

# Moist 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

These species thrive in shaded, moist areas or edges of a shaded rain garden. Spring will begin early, with large bell-shaped red and yellow flowers of columbine shortly followed by creamy-white flowers of foamflower and light blue blooms of Jacob's ladder. Purple and white foxglove-like blooms of hairy beardtongue will bring the garden into summer, eventually fading into yellow blooms of zigzag goldenrod in fall. Part sun to dappled shade, with moist, cool soils is best for these plants. The kit includes:

- Columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*, 5 plugs
- Foamflower 'Oakleaf', *Tiarella cardifolia*, 5 plugs
- Hairy Beardtongue, *Penstemon hirsutus*, 5 plugs
- Jacob's Ladder, *Polemonium reptans*, 5 plugs
- Zigzag goldenrod *Solidago flexicaulis*, 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, Ginger Van Ryzin, Fritz Flohr Reynolds, Ginger Van Ryzin, R.W. Smith.

## 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*

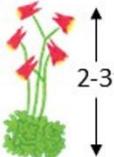
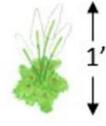
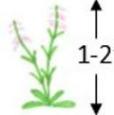
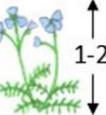
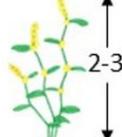
This design can be easily altered to fit a deeper, wider, or curved garden bed. These designs use moderate 10-12-inch center-to-center plant spacings to easily fill a 80 or 50 square foot area. The goal is to eventually have plants pressing shoulder to shoulder for easier maintenance. Tightly spaced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

