

Hell Strip 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

Perfect for dry, sunny spots where it is difficult for many other plants to survive, including hellstrips (area between sidewalk and road) and container gardens. Broadleaf sedge provides ground cover year-round until quinine starts the season off in late spring with long blooming, pearl-like flowers. By summer, dense blazing star and butterfly milkweed join quinine with blooms of pink and orange. Black-eyed Susans end the season in mid-fall, with bountiful blooms of daisy-like yellow flowers. If left alone to seed, broadleaf sedge, dense blazing star and black-eyed Susan all will provide food for small mammals and overwintering songbirds. Plants in this kit are all fairly deer resistant, although deer may browse plants if hungry enough. Full sun and dry to average soils. The kit includes:

- Black-Eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*, 5 plugs
- Broadleaf Sedge, *Carex platyphylla*, 5 plugs
- Butterfly Milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, 5 plugs
- Dense Blazing Star, *Liatris spicata*, 5 plugs
- Quinine, *Parthenium integrifolium*, 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 (from left to right): Ginger Van Ryzin, Jay Sterner, Public Domain, Public Domain, Ilona

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

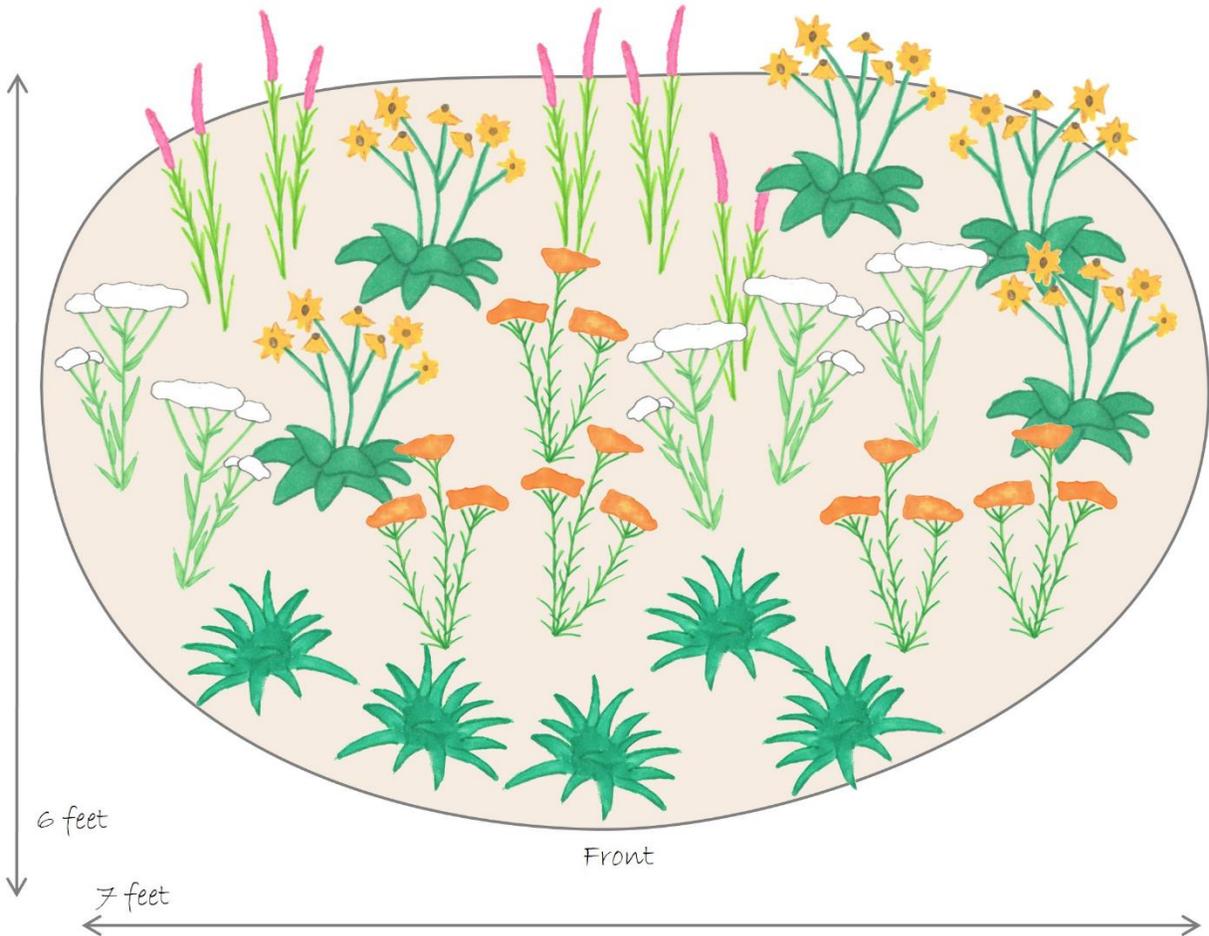
This design can be easily altered to fit a deeper, wider, or curved garden bed. These designs use moderate 10-12-inch center-to-center plant spacings to easily fill a 80 or 50 square foot area. The goal is to eventually have plants pressing shoulder to shoulder for easier maintenance. Tightly spaced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

Designing your garden: Sample Hell Strip Garden Design

Can be used as is or easily modified to fit your chosen space and your gardening goals.

