

Rain Garden Kit

2025 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 2025

Kit Contents

Perfect for a rain garden basin or wet area, these plants thrive in wetter areas. Golden flowers of marsh marigold provide spring forage for early pollinators, giving way to blue flag iris late spring into early summer. Pink bunches of swamp milkweed and large white to red swamp rose mallow blooms dominate in the summer. Come fall, abundant yellow flowers of sneezeweed bloom. The gentle giants sneezeweed and rose mallow can be given a “holiday haircut” for a shorter, bushier appearance. As many of the plant names suggest, these species do best in moist to wet areas with 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:

- Blue Flag Iris, *Iris versicolor*, 5 plugs
- Marsh Marigold, *Caltha palustris*, 5 plugs
- Rose Mallow, *Hibiscus moschuetos*, 5 plugs
- Sneezeweed, *Helenium autumnale*, 5 plugs
- Swamp Milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*, 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.

Cover Photo Credits: All Ginger Van Ryzin

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

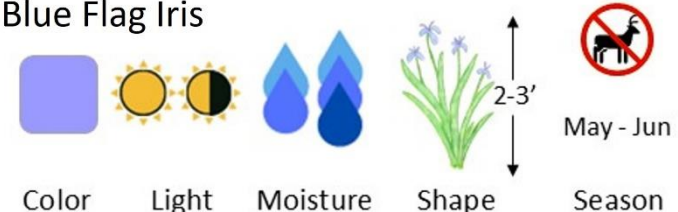
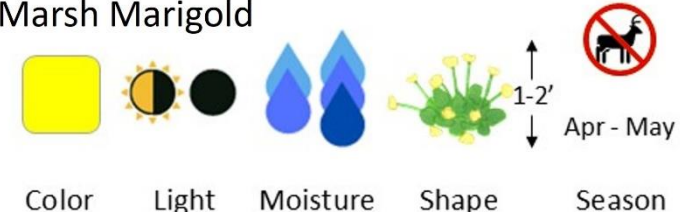
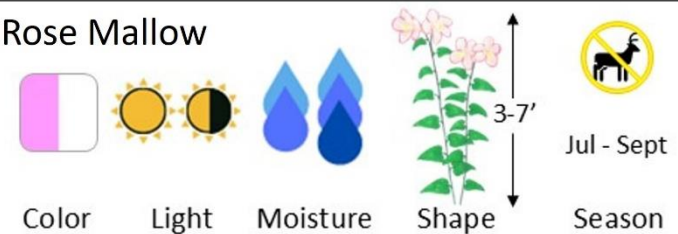
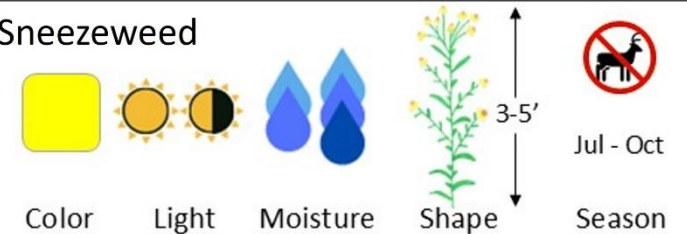
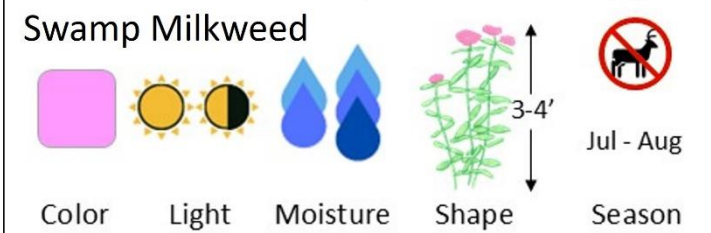
This design can be easily altered to fit a deeper, wider, or curved garden bed. These designs use moderate 10-12-inch center-to-center plant spacings to easily fill a 50 or 80 square foot area. The goal is to eventually have plants pressing shoulder to shoulder for easier maintenance. Tightly spaced 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.

