

Best Behaved Kit

2024 Owner's Manual



Five native species that bloom from Spring to Fall to provide beauty in your yard and critical habitat for pollinators

Great Swamp Watershed Association Native Plant Program 2024

Kit Contents

This kit is for gardeners who love the idea of natives, but want to have a pollinator garden that doesn't necessarily look like a pollinator garden! We have selected interesting, well-behaved plants that grow lower to the ground and spread less, which means they require less pruning and maintenance overall. The evergreen coralbells provide foliage year-round while cream colored flowers add spring interest. Long-blooming spotted bee balm takes off in late spring and joins with the feathery purple flowers of dense blazing star and bright orange blooms of butterfly milkweed in the summer to attract an array of bees, wasps and butterflies. By fall, smooth blue aster explodes with profuse, lavender flowers that will provide a winter seed source for overwintering songbirds. These plants grow best in dry to moist soils and full to part sun.

Your 25-plant plug kit includes five species that thrive in sunny gardens (6 hours of sun per day minimum) and moist soil conditions. The kit includes:

- Butterfly Milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, 5 plugs
- Coralbells, *Heuchera americana*, 5 plugs
- Dense Blazing Star, *Liatris spicata*, 5 plugs
- Smooth Blue Aster, *Symphyotrichum laeve*, 5 plugs
- Spotted Beebalm, *Monarda punctata*, 5 plugs

Important: Once you get home, check to see if your plugs need water. Keep their soil moist to the touch (but not soaked) until you are able to plant them in the ground.

Designing your garden: Design Considerations

Your Landscaping Style

These plants can fit any style, including a formal garden, a naturalistic garden (like this design), or a wild garden with clumps. Pollinators will be equally happy with any of these options.

Your Garden



























This design can be easily altered to fit a deeper, wider, or curved garden bed. These designs use moderate 10-12-inch center-to-center plant spacings to easily fill a 50 or 80 square foot area. The goal is to eventually have plants pressing shoulder to shoulder for easier maintenance. Tightly spaced plants create a "green mulch," reducing the opportunity for weeds to sprout so that annual mulching is no longer required. You can choose to plant on a tighter spacing. A larger spacing will require more maintenance and mulching to manage weeds until plants establish.

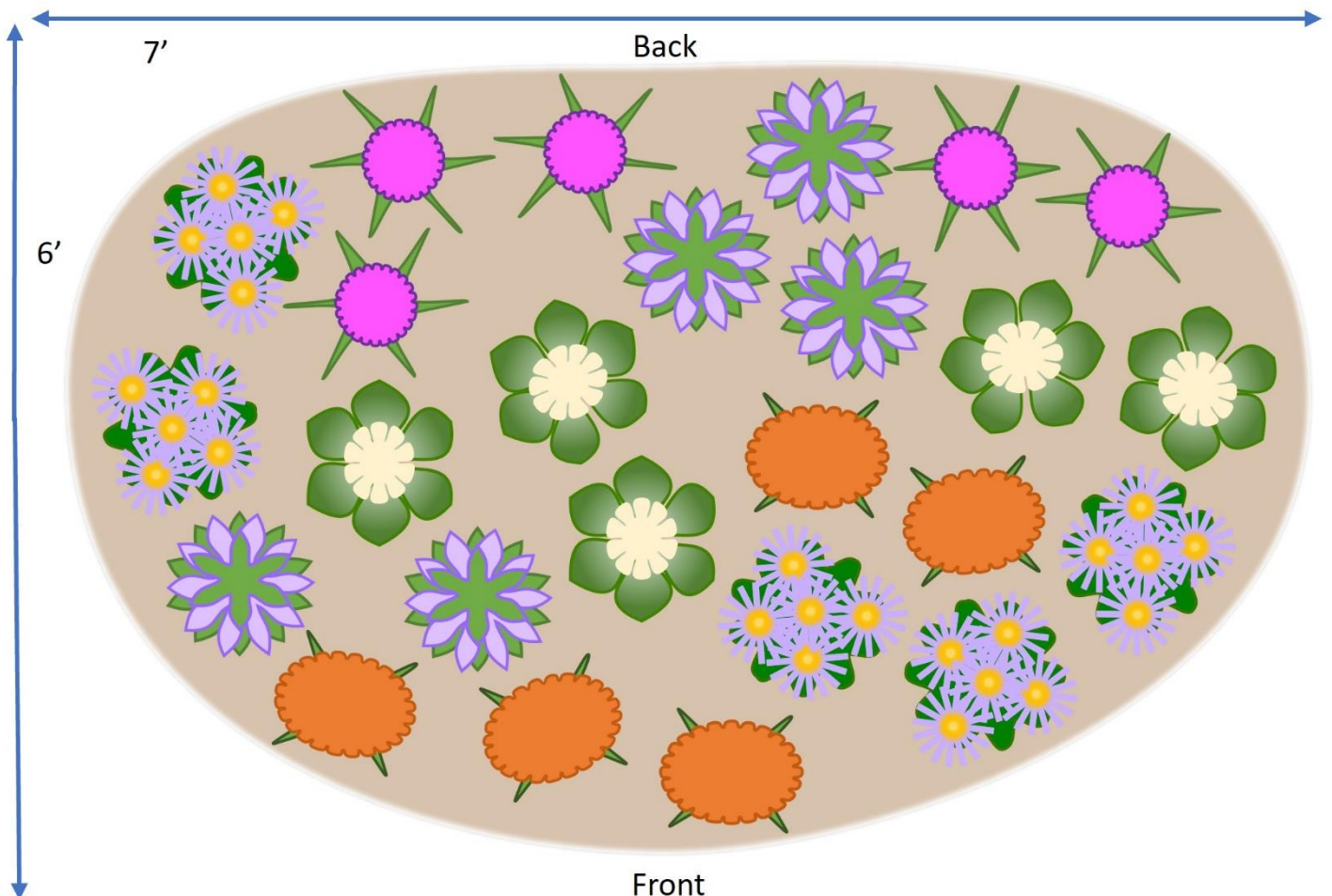
Add On!

