Wet Sun Kit

2024 Owner's Manual

Great Swamp Watershed Association

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 perfect for those who have a rain garden basin in full or partial sun. Golden Alexander and scarlet bee balm live up to their names starting in May, their blossoms intermingling to create a fiery show for hungry early pollinators. In July swamp milkweed adds fluffy bundles of small pink flowers that draw monarch and queen butterflies. As summer comes to a close, the purple-pink spiky blooms of NY ironweed and bright yellow sunbursts of swamp sunflower will attract songbirds through fall and overwintering birds until the next spring arrives and the show begins again. 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 and wet conditions. The kit includes:

- Swamp Milkweed*, Asclepias incarnata*, 5 plugs
- Golden Alexander, *Zizia aurea*, 5 plugs
- Scarlet Bee Balm, *Monarda didyma L*., 5 plugs
- NY Ironweed, *Vernonia noveboracensis*, 5 plugs

Swamp Sunflower, *Helianthus angustifolius*, 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 80 or 50 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 wet-loving kits or your favorite individual species to make a larger planting.

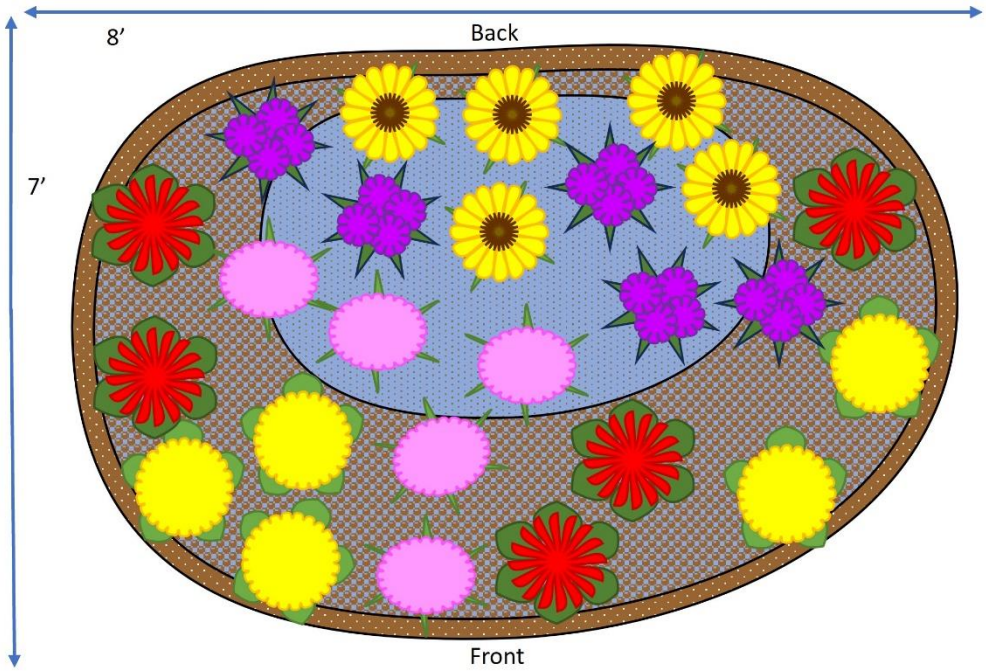
Designing your garden: Sample Design

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.***

Golden Alexander					NY Ironweed				
			May- Jun	1-3’				Aug - Oct	3-6’
Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height	Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height

Scarlet Beebalm					Swamp Milkweed				
			May- Aug	2’-4’				Jul - Aug	3-4’
Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height	Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height

Swamp Sunflower				
			Aug - Nov	3-6’
Color	Light	Moisture	Season	Height



Side Profile

Level 1: Mostly dry. Floods during severe rainstorms

Level 2: Intermediate. Floods during moderate rainstorms

Level 3: Wet. Floods during every rainstorm

Site Preparation

Know your sun, moisture, and soil conditions

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

These species grow well in moist to wet 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 or 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 exclosures 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 ⅓- ½ 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

Golden Alexander

Flowers: May - June

Light: Sun to Part Sun

Moisture: Moist to Wet

Height: 1-3ft

Flat round yellow clusters bloom late spring on tidy, 1-2.5 ft. tall stalks. Relatively low growing plants with glossy basal leaves providing a taller ground cover. Provides nectar and pollen for early pollinators and specialist mining bee species. Host plant for black swallowtail butterflies. Sun to part shade, average moist soil.

NY Ironweed

Flowers: Aug - Oct

Light: Sun

Moisture: Moist

Height: 3-6 ft

Deep purple with notes of pink, these thistle-like flowers explode from dark purple and green stems reach up to 6ft in early fall. Often found growing in wet or moist meadows, this plant is a great addition to a rain garden or other low-lying portion of a garden. In late fall and winter, seeds of ironweed provide forage for small mammals and songbirds. Grows best in moist to occasionally wet soils and full sun.

