



# Module 14:

# Native Plants and Why They Matter

LSU AgCenter Home Gardening Certificate Course

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# What is a Native Plant?

So many answers!



*Iris fulva*  
Copper Louisiana  
Iris



A native plant is...



*Coreopsis tinctoria*  
Plains Coreopsis



One that exists in a given region through non-human introduction, directly or indirectly.  
(Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center)





A plant that lives or grows naturally in a particular region without direct or indirect human intervention.  
(USDA National Arboretum)



With respect to a particular ecosystem, a species that, other than as a result of an introduction, historically occurred, or currently occurs, in that ecosystem.  
(US Fish and Wildlife Service)



*Magnolia grandiflora*  
Southern Magnolia



# Why Do Native Plants Belong in Our Gardens?



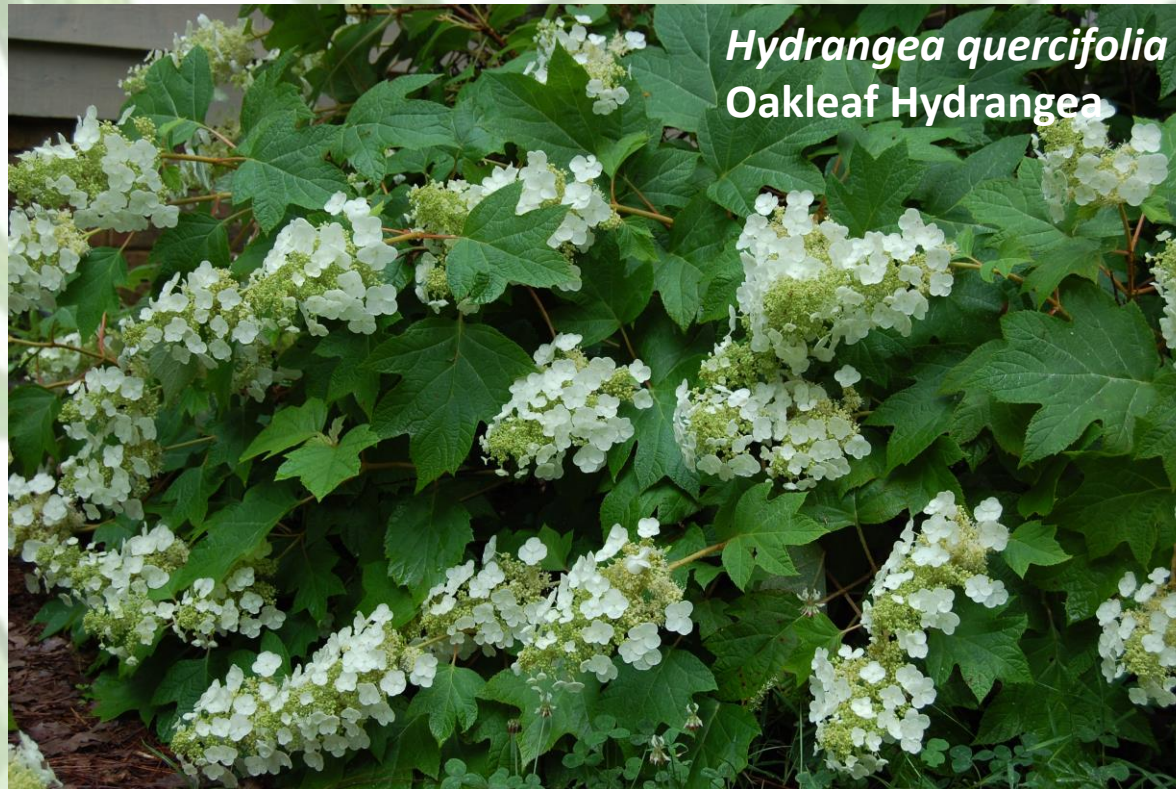
*Solidago sempervirens*  
Seaside Goldenrod

1. Gain a new appreciation of American flora, which is rich, diverse, and beautiful. “Sense of Place” and “Belonging” in a garden.