These species can be planted alone or can be combined with other sun-loving kits or your favorite individual species to make a larger planting.

Designing your garden: Sample Design

Can be used as is or easily modified to fit your chosen space and your gardening goals. The deer icon indicates high (red) and medium (yellow) deer resistance; however, no plant is deer proof and **deer still may browse on these species.**

Butterfly Milkweed  					Coralbells  					
			June - Aug	1-3'					Apr - May	1- 3'
Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height	Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height	
Dense Blazing Star  					Smooth Blue Aster 					
			Jul - Aug	3-4'					Aug-Oct	2-3'
Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height	Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height	
Spotted Beebalm  										
			May- Aug	2-3'						
Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height						



Site Preparation

Know your sun, moisture, and soil conditions

The plants in the Best Behaved Kit need 6 hours of sunlight per day, but more sun is always better.

These species grow well in average to moist soil conditions. You may need to water your plants during dry summer periods during the first season, after that they should only need watered during drought. Once their roots are established, they will generally not suffer permanent damage even without watering.

These native plants are selected for the clay-silt-loam soils typical for our piedmont or highlands region.

Prepare the bed

If planting in a prepared bed, remove grass and any other unwanted plants that may compete with your new native garden while establishing. Minimize soil disturbance.

To prepare a new native plant bed replacing previous plantings:

Sheet mulching is a great way to start! It is a back-saving “no-dig” strategy that kills unwanted weeds and grass by blocking out sunlight, allowing everything to die and decompose, minimizing soil disturbance and avoiding stirring up the weed seed bank.

- Mow the area you’d like to transform. Use a garden hose or a length of rope to create the garden outline.
- Cover the area with tapeless clean cardboard or 5 to 8 sheets of newspaper (don’t use glossy pages.) Overlap the edges to prevent gaps so that the turf is solidly covered. Wet down as you go.
- Cover cardboard with 3-4” of composted mulch. No soil amendments, no fertilizer. Native plants grow best in simple, nutrient poor soils.
- Poke many small holes through the cardboard to maintain rainwater infiltration.

During spring and summer, this will take at least a month, usually two, to kill enough weeds and turf. Dig spot planting holes straight through to plant plugs.

For more information, go to [The Lasagna Method \(Sheet Mulching\)](#) on our resources page.

If not planting immediately

- Keep plugs in a sheltered spot with enough sun and protect from frost/wind.
- Keep them moist but do not over-water.
- Trim plants back to 6-12” and pinch off flowers if they will not be planted for more than a month. With proper care, landscape plugs should stay healthy for many weeks.

