

# What Plants Do I Choose?

## Native Plants Provide A Number of Benefits:

- ❖ **Native plants are beautiful and functional.** Plants that are native to your region evolved there. They are well suited to the "local" vagaries of Mother Nature.
- ❖ **Planting native plants helps preserve biodiversity.** Biodiversity refers to the multitude of different forms of life. Scientists believe that maintaining biodiversity is important for the health and stability of the planet. When you garden with native plants you help preserve another piece of the great web of life. You are also less likely to plant weedy, invasive plants such as purple loosestrife and Japanese knotweed that can decrease biodiversity by out competing and displacing the native plants.
- ❖ **Gardening with plants native to New York makes our landscapes unique.** Native plants provide a visual connection between our landscapes and the surrounding field and forest. This gives our community a distinct regional character.

## What do I need to know about purchasing native plants?

- ❖ Over-harvesting of some native plants has led to their decline.
- ❖ Purchase native plants that have been grown from seeds and cuttings or propagated from plants that have been sustainably harvested.
- ❖ Avoid plants that have been collected from the wild for resale.
- ❖ Ask the nursery about their practices or those of their supplier before you make a purchase.
- ❖ Another option is to purchase your plants from a mail order nursery. Try searching using the key words: native plants. You should be able to find all of the plants listed below at local or mail order nurseries. For a more extensive listing of plants, the complete pamphlet, "Finger Lakes Landscapes: Landscaping for Water Quality" can be requested from [Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County](#).

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Onondaga County



## Gardener's Choice

All the plants described in this section are native to New York State and are hardy to zone 5 or colder. As native plants have become more popular, it has become easier to find them. That said, it is still much easier to find non-native plants. Local nurseries sell what people ask for. If you can't find something you want, ask the nursery if the plant can be special ordered. Many places will be happy to oblige if their wholesalers have the plant in stock.

### A Note of Caution

Please be a responsible consumer of native plants. Over harvesting of some native plants has led to their decline. Purchase native plants that have been grown from seeds and cuttings or propagated from plants that have been sustainably harvested. Avoid plants that have been wild-collected for resale. Ask the nursery about their practices or those of their supplier before you make a purchase.



### Red-osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea/stolonifera*)

**Habitat/Culture:** Found in swamps, low meadows and along streambanks across North America. Prefers sun but tolerates partial shade. Tolerates a wide range of soil conditions including flooding and drought but prefers moist to wet, slightly acidic soil.

**Appearance:** Red-osier has creamy white flowers in summer, red foliage in the fall and brilliant red stems in winter, which contrast sharply against a background of snow. Plants are fast growing, reaching a mature size of 4-8 feet tall with a spread of 10 feet.

**Landscape use:** Border shrub, erosion control/bankcover, buffer strip.

**Comments:** Spreads by stolons and layering. This is a good plant for lakeshores and streambanks. White berries are eaten by many birds. Preferred nest site of American goldfinches.

### What is a Wattle?

Wattles are bundles of dormant cuttings that are bound together in sausage-like structures. Cuttings are taken from species that root easily, such as willow and dogwood. Long straight branches are used to form the 6-8 inch diameter bundles. The wattles are placed in shallow trenches across the slope of the bank and staked into place with live or dead stakes. Within one growing season, roots and shoots grow along the entire length of the wattle more quickly stabilizing the bank than individual cuttings. The physical structure of the wattle also provides immediate bank support, even prior to root growth. This technique is best used on slopes of 2:1 horizontal run to vertical rise or flatter. Steeper slopes will need to be re-graded if this technique is to be used. The beauty of this type of technique is that it alleviates erosion, improves water quality, enhances wildlife habitat and looks more natural than a pile of rock filled wire baskets or other such structures.





**Spicebush** (*Lindera benzoin*)

**Habitat/Culture:** This aromatic, understory shrub is found on northern slopes, river bottomlands, and woodland streambanks in scattered locations from Florida to Canada. For best results, situate spicebush in full sun or part shade in moist soil.

**Appearance:** Usually rounded shrub 6-12 ft in height with a similar spread. Attributes include interesting yellow flower that bloom in early spring, brilliant, lemon yellow fall foliage and scarlet berries in the winter.

**Landscape use:** Border shrub, buffer strip.

**Comments:** Fragrance, Fragrance, Fragrance! The dried berries can be crushed and used similarly to allspice. The fresh leaves can be used to make an herbal tea. The berries are eaten by many birds. Spicebush is dioecious and spreads slowly by suckers.