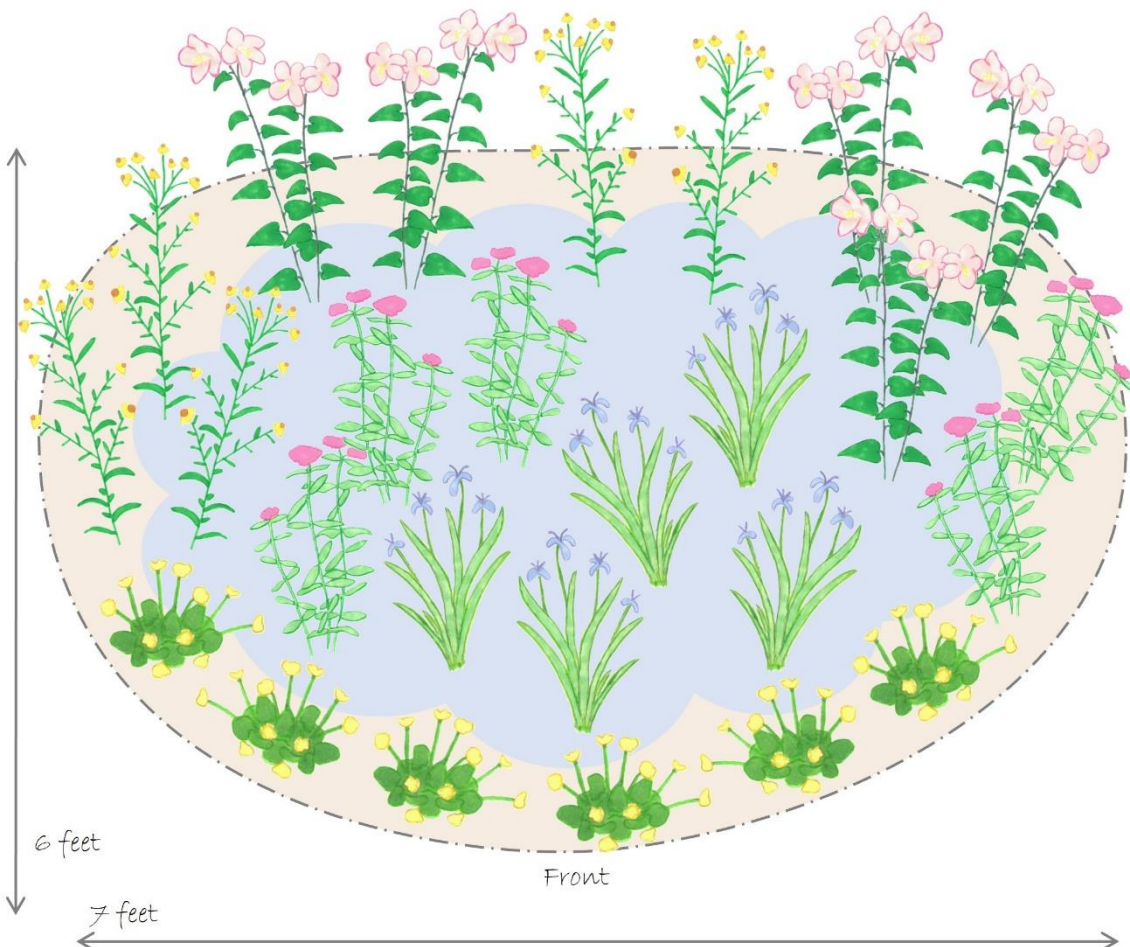
Add On!

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 Rain Garden 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, **deer still may browse on these species.**

<p>Blue Flag Iris</p>  <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>	<p>Marsh Marigold</p>  <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>
<p>Rose Mallow</p>  <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>	<p>Sneezeweed</p>  <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>
<p>Swamp Milkweed</p>  <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>	



Site Preparation

Know your sun, moisture, and soil conditions

The plants in the Rain Garden 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.

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

Blue Flag Iris



Flowers: May - June
Light: Sun to Part Shade
Moisture: Moist to Wet
Height: 2-3 ft

A native Iris with bluish-purple blooms with pale lemon centers above sword shaped blue-green leaves reaching 2-3 feet. Blooms in May and June, attracting bees and butterflies. Host to the Virginia ctenucha moth. Sun to part shade, moist to wet soil. Can tolerate shallow standing water. Photo credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

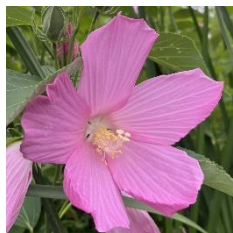
Marsh Marigold



Flowers: Apr - May
Light: Part Sun to Shade
Moisture: Moist to Wet
Height: 1-2 ft