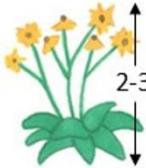
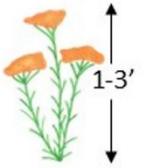
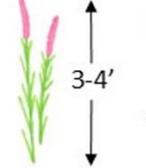
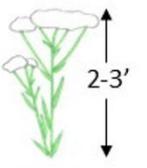


Alternate Design:



Hell Strip Plant Information

The deer icon indicates high (red) and medium (yellow) deer resistance; however, **deer still may browse on these species.**

<p>Black-Eyed Susan <i>Rudbeckia hirta</i></p>      <p>Jun - Sept</p> <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>	<p>Broadleaf Sedge <i>Carex platyphylla</i></p>      <p>Evergreen</p> <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>
<p>Butterfly Milkweed <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i></p>      <p>Jun - Aug</p> <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>	<p>Dense Blazing Star <i>Liatris spicata</i></p>      <p>Jul - Aug</p> <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>
<p>Quinine <i>Parthenium integrifolium</i></p>      <p>May - Aug</p> <p>Color Light Moisture Shape Season</p>	

Site Preparation

Know your sun, moisture, and soil conditions

The plants in the Hell Strip Kit will do well in full sun conditions.

Dry to average 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 black-eyed Susan, dense blazing star, and quinine, 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

Black-Eyed Susan



Flowers: Jun - Sept
Light: Full Sun
Moisture: Dry to Moist
Height: 2-3 ft

Long-blooming, bright yellow flowers with dark center "eyes" bloom in summer. Great for cut flowers, this hardy plant reaches 2-3 feet tall and is a host plant for the wavy-lined emerald and silvery checkerspot. A prolific seeder, black-eyed Susans provide forage for birds in fall and can be aggressive at times. Full sun and dry to moist soils. Photo Credit Ginge Van Ryzin.

Broadleaf Sedge



Flowers: Evergreen
Light: Sun to Shade
Moisture: Dry
Height: 1 ft

Also known as silver sedge, this woodland sedge has broad, bluish leaves making a great groundcover while also serving as a hostplant for many species of butterflies. Its neat, 1 foot clumps is deer resistant and semi-evergreen. It grows best in sun to shade, preferring drier soils. Photo Credit Jay Sturner.

Butterfly Milkweed



Flowers: Jun - Aug
Light: Full Sun
Moisture: Dry
Height: 1-3 ft

Striking long-lasting orange blooms in flat-topped clusters reaches 1-3 feet tall, followed by attractive seedpods. Many bee species and other insects flock to this flower for its nectar throughout summer. 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. Photo Credit Public Domain.

Dense Blazing Star



Flowers: Jul - Aug
Light: Sun to Part Sun
Moisture: Average to Wet
Height: 3-4 ft

Spikes of tufty, fluffy, purple flowers on rigid stalks 3-4 feet 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 including the wavy-lined emerald. Plant in masses or as vertical accents. Sun to part sun, average to wet soil. Photo Credit Public Domain.

Quinine



Flowers: May - Aug
Light: Sun to Part Shade
Moisture: Dry to Moist
Height: 2-3 ft

A long blooming and easy-going garden perennial, this unique plant is perfect for both formal or wild gardens. Reaching 2-3 feet, its small disc flowers resemble pearls from afar and flowers in summer. Bees, wasps and flies flock to this great nectar source, while beetles feed on the pollen. Prefers sun to part shade, dry to moist soils. Photo Credit Ilona.

Your native garden throughout the year

Emerge, Bloom and Seed Timeline										
Species Name	Spring			Summer			Fall		Winter	
Black-Eyed Susan										
Broaflor Sedge									semi-evergreen	
Butterfly Milkweed										
Dense Blazing Star										
Quinine										
Key:										
			Emerge			Bloom		Seed		

Some native pollinators that frequent these plants

Species Name	Some pollinators, larval hosts, and specialist species attracted to these plants
Black-Eyed Susan	<p>Bees: little carpenter, leafcutter, metallic green, long-horned, sweat, cuckoo Other: flies (Syrphid, bee, Tachinid)</p> <p>Larval Host Species: wavy-lined emerald, silvery checkerspot, gorgone checkerspot, Specialist Species: <i>Andrena rudbeckia</i>, <i>Heterosaurus rudbeckiae</i>, <i>Pseudopanurgus albitarsis</i>, <i>P. rudbeckiae</i>, <i>Melissodes denticulatus</i>, <i>M. druriellus</i>, <i>M. illatus</i>, <i>Megachile pugnata</i>, <i>M. xylocopoides</i></p>
Broadleaf Sedge	<p>Larval Host Species: Satyrs, various skippers (eyed-brown, Appalachian brown, black dash, Dion)</p>
Butterfly Milkweed	<p>Bees: bumble, cuckoo, digger, large carpenter, leafcutter, long-horned, metallic green sweat, small carpenter, small resin, sweat Butterflies: crescent, great spangled fritillary, monarch, pearl crescent, spicebush swallowtail, sulphurs Wasps: great golden sand digger, paper, thread-waisted, yellow-collared scape Others: Formicidae ants, milkweed leaf beetle, soldier beetle, Tachnid flies Larval Host Species: milkweed tussock moth, monarch</p>
Dense Blazing Star	<p>Bees: bumbles, green sweats, leafcutters Butterflies: Aphrodite fritillary, clouded sulphur, gray hairstreak, great spangled fritillary, orange sulphur, monarch, painted lady, Peck's skipper, red admiral, tiger swallowtail, wood nymph 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>
Quinine	<p>Bees: sweat, mining, small carpenter, yellow-faced, cuckoo Wasps: cuckoo Other: soldier flies, Syrphid flies, Tachnid flies</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

P.O. Box 300 • New Vernon, NJ 07976

(973) 538-3500 • GreatSwamp.org