

# Sunny Meadow 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

Great for a naturalist meadow or a native garden, these hard-working plants are favorites for pollinators and wildlife, providing food and shelter for many organisms. Blue-green leaves of little bluestem emerge in spring, providing habitat until blooms of pale purple coneflower and eastern beebalm flower in early summer.

Clusters of pollinator-favorite Virginia mountain mint flowers in mid-summer, and eventually joined with purple flowers of New England aster. Seeds of little bluestem, pale purple coneflower and New England aster are all beloved by small mammals and songbirds. Sun to part sun, dry to moist soils are best. The kit includes:

- Eastern Beebalm, *Monarda bradburiana*, 5 plugs
- Little Bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*, 5 plugs
- New England Aster, *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*, 5 plugs
- Pale Purple Coneflower, *Echinacea pallida*, 5 plugs
- Virginia Mountain Mint, *Pycnanthemum virginianum*, 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: John Hall, Public Domain, Public Domain, Public Domain, 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 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.

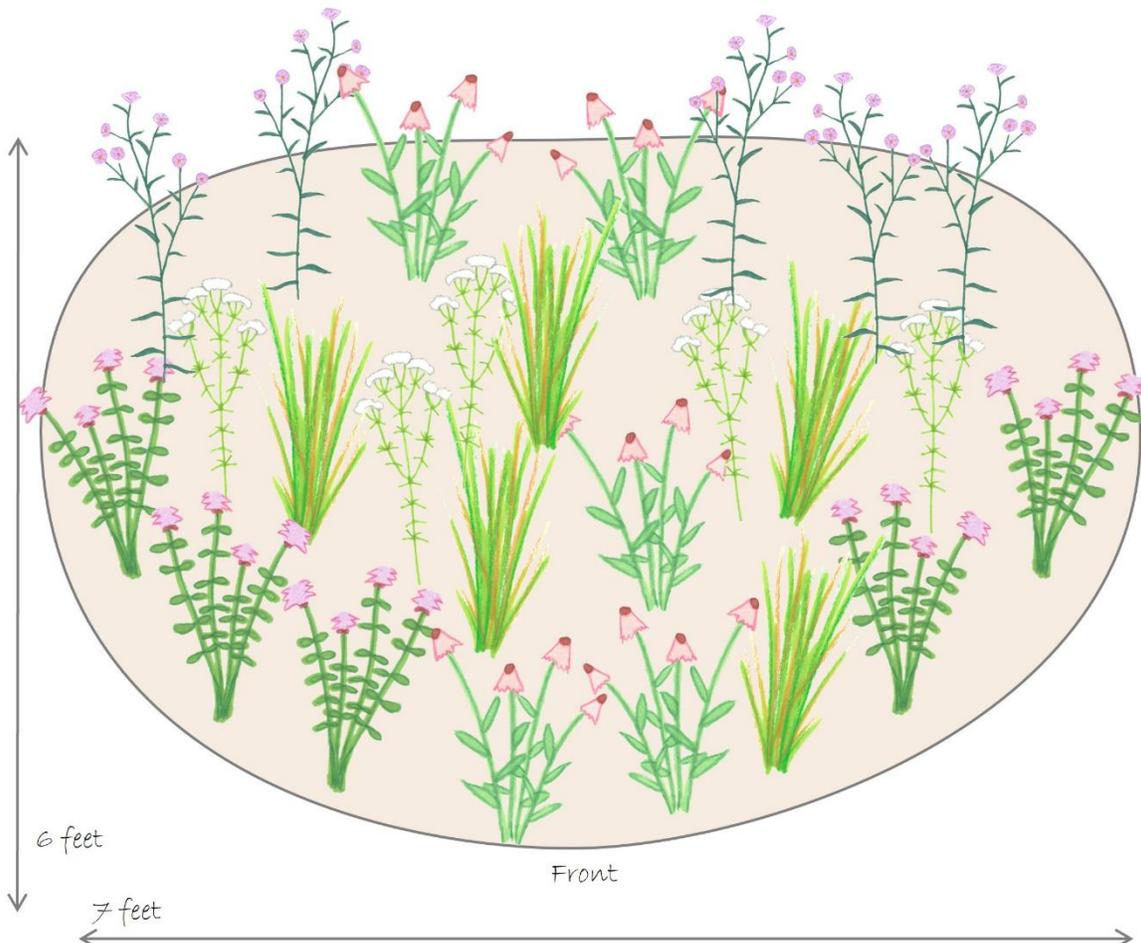
### *Add On!*

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 Sunny Meadow 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>Eastern Beebalm</b> <i>Monarda bradburiana</i></p> <p>Color: Light purple square</p> <p>Light: Sun icon</p> <p>Moisture: Two blue water droplets</p> <p>Shape: Upright flowering plant, 1-2' height</p> <p>Season: Jun - Sept</p> <p>Deer resistance: High (Red deer icon)</p>	<p><b>Little Bluestem</b> <i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i></p> <p>Color: Purple square</p> <p>Light: Sun icon</p> <p>Moisture: Two blue water droplets</p> <p>Shape: Grass-like plant, 2-4' height</p> <p>Season: Jul - Oct</p> <p>Deer resistance: High (Red deer icon)</p>
<p><b>New England Aster</b> <i>Symphyotrichum novae-angliae</i></p> <p>Color: Purple square</p> <p>Light: Sun icon</p> <p>Moisture: Two blue water droplets</p> <p>Shape: Upright flowering plant, 3-5' height</p> <p>Season: Aug - Nov</p> <p>Deer resistance: High (Red deer icon)</p>	<p><b>Pale Purple Coneflower</b> <i>Echinacea pallida</i></p> <p>Color: Light purple square</p> <p>Light: Sun icon</p> <p>Moisture: One blue water droplet</p> <p>Shape: Upright flowering plant, 2-4' height</p> <p>Season: Jun - Aug</p> <p>Deer resistance: High (Red deer icon)</p>