**Northern Bayberry** (*Myrica pensylvanica*)

**Habitat/Culture:** This tough plant grows in coastal sandflats and tidal marshes from Maine to North Carolina. It is adaptable to a range of difficult landscape conditions including poor, sterile, sandy soils and heavy clay soils. Plant in full sun or part shade

**Appearance:** Deciduous to semi-evergreen shrub ranging from 5-12' high with a similar spread. Inconspicuous white flowers become fragrant, waxy, grayish white berries

**Landscape use:** Border shrub, foundation planting, erosion control/bank cover.

**Comments:** If you want to fully experience the lovely berries, you will need to plant both male and female plants. Then, you can harvest them to make bayberry candles or leave them for the birds. They are a preferred food of tree swallows, eastern meadowlarks, red bellied woodpeckers and gray catbirds to name a few. Bayberry shrubs also make good nest sites for songbirds.



**Fragrant Sumac** (*Rhus aromatica*)

**Habitat/Culture:** Native to open rocky areas from Ontario to Louisiana. Prefers dry, soil and sun but withstands half shade.

**Appearance:** 2-8-foot mounded shrub with a spread of 6-10 feet. Fragrant, attractively shaped leaves turn orange to red to reddish purple in the fall. Bright red berries.

**Landscape use:** Border shrub, erosion control/bankcover.

**Comments:** Good winter food source for many birds. Fast-growing.



### Eastern Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)

**Habitat/Culture:** Grows along the edges of rivers and streams and on moist cliffs from Florida to Quebec. Tolerates almost any landscape situation from dry to wet, acid to alkaline soils, but does best when ample moisture is available. Full sun or partial shade.

**Appearance:** Upright, stiffly arching, 8-9-foot shrub bears white to pinkish round heads of flowers that droop down toward eye level. The one pictured above is a charming dwarf variety.

**Landscape use:** Border shrub, erosion control/bankcover

**Comments:** The common name comes from the plant's bark which peels away to expose a rich brown inner bark. Benefits being cut to the ground in late winter.



### Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)

**Habitat/Culture:** Look for this beauty in wetlands or wet woods from Maine to Minnesota, south to Florida. It does best in moist soil in sun or partial shade.

**Appearance:** Oval-rounded shrub, 6-10 feet high with a similar spread. It boasts an abundance of red berries that add color to the winter landscape.

**Landscape use:** Border shrub, pond, stream or lakeside.

**Comments:** Male and female flowers are on separate plants, so both are needed for berry production.



### Creeping Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*)

**Habitat/Culture:** This popular plant inhabits sea cliffs, gravelly slopes and swamps in scattered locales across the northern part of the United States. It readily withstands hot, dry, sunny situations.

**Appearance:** Low growing, mat forming evergreen shrub or ground cover; 4"-18" height. Insignificant flowers become little cones.

**Landscape use:** Groundcover, Erosion control/bankcover, foundation planting.

**Comments:** Many cultivars available.



### Red Chokecherry (*Aronia arbutifolia*)

**Habitat/Culture:** Native to wetlands and wet woods from Florida to Nova Scotia, this fast-growing shrub does fine in wet or dry soil, in sun or partial shade, even in poor soils.

**Appearance:** Vase shaped shrub, suckering from the base, 6-10 ft in height, with touches of red in every season including; white flowers with red stamens in spring, orange/red fall foliage and clusters of red berries in fall and winter.

**Landscape use:** Naturalizing, border shrub or erosion control.

**Comments:** The closely related and also attractive black chokeberry, (*Aronia melanocarpa*) works well in similar environments. The berries of both are eaten by cedar waxwings, chickadees, grouse, catbirds, eastern meadowlarks and others.



### Serviceberries (*Amelanchier canadensis*, *A. arborea*, *A. stolonifera*, *A. laevis*)

**Habitat/Culture:** There is probably a native serviceberry for any site. Some species do well in dry areas while others are perfectly content to get their feet wet. Sun to shade depending upon the species

**Appearance:** Small trees or tall shrubs that produce clouds of small white flowers in spring. Shrubs tend to sucker. Orange to red fall color.

**Landscape use:** Buffer strip, shade tree. Multi-stem shrubs are effective for screening

**Comments:** The delicious fruits are eaten by many songbirds and mammals, so consider yourself lucky if you get to taste them before they are gone.



### Silky Dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)

**Habitat/Culture:** Naturally occurs on edges of wetlands and streambanks from Florida to Canada. Prefers full sun but tolerates partial shade. Wet or dry soil.

**Appearance:** Multi-stem, fast growing shrub, 6-10 feet in height. Flat-topped heads of white flowers, blue fruit ripening to black, purple to red fall foliage, reddish stems.

**Landscape use:** Border shrub, erosion control/bankcover, buffer strip.

**Comments:** Plants can be spread by layering or cuttings. Will grow on sloped banks and provide effective erosion control in 3-5 years. Provides food and cover for a variety of birds and mammals. Nesting site for gray catbirds and American goldfinches.