Scarlet Beebalm

Flowers: May - Aug

Light: Sun to Part Shade

Moisture: Moist to Wet

Height: 2-4 ft

Stand forming showy crown-like clusters of spectacular, tubular, lipped red flowers beloved by hummingbirds, bees and butterflies. Deadhead to prolong blooming. Susceptible to powdery mildew, this plant will grow best with good air circulation. Spreads through rhizomes and can sometimes be aggressive. Sun to part-shade and average to occasionally wet soils. Prefers growing conditions with some air circulation.

Swamp Milkweed

Flowers: July - Aug

Light: Sun to Part Sun

Moisture: Average to Wet

Height: 2-4 ft

Fragrant Pink blooms July to August with large, interesting seed pods in fall. Grows up to 4ft tall and is beloved by bees, wasps, moths, butterflies and more. Larval host to monarch and queen butterflies. Caterpillars may defoliate but the plant will rebound to feed more caterpillars! Sun to part sun. Moist to wet soil.

Swamp Sunflower

Flowers: Aug - Nov

Light: Sun to Part Shade

Moisture: Moist to Wet

Height: 3-6 ft

Bright, two-inch yellow flowers will attract both generalist pollinators as well as specialized species including mining bees, blooming in fall until the first frost. As the name suggests, swamp sunflower grows best in wet conditions and can sometimes grow up to 8 ft tall when conditions are perfect. Host to the silvery checkerspot and seeds provide winter forage for mammals and overwintering birds. Does well in moist to wet soils and sun to partial shade.

Your native garden throughout the year

Emerge, Bloom and Seed Timeline

Species Name	Spring			Summer			Fall			Winter		
Golden Alexander												
NY Ironweed												
Scarlet Beebalm												
Swamp Milkweed												
Swamp Sunflower												

	Key:	Emerge	Bloom	Seed

Garden Maintenance Timeframe

Species Name	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Golden Alexander				
NY Ironweed	cut back last year's stalks to 8-15"	cut by 1/2-1/3 by July 4 to shorten up plant	leave seedheads for wildlife leave stems for habitat	
Scarlet Beebalm	cut back last year's stalks to 8-15"	deadhead early blooms	leave seedheads for wildlife leave stems for habitat	
Swamp Milkweed	cut back last year's stalks to 8-15"		leave stems for habitat	
Swamp Sunflower	cut back last year's stalks to 8-15"		leave seedheads for wildlife leave stems for habitat	

Some native pollinators that frequent these plants

Species Name	Pollinators, Larval Hosts, and Specialist Species
Golden Alexander	**Bees:** mason, bumble, yellow-faced, small carpenter, **Butterflies:** azure **Wasps:** potter, paper, wood-boring mason, **Others:** ebony bugs, ladybird beetle, soldier beetles, syrphid flies, tachinid flies ***Specialist Species:*** **mining bee** ***Larval Host Species:*** **black swallowtail, rigid sunflower borer, ladybird beetle**
New York Ironweed	**Bees:** bumble, green sweat, leafcutter, long-horned **Butterflies:** eastern tiger swallowtail, painted lady, Peck's skipper **Others:** soldier beetles, syrphid flies ***Specialist Species:*** **long-horned bee** ***Larval Host Species:*** **Parthenice tiger moth**
Scarlet Beebalm	**Bees:** bumbles, cuckoos, green sweats, leafcutter, long-horned, small resin, wool carder **Birds:** ruby-throated hummingbird **Butterflies:** monarch, silver spotted skipper, swallowtails (spicebush, tiger) **Moths:** clearwing hummingbird, snout **Wasps:** great black wasp, mason **Others:** banded-long horn beetle, bee flies, soldier beetles ***Specialist Species:*** **black sweat bee** ***Larval Host Species:*** **hermit sphinx mot, orange mint moth, raspberry pyrausta**
Swamp Milkweed	**Bees:** bumble, leafcutter, small resin, sweat, yellow-faced **Butterflies:** banded hairstreak, great spangled fritillary, monarch, red admiral, skippers **Moths:** clearwing hummingbird **Wasps:** great black, great golden digger, paper, square-headed, yellowjacket **Others:** banded long-horned beetle, bee flies, green bottle flies, long-horned beetle, milkweed leaf beetle, red milkweed beetle, soldier beetles, syrphid flies, tachinid flies ***Larval Host Species:*** **monarch, milkweed tussock moth, queen**
Swamp Sunflower	**Bees:** bumble, long-horned, sweat **Butterflies:** monarch **Moths:** garden webworm **Others:** spotted cucumber beetle, syrphid flies ***Larval Host Species:*** **saddleback caterpillar, silvery checkerspot**

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
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