

Dry Shade Kit

2026 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 2026

Kit Contents

Well-drained, drier gardens with shade are where you will these plants thrive. Semi-evergreen coralbells and stonecrop start off the season providing forage for early pollinators, giving way to ground cover the rest of the season. Lavender bursts of creeping phlox brings the garden into summer where lavender tufts of mistflower and white flowers of bigleaf aster bloom into fall. If left to go to seed, mistflower and bigleaf aster will be a winter seed source for overwintering small mammals and songbirds. Dry to average soils, part sun to shade. The kit includes:

- Bigleaf Aster, *Eurybia macrophylla*, 5 plugs
- Coralbells, *Heuchera americana*, 5 plugs
- ~~Fire Pink, *Silene virginica*, 5 plugs~~ Due to unexpected grower issues, fire pink has been replaced with Creeping Phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*), 5 plugs
- Mistflower, *Conoclinium coelestinum*, 5 plugs
- Stonecrop, *Sedum tematum*, 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.

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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.

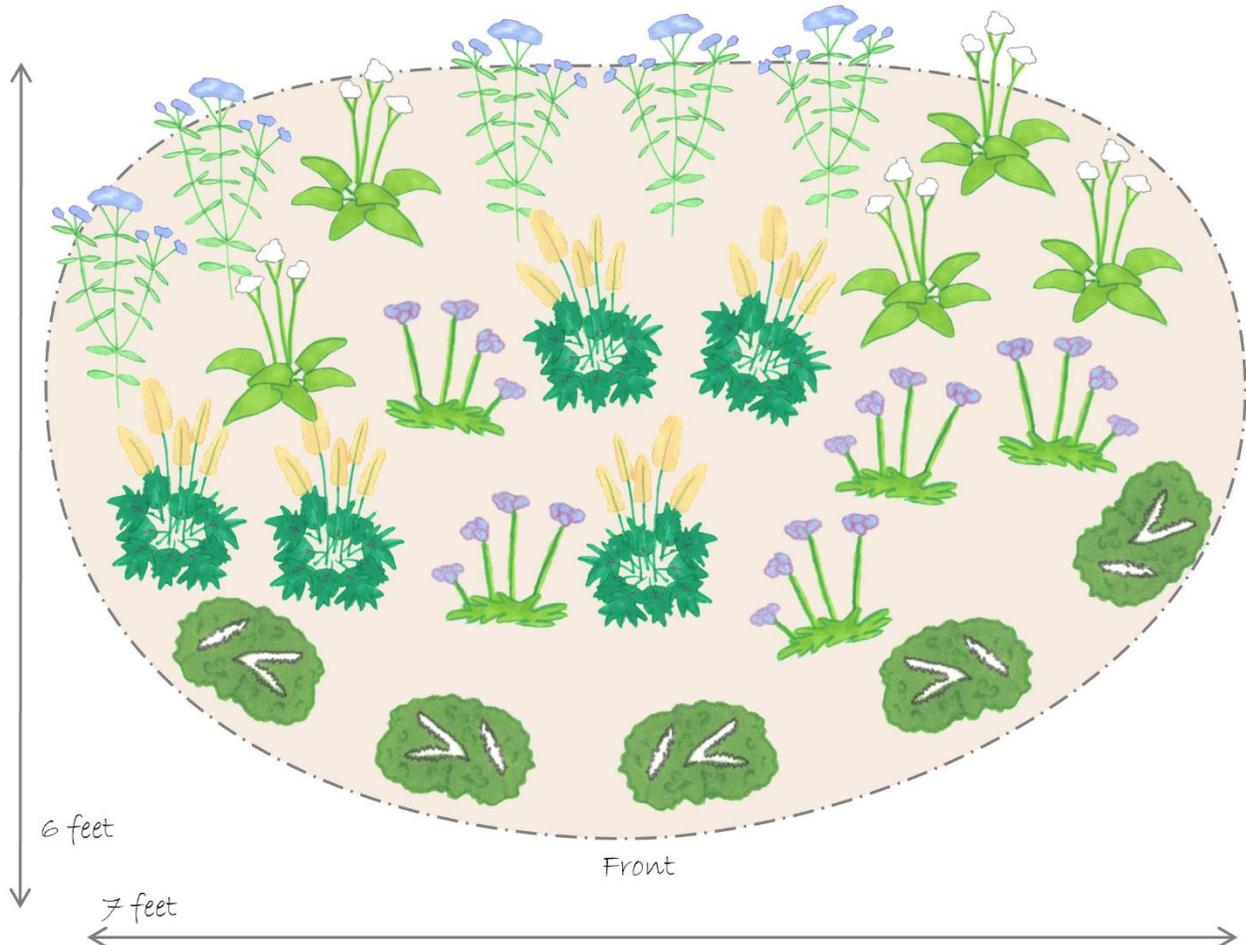
Add On!