Reaching 2 feet tall, marsh marigold bloom in early spring and are primarily pollinated by hoverflies. Like its name suggests, marsh marigold grows best in wet areas. Its toxic leaves make it unpalatable for deer and other herbivores. Prefers moist to wet soils, partial sun to shade. CAUTION: This plant contains poisonous parts that can be toxic in large quantities. Photo credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

Rose Mallow



Flowers: July - Aug
Light: Sun to Part Sun
Moisture: Moist to Wet
Height: 3-7 ft

Large, showy hollyhock-like flowers grow on tall stems reaching up to 7 feet tall. The flowers range from white, pink or red and can have a dark, crimson red circle in its center, blooming in summer. Larval host plant to over twenty butterflies and moths while songbirds eat ripe seeds. A wetland plant, rose mallow prefers moist to wet soils and can tolerate standing water. Grows best in full sun but can grow in partial shade. Photo credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

Sneezeweed



Flowers: Aug - Oct
Light: Sun to Part Sun
Moisture: Average to Moist
Height: 2-3 ft

Also known as Helen's flower, its numerous, yellow, 1-2 inch flower has a larger disc flower center with small ray flowers surrounding it. It blooms in summer, reaching 3-5 feet tall. The plant contains toxic components and is poisonous to humans in large quantities, making it unpalatable to deer and rabbits as well. It prefers moist to wet soils and full sun to part shade. Photo credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

Swamp Milkweed



Flowers: May - Aug
Light: Sun
Moisture: Dry
Height: 2-3 ft

Fragrant Pink blooms July to August with large, interesting seed pods in fall. Grows up to 4 feet 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. Photo credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

Your native garden throughout the year

Emerge, Bloom and Seed Timeline											
Species Name	Spring			Summer			Fall			Winter	
Blue Flag Iris	Emerges		Blooms	Seeds							
Marsh Marigold	Emerges	Blooms	Seeds								
Rose Mallow		Emerges		Blooms		Seeds					
Sneezeweed		Emerges			Blooms		Seeds				
Swamp Milkweed		Emerges	Blooms		Seeds						
<p>Key: Emerge Bloom Seed</p>											

Some native pollinators that frequent these plants

Species Name	Pollinators, Larval Hosts, and Specialist Species
Blue Flag Iris	<p>Bees: bumble, digger, green sweat, mason, small carpenter, small sweat, yellow-faced</p> <p>Butterflies: bronze copper, eastern tiger swallowtail, long dash, monarch, silver-banded fritillary, skippers (silver-spotted, Peck's, tawny-edged)</p> <p>Other: Formicidae ants, long-horned beetle, weevil</p> <p>Larval Host Species: <i>Virginia ctenucha</i></p>
Marsh Marigold	<p>Bees: cuckoo, mining</p> <p>Other: bee fly, Formicidae ants, hover fly, two leaf beetle</p>
Rose Mallow	<p>Bees: bumble, eastern carpenter, green sweat, little sweat, long-horned</p> <p>Birds: ruby-throated hummingbird</p> <p>Butterflies: silver-spotted skipper,</p> <p>Wasps: digger, potter</p> <p>Specialist Species: rose-mallow bee</p> <p>Larval Host Species: common checkered skipper, painted lady, gray hairstreak, lo moth, pearly wood nymph</p>
Sneezeweed	<p>Bees: bumble, cellophane, eastern carpenter, green sweat, leaf-cutter, long-horned, mining, small carpenter, small sweat, sweat</p> <p>Butterflies: bronze copper, cabbage white, clouded sulphur, pearl crescent, tawny-edged skipper</p> <p>Moths: yellow-collared scape</p> <p>Wasps: paper, sand, thread-waisted</p> <p>Other: black blister beetle, flies (hover, bee, thick-headed, house, Tachinid), soldier beetles, weevil</p> <p>Larval Host Species: dainty sulphur</p>
Swamp Milkweed	<p>Bees: bumble, cuckoo, digger, green sweat, large carpenter, leaf-cutter, metallic green sweat, mining, small sweat, small resin, small sweat, yellow-faced,</p> <p>Wasps: great black, great golden digger, paper, square-headed, thread-waisted, Tiphiid, Vespid, yellowjacket</p> <p>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</p> <p>Larval Host Species: monarch, milkweed tussock moth</p>

For more information, check out [Pollinators of Native Plants](#) by Heather Holm or visit

https://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/flower_insects/index.htm

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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