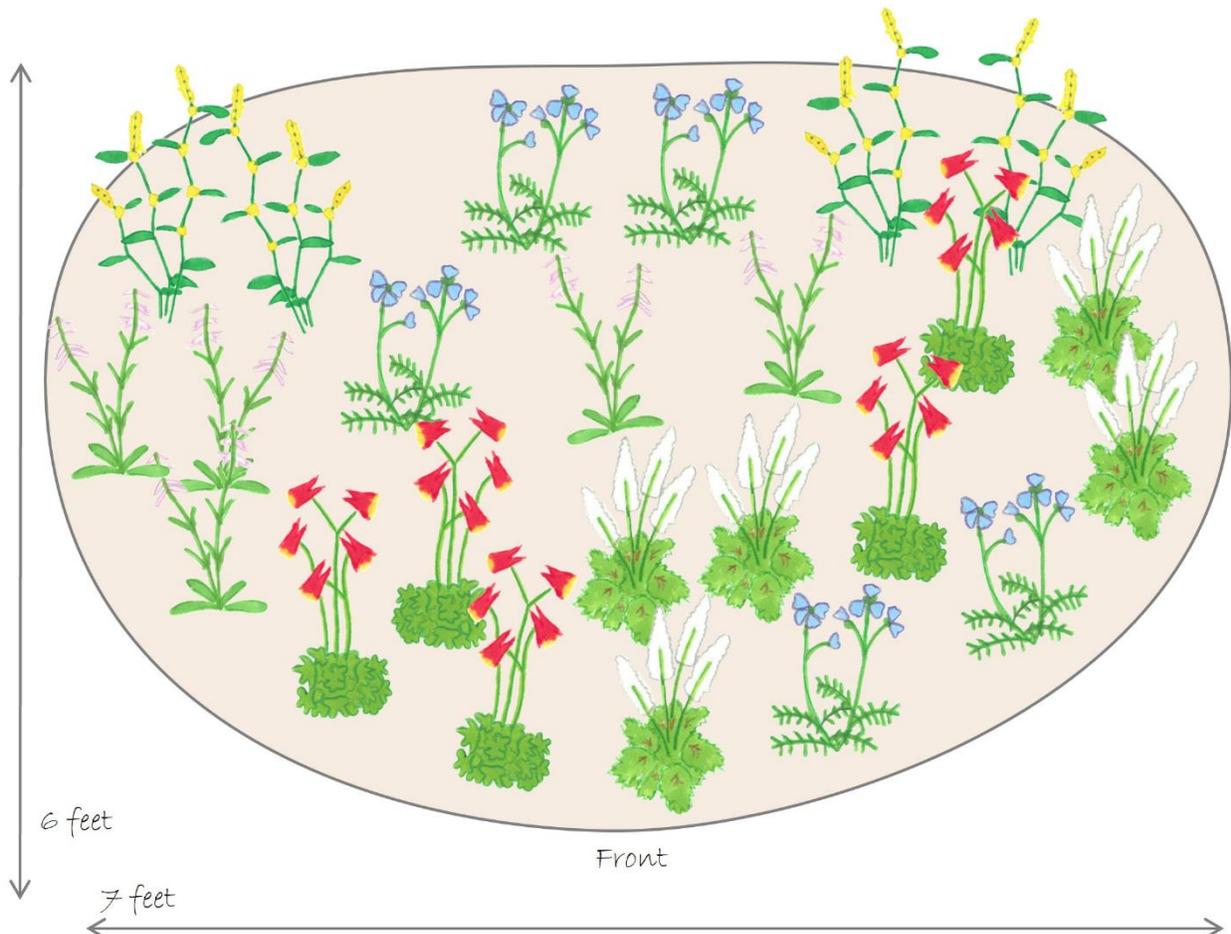
### *Add On!*

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 Moist 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><b>Columbine</b> <i>Aquilegia canadensis</i></p>      <p>Apr - May</p> <p>Color    Light    Moisture    Shape    Season</p>	<p><b>Foamflower 'Oakleaf'</b> <i>Tiarella cordifolia</i></p>      <p>Apr - Jun</p> <p>Color    Light    Moisture    Shape    Season</p>
<p><b>Hairy Beardtongue</b> <i>Penstemon hirsutus</i></p>      <p>May - Jul</p> <p>Color    Light    Moisture    Shape    Season</p>	<p><b>Jacob's Ladder</b> <i>Polemonium reptans</i></p>      <p>Apr - Jun</p> <p>Color    Light    Moisture    Shape    Season</p>
<p><b>Zigzag Goldenrod</b> <i>Solidago flexicaulis</i></p>      <p>Jul - Aug</p> <p>Color    Light    Moisture    Shape    Season</p>	



# Site Preparation

## *Know your sun, moisture, and soil conditions*

The plants in the Moist Shade Kit will do well in part sun to dappled shade conditions.

Moist, cool 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. In hot, dry conditions, Jacob's ladder will go dormant.

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 4<sup>th</sup> to shorten plant height. This method can be done on the zigzag goldenrod, 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

### Columbine



Flowers: Apr - May  
Light: Sun to Part Shade  
Moisture: Average to Moist  
Height: 2-3 ft

Drooping bell-shaped red and yellow bi-colored flowers 2-3 feet tall float over delicate feathery foliage in spring. Provides nectar for hummingbirds and early pollinators and is a larval host plant for butterflies and moths as well. Mixes well with other early bloomers. Sun to part shade, average to moist soil. Photo credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

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### Foamflower 'Oakleaf'



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

Tiny, pink buds open into delicate foot-tall clusters of white flowers in late spring. This plant spreads to form colonies and works well as a groundcover in shade. Good early nectar source for pollinators. Part shade to shade, average to moist soil. Photo Credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

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### Hairy Beardtongue



Flowers: May - Jul  
Light: Sun to Shade  
Moisture: Dry to Moist  
Height: 1.2 ft

Lower-growing, 1-2 foot tall beardtongue blooms in early summer with long, tubular pink and white flowers that are attractive to hummingbirds and other pollinators. In fall, its leaves will turn fiery red. Larval host plant to Baltimore checkerspot and is a good nectar source for bumblebees. An adaptable plant, it prefers dry to moist soils and will grow in sun or shade. Photo credit Fritz Flohr Reynolds.

