipper and many other pollinators