Planting your plugs

- The only tool you need is a garden knife, trowel, or lightweight one hand pick.
- Extract each plug gently from its socket. Squeeze the sides to loosen. Push up from the bottom or use a narrow spatula to ease the plug out. Avoid pulling on the plant's stem!
- Lay out where you want to place each plug. Dig a hole large enough for the plug.
- Plant so the top of the plug is even with the top of the soil. Tamp soil firmly.
- Water the plugs in well.

Pollinator Garden Management

Native plants are low maintenance, but every garden requires management.

Over-watering can be harmful. Through the first year, water them when the soil surface is dry. The second year and beyond you should only need to water during a drought.

Insects may chomp on plants, but these plants are larval hosts to butterflies and will recover.

Undesirable insects like Japanese beetles or aphids may become a problem. Find a caterpillar-safe way to mitigate the problem (Rutgers agricultural extension hotline 609-989-6853 can help). Even "organic" insecticides can kill desirable insects like Monarch caterpillars or butterflies.

- Healthy pollinator gardens host beneficial insects like ladybugs that eat pests.
- Mechanical removal, eg. spraying, wiping, or picking off large bugs works well.

Deer may also chomp some of these plants. Some species are more deer resistant than others.

- Plants are most palatable when young and don't have deep roots to recover.
- Organic deer repellents successfully repel deer and rabbits but require re-applications
- Cages and fences can be effective physical barriers but check local ordinances.
 - Deer fences should typically be 7-8' tall but for small enclosures 5' is effective.

Shortening up giants. If your soil is rich, tall-growing bushy plants may grow taller than wanted and can flop over. Avoid this by cutting back by $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ from Memorial Day to July 4th to shorten plant height.

A slightly messy garden is the best habitat! Leaving the stalks through the winter provides food and shelter for wildlife as well as visual interest. Cut the stalks in early spring after insects are active. In the fall, leave the autumn leaves to protect overwintering pupae and firefly eggs in your yard. The leaves decompose, enriching the soil, but ensure they are removed in the spring to protect basal rosettes.

Monitor your garden as it changes. Remove invasive plants and weeds little and often. If species prove too prolific, divide and share. Diverse yards incorporate multiple layers and support more wildlife.

Experiment and have FUN!

About each plant

Butterfly Milkweed



Flowers: June - Aug

Light: Sun

Moisture: Dry

Height: 1-3 ft

Striking long-lasting orange blooms in flat-topped clusters followed by attractive seedpods. Many bee species and other insects flock to this flower for its nectar. Host to many butterflies including monarch, queen and gray hairstreak butterflies. Deep taproot makes it drought tolerant, but hard to transplant. Prefers full sun, dry soil.

Coralbells



Flowers: Apr - May

Light: Sun to Shade

Moisture: Dry to Average

Height: 1-3 ft

A low mounding, 1-3 ft evergreen produces cream-colored flowers on dainty stalks in spring. The tiny, tubular flowers attract both native bees and hummingbirds, while the evergreen basal leaves provide cover year-round. Prefers dry to moist soils and dappled sunlight but grows in full sun to shade.

Dense Blazing Star



Flowers: Jul - Aug

Light: Sun to Part Sun

Moisture: Moist to Wet

Height: 3-4 ft

Spikes of tufty, fluffy, purple flowers on rigid stalks 3-4 ft. tall, bloom from July into August. Dense Blazing Star is a valuable nectar source for native bees and butterflies. Larval host plant to multiple species of moths. Plant in masses or as vertical accents. Sun to part sun, average to wet soil.

Smooth Blue Aster



Flowers: Aug - Oct

Light: Sun to Part Sun

Moisture: Average to Moist

Height: 2-3 ft

Billowing panicles of blue-violet blooms open on 3 ft tall plants in late summer and autumn. Important to late season pollinators and hosts over 100 species of Lepidoptera. Favored by deer and rabbits, protection such as fencing during establishment is recommended. Sun to part shade, average to moist soil.

Spotted Beebalm



Flowers: May - Aug

Light: Sun

Moisture: Dry

Height: 2-3 ft

Interesting, lilac leaf-like bracts draw in pollinators all around in late spring and throughout summer reaching up to 3ft. Deer tend to avoid this aromatic plant. Long blooming and great for cut flower arrangements. Grows well in dry to average soils and full sun.