<p><b>Virginia Mountain Mint</b> <i>Pycnanthemum virginianum</i></p> <p>Color: White square</p> <p>Light: Sun icon</p> <p>Moisture: Two blue water droplets</p> <p>Shape: Upright flowering plant, 2-3' height</p> <p>Season: Jul - Aug</p> <p>Deer resistance: High (Red deer icon)</p>	



# Site Preparation

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

The plants in the Sunny Meadow Kit will do well in sunny to part sun conditions.

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 4<sup>th</sup> to shorten plant height. This method can be done on the eastern beebalm, New England aster, pale purple coneflower, and Virginia mountain mint 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

### Eastern Beebalm



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

Tubular speckled pink blooms on flowerheads reach 1-2 feet tall in summer. A member of the mint family, its aromatic leaves can be used for teas and are unfavored among deer and rabbits. Can be used as a cut flower, deadheading and trimming will promote additional blooms. Susceptible to powdery mildew, this plant grows best with some air circulation. Sun to part sun, dry to moist soils. Photo Credits: John Hall.

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### Little Bluestem



Flowers: Jun - Sept  
Light: Sun to Part Sun  
Moisture: Dry to Average  
Height: 2-4 ft

A widespread prairie grass, little bluestem provides interest and habitat to any garden throughout the year. Its 2-4 foot bunches start the growing season with blue-green foliage, eventually fading to a beautiful bronze-range by fall. Little bluestem is a host plant to many skippers and its seeds are eaten by songbirds. Sun to part sun, dry to average soils. Photo Credits: Public Domain.

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### New England Aster



Flowers: Aug - Nov  
Light: Sun to Part Shade  
Moisture: Dry to Moist  
Height: 3-5 ft

Flashy purple daisy-like flowers with bright yellow centers flower for weeks in late summer and throughout fall. Provides fall nectar to myriad pollinators and is a host plant of the pearl crescent. Complements many of the yellow blooming fall perennials such as goldenrod and coreopsis. Can reach up to 5 feet tall, but a mid-season haircut can help shorten up this gentle giant. Sun to part-shade, dry to moist soils. Photo Credits: Public Domain.