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### Jacob's Ladder



Flowers: Apr - June  
Light: Part Shade  
Moisture: Moist  
Height: 1-2 ft

An early bloomer, Jacob's ladder provides nectar and pollen to hungry early pollinators. Delicate, bell-shaped flowers bloom in spring and its opposite leaflets resemble rungs on a ladder, reaching 1-2 feet high. Preferring partial shade and cool, moist soils; it will go dormant in drought conditions. Photo Credit Ginger Van Ryzin.

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### Zigzag Goldenrod



Flowers: July - Aug  
Light: Sun to Shade  
Moisture: Moist  
Height: 2-3 ft

Alternating leaves provide a zig-zag stem that reaches 2-3 feet tall. Its golden flowers provide nectar and pollen to a variety of pollinators. As a goldenrod, it is a host plant for moths and butterflies such as the ruby tiger moth. Its seeds serve as a food source for songbirds. Grows in both sun and shade, and prefers moist soils. Photo Credit R.W. Smith.

# Your native garden throughout the year

Emerge, Bloom and Seed Timeline											
Species Name	Spring			Summer			Fall			Winter	
Columbine											
Foamflower 'Oakleaf'											
Hairy Beardtongue											
Jacob's Ladder											
Zigzag Goldenrod											
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key:</b>                      <b>Emerge</b>                      <b>Bloom</b>                      <b>Seed</b></p>											

## Some native pollinators that frequent these plants

Species Name	Some pollinators, larval hosts, and specialist species attracted to these plants
Columbine	<p><b>Bees:</b> bumbles, small sweets</p> <p><b>Birds:</b> ruby-throated hummingbird</p> <p><b>Larval Host Species:</b> columbine borer moth, columbine duskywing</p>
Foamflower 'Oakleaf'	<p><b>Bees:</b> two-spotted bumble</p> <p><b>Others:</b> greater bee-fly</p>
Hairy Beardtongue	<p><b>Bees:</b> bumble, digger, large carpenter, leaf cutter, leafcutter, mason, metallic green sweat, small carpenter, small sweat, sweat bee, woolcarder</p> <p><b>Butterflies:</b> swallowtails (black, giant, pipevine), Zabulon skipper</p> <p><b>Wasps:</b> mason</p> <p><b>Others:</b> bee fly</p> <p><b>Larval Host Species:</b> Baltimore checkerspot</p> <p><b>Specialist Species:</b> <i>Osmia distincta</i></p>
Jacob's Ladder	<p><b>Bees:</b> bumble, leaf-cutting, long-horned, metallic green sweat, mining, small carpenter, small sweat, sweat</p> <p><b>Butterflies:</b> clouded sulphur, Juvenal's duskywing, sleepy duskywing,</p> <p><b>Moths:</b> hummingbird clearwing, looper</p> <p><b>Others:</b> fire-colored beetle, flies (bee, dagger, hover), flower weevil</p> <p><b>Specialist Species:</b> mining bees (<i>Andrena polemonii</i>)</p>
Zigzag Goldenrod	<p><b>Bees:</b> bumble, cuckoo, large carpenter, leaf-cutter, long-horned, metallic green sweat, mining, small carpenter, small sweat, sweat, woolcarder, yellow-faced</p> <p><b>Larval Host Species:</b> bilobed dichomeris (<i>Dichomeris bilobella</i>), brown hooded owlet (<i>Cucullia convexipennis</i>), twirler moth (<i>Gnorimoschema gallaeasterella</i>),</p> <p><b>Specialist Species:</b> <i>Colletes spp</i>, mining bees (<i>Andrena hirticincta</i>, <i>A. placata</i>, <i>A. simplex</i>)</p>

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

[https://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/flower\\_insects/index.htm](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](mailto: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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