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

Designing your garden: Sample Dry Shade 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>Bigleaf Aster <i>Eurybia macrophylla</i></p> <p>Color: [White square]</p> <p>Light: [Sun icon]</p> <p>Moisture: [Two blue water droplets]</p> <p>Shape: [Plant illustration with 1-3' height]</p> <p>Season: [Deer icon with red slash]</p> <p>Jul - Oct</p>	<p>Coralbells <i>Heuchera americana</i></p> <p>Color: [Yellow square]</p> <p>Light: [Sun icon]</p> <p>Moisture: [Two blue water droplets]</p> <p>Shape: [Plant illustration with 1-3' height]</p> <p>Season: [Deer icon with yellow slash]</p> <p>Apr - May</p>
<p>Creeping Phlox <i>Phlox stolonifera</i></p> <p>Color: [Purple square]</p> <p>Light: [Half sun, half moon icon]</p> <p>Moisture: [Two blue water droplets]</p> <p>Shape: [Plant illustration with 1' height]</p> <p>Season: [Deer icon with yellow slash]</p> <p>Apr - Jun</p>	<p>Mistflower <i>Conoclinium coelestinum</i></p> <p>Color: [Light purple square]</p> <p>Light: [Half sun, half moon icon]</p> <p>Moisture: [Two blue water droplets]</p> <p>Shape: [Plant illustration with 1-3' height]</p> <p>Season: [Deer icon with yellow slash]</p> <p>Jul - Oct</p>
<p>Stonecrop <i>Sedum ternatum</i></p> <p>Color: [White square]</p> <p>Light: [Half sun, half moon icon]</p> <p>Moisture: [Two blue water droplets]</p> <p>Shape: [Plant illustration with 6 in height]</p> <p>Season: [Deer icon with red slash]</p> <p>Apr - May</p>	



Site Preparation

Know your sun, moisture, and soil conditions

The plants in the Dry Shade Kit will do well in part shade to shade conditions, but will not thrive in deep shade.

Dry to moist soil is best for these species. 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. This method can be done on the mistflower and bigleaf aster, if desired.

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

Bigleaf Aster



Flowers: Jul - Oct
Light: Sun to Shade
Moisture: Dry to Moist
Height: 1-3 ft

Numerous, one-inch white to lavender flowers bloom in early fall, reaching 1-3 feet tall. Its large basal leaves ranging from 4-8 inches wide provides good ground cover. Larval host plant for slivery checkerspot and pearl crescent butterfly. This plant can grow in sun or shade, needing dry to moist soils. Photo Credit Public Domain.

Coralbells



Flowers: Apr - May
Light: Sun to Shade
Moisture: Dry to Moist
Height: 1-3 ft

A low-mounding, evergreen plant produces cream-colored flowers on dainty stalks in spring, rising 1-3 feet tall. The tiny, tubular flowers attract small native bees, while the evergreen basal leaves provide cover year-round. Prefers dry to moist soils and dappled sunlight but grows in full sun to shade. Photo Credit Larry Hurley.

Creeping Phlox



Flowers: Apr - Jun
Light: Part Shade to Shade
Moisture: Dry to Moist
Height: 1 ft

Creeping phlox is a great ground cover or border plant for a shade garden. Reaching 1 foot tall, pink to purple blooms arrive in mid-spring. Spreads through short rhizomes and roots at nodes, creeping phlox forms loose mats once established. Grows best in dry to moist soils, part shade to shade. Photo credit Public Domain.

Mistflower



Flowers: Jul - Oct
Light: Sun to Part Shade
Moisture: Dry to Moist
Height: 1-3 ft

Tufts of blue-lavender disc flowers that bloom in the summer into early fall. This is an uncomplicated, easily grown perennial reaches 1-3 feet tall and spreads through rhizomes and reseeding. Provides nectar to a variety of butterflies including monarchs, swallowtails and more. Prefers dry to moist soils and grows best in sun to part sun, but tolerates shade. Photo Credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

Stonecrop



Flowers: Apr - May
Light: Sun to Part Shade
Moisture: Average
Height: 6 in

A mostly evergreen succulent and excellent groundcover, this low growing plant has star-like white flowers that bloom in early spring, offering vital early pollen and nectar. Pollinators include bees and butterflies, and this plant is a host species of buckeye butterfly and the variegated fritillary. Prefers average soil with sun to part sun. Photo Credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

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

P.O. Box 300 • New Vernon, NJ 07976

(973) 538-3500 • GreatSwamp.org