2. Create “mini ecosystems” within habitat that has been developed over time.





3. Native plants are best suited to local conditions and adapt to challenges related to weather and soil conditions.





## 4. Foster diversity within a garden landscape.



*Aquilegia chrysantha* var. *hinckleyana*  
Hinckley's Columbine

## 5. Connect to local ecological history and indigenous traditions.



*Eyrthrina herbacea*  
Coralbean aka Mamou



6. Support pollinators and other beneficial insect species. Native plants are a “better” choice for meeting insect food/habitat needs. “Specialist” species are unable to switch host plants as easy as “Generalist” feeders.



*Asclepias perennis*  
Aquatic Milkweed

7. Support wildlife species, especially birds, in an increasingly urban world. Fledgling birds rely on insects as a food source, native plants host many insects. Seeds provide source of food also.





8. Once established, native plants do not require as many inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides compared to lawns and non-native garden landscapes because they are adapted to local conditions.





## 9. Native plants can be integrated into existing landscapes and gardens!



*Chionanthus virginicus*  
American Fringetree  
aka Grancy Greybeard



What does this mean for YOUR home garden?





## Benefits of Native Plants According to USDA- US Forest Service:

- Native plants require no fertilizer and fewer pesticides compared to lawns.
- Native plants require less water than lawns and can fight erosion. Deep rooted species increase a soil system's capacity to hold water.
- Native plants help to reduce air pollution. Native plants require little mechanical maintenance. They sequester carbon from the atmosphere.
  - Native plants provide food and shelter for wildlife species.
- Native plants promote biodiversity and stewardship of our natural heritage.
  - Native plants are beautiful and increase scenic value.



# Native vs Nativar

We defined a native... what the heck is a “nativar”???





## Definition of “Nativar”:

A “nativar” is sometimes a natural variation that has been found in the wild and brought into cultivation. Often, though, nativars are developed by plant breeders and would never be found in nature.  
(National Wildlife Foundation)



## Some Potential Nativar Pros:

- Improved hardiness for greater geographic area
  - Adds genetic diversity
- Showier appearance may be selected for, such as larger blooms or variegation
- Easier to cultivate or propagate for nursery sales because it has been bred for uniformity
- Many of the same benefits of “straight natives”
- “Generalist” insect species use nativars just as much as “straight natives”

## Potential Nativar Cons:

- Loss of original genetic material through breeding efforts and crosses
- Leaf-eating species at times prefer straight natives (leaf color largest factor)
- “Specialist” pollinators often prefer straight natives for nectaring or feeding (host-specific species)
- More research is needed into species preferences for habitat and food sources



## Potential “Straight Native” Cons:

- Introduced pest and disease species can wreak havoc on native species in an ecosystem.

### Examples:

- American Ash/Emerald Ash Borer
- American Chestnut/Chestnut Blight



***Emerald Ash Borer***



## Tips for Finding Which Natives Grow in YOUR Area:

1. Find your local Native Plant Society (most states have one!)
2. Ask your local Extension Agent!
3. Consult state-specific field guides
4. Consult the USGS Plants Database:  
<https://warcapps.usgs.gov/PlantID/>
5. Consult the National Wildlife Foundation's Native Plant Finder:  
<https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>



# Uses of Native Plants in the Home Vegetable Garden





## - Attract Pollinators and Beneficial Insects

**Milkweed Assassin Bug on Aquatic Milkweed**





## - Edible Native Species






# - Beautify Our Yards and Gardens

Honeybee nectaring on Scarlet Sage-  
*Salvia coccinea*







“Gateway” Natives for Home Gardens  
(Try to find locally-endemic species!)



# 1. Milkweed!

Many species in the US, figure out what grows in your location. Milkweed is the host to many insects!  
Not just Monarchs!