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### Pale Purple Coneflower



Flowers: Jun - Aug  
Light: Sun to Part Sun  
Moisture: Dry to Average  
Height: 2-4 ft

An attractive, reliable and sturdy bloomer reaching 2-4 feet tall, this plant provides food for many types of pollinators and birds. In the summer, its lavender to whitish flowers provide pollen to bees and butterflies while in the fall the seed heads provide NJ's state bird, the goldfinch with seeds. Great cut flower that blooms in summer and prefers dry to average soils. Photo Credit: Public Domain.

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### Virginia Mountain Mint



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

Long lasting, tiny white flower clusters bloom in summer. Superstar plants for nectar and pollen, they positively vibrate with pollinator activity. 2-3 feet tall plants spread by rhizomes but are far less aggressive than the non-native mints. Leaves for mint tea as well! Sun to part shade, average to moist soil. Photo Credits: Ginger Van Ryzin.

# Your native garden throughout the year

Emerge, Bloom and Seed Timeline									
Species Name	Spring		Summer			Fall		Winter	
Eastern Beebalm									
Little Bluestem									
New England Aster									
Pale Purple Coneflower									
Virginia Mountain Mint									
	<b>Key:</b>		<b>Emerge</b>			<b>Bloom</b>		<b>Seed</b>	

## Some native pollinators that frequent these plants

Species Name	Some pollinators, larval hosts, and specialist species attracted to these plants
Eastern Beebalm	<p><b>Bees:</b> bumble, sweat, green sweat, cuckoo, long-horned, leaf-cutter, woo carder  <b>Butterflies:</b> fritillary, monarch, silver-spotted skipper, swallowtails  <b>Moths:</b> hummingbird clearwing moth  <b>Wasps:</b> mason, great black  <b>Other:</b> beeflies, ruby-throated hummingbird, soldier beetle, long-horned beetle,</p> <p><b>Larval Host Species:</b> hermit sphinx, pyralid moth, gray marvel,  <b>Specialist Species:</b> <i>Doufourea monardae</i>, <i>Perdita gerhardi</i></p>
Little Bluestem	<p><b>Larval Host Species:</b> various skippers (dusted, Indian, crossline, swarthy etc.), common wood-nymph</p>
New England Aster	<p><b>Bees:</b> bumble, cellophane, cuckoo, eastern carpenter, green sweat, leafcutter, long-horned, mining, small carpenter, small sweat, sweat, woolcarder, yellow-faced  <b>Butterflies:</b> American lady, black swallowtail, cabbage white, clouded sulphur, fiery skipper, monarch, orange sulphur, painted lady, pearl crescent, Peck's skipper, red admiral, Viceroy  <b>Moths:</b> looper, white-lined sphinx, yellow-collared scape  <b>Wasps:</b> sand  <b>Other:</b> flies (bee, blow, house, hover), leaf beetles, soldier beetles  <b>Larval Host Species:</b> pearl crescent, Canadian conia moth  <b>Specialist Species:</b> mining bees (<i>Andrena spp.</i>), <i>Perdita octomaculata</i>, <i>Megachile inimical</i>, <i>Melissodes spp.</i>, <i>Calliopsis coloradensis</i>, <i>Colletes americanus</i></p>
Pale Purple Coneflower	<p><b>Bees:</b> bumble, cuckoo, large carpenter, leaf-cutting, metallic green sweat, sweat, long-horned, small sweat  <b>Butterflies:</b> painted lady, swallowtail, sulfurs, monarch, fritillaries</p> <p><b>Larval Host Species:</b> silvery checkerspot, wavy-lined emerald, common eupithecia</p>
Virginia Mountain Mint	<p><b>Bees:</b> cuckoo, yellow-faced, metallic green sweat, long-horned, small resin, bumble  <b>Butterflies:</b> pearl crescent  <b>Wasps:</b> Sphecid, Eumenine  <b>Other:</b> wedge-shaped beetle, various flies (Tachinid, bee)</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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