

Elaine Mills, presenter of Native Flowers, Fruit & Foliage for Fall

The following information is provided as a supplement to answers given to chat box questions during the live presentation.

General Information

The native plant species discussed are generally native to the Mid-Atlantic region, and many are native along the east coast and even across the eastern half of the United States.

- Viewers from various areas of Virginia will want to look for regional native plant guides. Links to free PDF versions of these guides can be found on the website for the Virginia Native Plant Society at <https://vnps.org/virginia-native-plant-guides/>
- Viewers watching from other states may wish to consult county-level maps at <https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/java/> to confirm the presence of the plants in their regions. State native plant societies and local Extension offices should also be able to provide information on locally native species.

With regard to **pinching or cutting back taller perennials**, such as Woodland Sunflower, Joe-pye-weed, and New England Aster, to control their height, these plants can be trimmed by up to one-half at several points in May and June, no later than July 4. Our Extension Agent refers to this technique as the “Chelsea Chop” because it is usually carried out in late May, at the time of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. A [review](#) of the three editions of the book I mentioned on perennial care, *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust, is available on the MGNV website.

I listed some **plants to control erosion** on slopes:

- Joe-pye-weed and goldenrods among the perennials.
- Hairy Alumroot, White Wood Aster, and Aromatic Aster among the ground covers.
- Virginia Creeper, the vine; Sweet Pepperbush, a shrub; and Cockspur Hawthorn, a tree.
- Native grasses are particularly effective on slopes due to their deep, fibrous roots that grab and hold the soil.
- Look for a new Best Bets fact sheet on plants to control erosion in January 2022 and a new public ed presentation on the topic sometime in the new year.

Regarding the **aggressive spread of goldenrods**, here are several solutions:

- Grow the plants in pots or in a garden bed with barriers to contain the underground spread.
- Transplant goldenrod frequently so it doesn’t fully establish its roots.

- Cut off the spent flower heads promptly before they go to seed. This means, of course, that they will not be available as a food source for wildlife.

I mentioned Hairy Alumroot as an evergreen ground cover. Other **evergreen ground covers**:

- Allegheny Spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*) for shade
- Barren Strawberry (*Geum fragarioides*) for part-shade
- Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red') for sun to part-shade
- Wild Pink (*Silene caroliniana*) for sun to part-sun
- Golden Ragwort (*Packera aurea*) for sun to shade
- Moss Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) for sun
- Lyreleaf Sage (*Salvia lyrata*) for sun
- Green-and-Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*) – semi-evergreen
- See the presentation "[Native Ground Covers for Sun and Shade](#)" for more details on these plants.

One participant asked for information about **growing native grasses from seed**.

- I recommended using plugs as an economical alternative to seeds.
- This brochure from the Indiana State Department of Agriculture has [tips on starting native plantings](#) from either plugs or seed.
- **Little Bluestem** is reportedly somewhat slow to establish from seed. It is a warm-season grass, so most of its growth would occur during the summer months.

On the question of when and how to **prune native Trumpet Honeysuckle**:

- Prune regularly to promote the health of the vine and maintain a desirable shape, removing tangled, diseased, or damaged branches.
- Up to one-third of the branches can be pruned in a year.
- It is best to wait until after the initial period of bloom in the spring.

There are several reasons why **honeysuckle vines**, such as 'John Clayton' may **lose their leaves**:

- Drought, as I mentioned
- Lack of soil nutrients or improper pH of soil
- Lack of sunlight
- Honeysuckle leaf blight, if leaves are rolled and twisted and drop prematurely
- Contact the Master Gardener Help Desk (mgarlalex@gmail.com) for a diagnosis.

Here is information I promised to include regarding **American and Oriental Bittersweet**:

- Native *Celastrus scandens* has flowers and fruits at the ends of branches, fewer and larger clusters of fruit, and long, tapered leaves.
- Invasive *Celastrus orbiculatus* has rounded leaves and flowers in leaf axils. It is a prolific fruiter with clusters at many points along the stem.
- Hybrids may occur, making ID more difficult.

On the question **wildlife support from native grasses**:

- Bunching grasses provide runways for birds to travel while protected from overhead.
- Clumps at base of grasses provide habitat for nesting bumblebees.
- Grass seeds are good food sources for songbirds.
- Native grasses are larval host plants for Lepidoptera, especially skippers.

In response to a question on allowing **growth of Virginia Creeper in trees**, Dr. Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home* (pp. 276-278) advises against this practice.

- While in principle, native vines can be “good neighbors” in ecosystems, providing insects & fruit, there can be serious problems with woody vines, regardless of their geographical origin.
- All native woody vines in the East grow faster than trees, so the trees end up being unable to photosynthesize as their canopy foliage is smothered. The trees can also be pulled down by the sheer weight of vines.
- A blog from New Mexico State University comments that in addition to competing for light, vines will compete for water, and there is the potential for vines to girdle themselves as they wrap around a tree.

Native evergreens for screening:

Shrubs

- Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*)
- Rosebay Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*)
- Coastal Dog-hobble (*Leucothoe axillaris*)
- ‘Grey Owl’ Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana* ‘Grey Owl’)

Trees

- American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)

- Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)
- American Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*)

Regarding the **spacing of male and female shrubs** in the dioecious holly species:

- Locating plants side by side is ideal, but they should be no closer than 8 to 10 feet on center to allow for the natural spread of the shrubs. One male can service multiple female plants.
- To ensure pollination, a male should be located within 40 to 50 feet of a female holly. It should be matched for bloom time.

A questioner asked for a **definition of “invasive species”** which I did not get to explain.

- Invasives are clearly defined in Presidential Executive Order 13112 of February 1999 as non-native species introduced into the ecosystem under consideration, causing harm to the environment, economy, or human health.
- Some native plants, such as the goldenrods or River Oats, can be considered aggressive in their manner of spreading within a garden.
- But they are not termed “invasive” because they are not alien to the region and they do not cause harm to the environment.
- The problem with invasive non-native plants is that they can spread beyond cultivation in our gardens, outcompeting native plants in natural areas and disrupting habitat and plant communities.
- See the public ed presentation [“Invasive Plants & Native Alternatives”](#) for a fuller discussion of the problems with specific invasive plants.
- Follow the link for “Invasive Plants” in the sidebar at MGNV.ORG to see fact sheets and articles on the topic.

As far as sources for **purchasing native shrubs**:

- Many of the [native-only sellers](#) listed by the Plant NoVA Natives campaign should have American Beauty-berry (*Callicarpa americana*) in stock.
- The native-only sellers will likely have red-berried cultivars of the native Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). For the more unusual ‘Winter Gold’ (orange-berried) cultivar, you may need to go to one of the larger traditional nurseries.



Regarding good **apps for the identification of plants:**

- Seek by iNaturalist is an app that a Master Gardener colleague frequently uses. The original iNaturalist app is intended as a means of documenting plant and animal species in the natural world. Uploaded photos are reviewed by peers to confirm identification.
- Other apps that I have heard good things about are PlantSnap and PictureThis.
- Here is a review I wrote on the [Flora of Virginia mobile app](#). It is not used for ID purposes, but it contains a wealth of information on species native to our state.