Large Milkweed Bug



Milkweed Tussock Moth



Swamp Milkweed Beetle



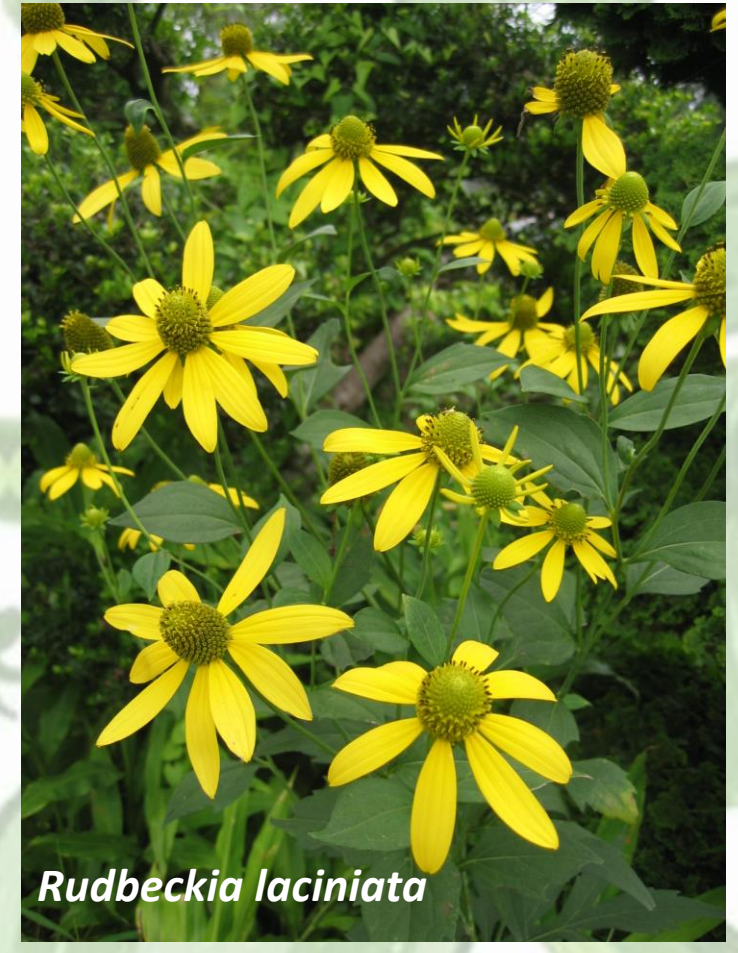
Oleander Aphids





## 2. *Rudbeckia* sp.

Many species in the US, figure out what grows in your location. Nativars are an option, but not ideal.





### 3. *Monarda* sp. / Beebalm

Many species throughout US, attracts pollinators, hummingbirds, easy to grow.





## 4. Solidago sp. / Goldenrod

There are more “well behaved” species, and natives bred for use in flower beds and landscapes. Excellent pollinator plant, easy to grow.





## 5. Echinacea sp.

Widespread through most of US. Many natives in colors available, stick to the ones native to your area.





# Tips for Integrating Natives into Existing Gardens

1. Don't immediately rip all of your non-natives out
2. Design principles apply to natives and non-natives
3. Can be integrated with existing plantings
4. Can be fitted to small or large spaces
5. Start with the easy ones!



# Wildflower Corners





# Mixed into Formal Plantings, Use of Formal Border





# Rain Garden or Bioswale





# Containers and Planters





# Meadows, Not Lawns





# Plant a Native Tree





# Suggested Reading

Bringing Nature Home- Doug Tallamy

Planting in a Post-Wild World: Designing Plant Communities for Resilient Landscapes-  
Thomas Rainier and Claudia West

The Wildlife Garden: Planning Backyard Habitats- Charlotte Seidenberg

Native Plants of the Southeast- Larry Mellichamp

Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard- Doug  
Tallamy

Garden Revolution: How Our Landscapes Can Be a Source of Environmental Change-  
Larry Weaner and Thomas Christopher





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