Your native garden throughout the year

Emerge, Bloom and Seed Timeline										
Species Name	Spring			Summer			Fall		Winter	
Butterfly Milkweed				Emerge			Bloom			
Coralbells	Emerge	Bloom							semi-evergreen	
Dense Blazing Star		Emerge		Bloom						
Smooth Blue Aster		Emerge				Bloom		Seed		
Spotted Beebalm		Emerge	Bloom			Seed				
	Key:			Emerge			Bloom		Seed	

Garden Maintenance Timeframe				
Species Name	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Butterfly Milkweed	cut back last year's stalks to 8-15"		leave stems for habitat	
Coralbells	same as above divide every 2-3 years		semi-evergreen, leave leaves for habitat	
Dense Blazing Star	same as b. milkweed		leave stems for habitat	
Smooth Blue Aster	same as b. milkweed		leave seedheads for wildlife	
Spotted Beebalm	same as b. milkweed	deadhead early blooms	leave stems for habitat	

Some native pollinators that frequent these plants

Species Name	Pollinators, Larval Hosts, and Specialist Species
Butterfly Milkweed	<p>Bees: cuckoos, green sweets, leafcutters, small carpenters, small resins, sweets</p> <p>Butterflies: crescent butterflies, great spangled fritillary, monarch, pearl crescent, spicebush swallowtails, sulphurs</p> <p>Wasps: paper, thread-waisted</p> <p>Others: Formicidae ants, milkweed leaf beetle, soldier beetle</p> <p>Larval Host Species: milkweed tussock moth, monarch, queen</p>
Coralbells	<p>Bees: small sweets, green sweets</p>
Dense Blazing Star	<p>Bees: bumbles, green sweets, leafcutters</p> <p>Butterflies: Aphrodite fritillary, clouded sulphur, gray hairstreak, great spangled fritillary, orange sulphur, monarch, painted lady, Peck's skipper, red admiral, tiger swallowtail, wood nymph</p> <p>Others: bee flies, soldier beetles, syrphid flies</p> <p>Larval Host Species: blazing star borer moth, glorious flower moth, three lined flower moth, wavy-lined emerald</p>
Smooth Blue Aster	<p>Bees: bumble, green sweat, long-horned, small sweat, yellow-faced</p> <p>Butterflies: buckeye, painted lady</p> <p>Others: syrphid flies</p> <p>Specialist Species: mining bees</p> <p>Larval Host Species: brown-hooded owlet, pearl crescent, saddleback caterpillar, silvery checkerspot</p>
Spotted Beebalm	<p>Bees: bumble, digger, large carpenter, long-horned, miner, plasterer, sweets</p> <p>Wasps: great black, great gold digger, paper</p> <p>Others: soldier beetle, wedge-shaped beetle</p> <p>Specialist Species: black sweat bee</p> <p>Larval Host Species: gray marvel moth, northern crescent, pearl crescent, pyralid moth, snouth moth</p>

Put your garden on the Map

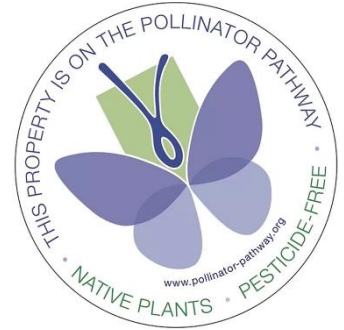
Each new native planting adds to the Pollinator Pathway that renews and extends wildlife habitat across our neighborhoods and region, whether it is one container on the patio or a fully native backyard.

If you plant it, the pollinators and birds really will come!

Please take a minute to [Register Your Pollinator Garden](#) on the map to encourage the growing sustainable landscaping community.

To encourage your neighbors, we also recommend attractive explanatory garden signs.

You can purchase a Pollinator Pathway Garden sign through the GSWA plant sale.



If you have questions about your native plant garden

Feel free to email us at plantsale@greatswamp.org We want your pollinator garden to get a good start so it will provide you with years of enjoyment!



Great Swamp Watershed Association

The Passaic River **WATERKEEPER**® ALLIANCE Affiliate

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