



PLANTING GUIDE: LANDSCAPING WITH NATIVE SPECIES TO PROMOTE BIODIVERSITY & WILDLIFE HABITAT

There is growing movement to promote the use of native plants in residential and commercial landscapes. Somewhat more slowly, homeowners' associations (HOAs) have recognized this trend and sought to adjust their landscaping covenants to allow or even promote the use of native plants by their residents or even in their common area plantings. The purpose of this guide is to list plants native to North Carolina that are attractive in many seasons, relatively easy to grow, and generally available in the nursery trade with the hopes of inspiring homeowners and HOAs to install these plants.

In this context, "native" means species of plants which grow here naturally in the wild without prior introduction by European settlers. Because they evolved here over millions of years, they are well adapted to the insects, critters and climate of north Mecklenburg County. Plants that were introduced after the settlement of America by Europeans are called "exotics." Many fine landscape plants are exotic, but they are not listed here.

Certain exotics have the unfortunate habit of escaping cultivation, spreading rapidly and forming dense infestations in the wild that crowd out and replace native species. These are called "invasives" – see DLC's paper "Top Invasive Plants". Freed from natural restraints, invasive plants spread across the landscape, crowding out native plants and eliminating biodiversity. They cause significant damage to our native ecosystems, communities and habitats. This is a particular problem in our native forests and fields, but also in cultivated landscapes and farms. Because it is in their nature to aggressively self-seed, a property with invasive species requires constant weeding and eradication, costing the property owner time, energy and money.

Native/Invasive Plant Resources Include:

[NC Native Plant Society](#)

[Native Plant Finder](#)

[Dearness Gardens](#)

[Top Invasive Plants](#)

[NC Invasive Plant Council](#)

TREES

Large Maturing Trees

North Carolina is home to some magnificent species of trees that, in the wild, can grow to over 80' tall. (Trees in cultivation tend to grow smaller and live shorter lifespans.) Although a marvel to behold, these trees are suitable only for large properties, rarely for homes in an HOA. Thus, we have omitted forest giants such as White Oaks, Southern Magnolia (except for specific smaller cultivars), Beech and Sycamore – these are all great native, large maturing trees for owners with larger properties.

LARGE MATURING DECIDUOUS TREES	Growth Rate	Mature Height*	Mature Width*	Comments
<i>Acer rubrum</i> , Red Maple	F	40-60'	25-35'	Shade tree. Beautiful fall color
<i>Acer saccharum subsp. Floridanum</i> , Southern Sugar Maple	S	40-80'	40-50'	Shade tree. Similar to its northern cousin – both have brilliant yellow fall leaf color - but more heat tolerant. Also tolerates dry soil.
<i>Acer succharinum</i> , Sugar Maple	S-M	50-75'	30'-40'	Shade tree. Excellent fall color
<i>Gleditsia tricanthos var. inermis</i> “Shademaster”, Shademaster Honeylocust	F	60'	40'	Shade tree. Full to partial sun. Adaptable to harsh conditions. Grass will grow under it. Essential to avoid straight species which has sharp thorns.
<i>Nyassa sylvatica</i> , Black Gum	M	40-60'	20-30'	Shade tree. Brilliant red fall foliage.
<i>Quercus falcata</i> , Southern red oak	F	60-80'	40-50'	Shade tree. Tolerates dry soil, pollution, drought. Full sun.
<i>Quercus lyrata</i> , Overcup oak	M	45-75'	35-50'	Shade tree with good fall color. Long lived. Tolerates clay soil. Full sun.

<i>Quercus rubra</i> , Red oak	F	50-75'	50-75'	Shade tree with good fall color. Tolerates dry soil, urban pollution, drought. Prefers full sun and well drained soils.
<i>Quercus shumardii</i> , Shumard oak	F	40-60'	30-40'	Shade tree with good fall color. Tolerates dry soil, urban pollution, drought.

LARGE MATURING EVERGREEN TREES	Growth Rate	Mature Height	Mature Width	Comments
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i> , Eastern Red cedar	S	40-50	8-20'	Useful for screening & windbreaks
<i>Tsuga canadensis</i> , Canadian hemlock	F	30-80'	15-30'	Large screen or specimen evergreen. Requires cool, moist soil.
<i>Tsuga caroliniana</i> , Carolina hemlock	S	40-50'	20-25'	Large screen or specimen. Full sun to partial shade. Intolerant of hot sites and dry soil.

SMALL – MEDIUM DECIDUOUS TREES	Growth Rate	Mature Height	Mature Width	Comments
<i>Acer leucoderme</i> , Chalk maple	S	To 25'	15-20', Often multi trunked	Specimen small shade tree with brilliant fall foliage.
<i>Aesculus pavia</i> , Red buckeye	S	To 20'	15-20'	Specimen. Red flowers feed bees and hummingbirds in early April. Part shade to sun.
<i>Amelanchier arborea</i> , Downy serviceberry	M	15-25'	10-20'	Specimen. Very showy white to pinkish flowers in early spring. Redpurple, edible fruits in early summer attract birds. Good fall color.
<i>Asimina triloba</i> , Pawpaw	S-M	20-30'	15-20' but colonizes	Deciduous screen (large leaves) with occasional edible fruit and good fall color
<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i> , American hornbeam or Ironwood	S	20-30'	15-20'	Small shade tree. Partial to full shade. Good fall color. Attractive smooth, “muscular” bark. Feeds a large variety of wildlife.
<i>Cercis canadensis</i> , Redbud	F	20-30'	15'	Magenta flowers in spring before dogwood. Drought tolerant. Full sun- part shade. Many attractive and unusual cultivars.

<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i> , Fringetree, Grancy greybeard, Old Man's beard	S-M	12-20'	12-20'	Unusual white flowers. Good fall color. Sun to part shade.
<i>Coronus florida</i> , Flowering dogwood	M	15-30'	15-30'	Highly attractive white or pink flowers in spring. Red fruits attractive to birds in fall. Excellent fall color. Susceptible to a variety of diseases. Does not tolerate full sun. Diseaseresistant cultivars are superior to species.
<i>Cotinus obovatus</i> American smoketree	M	20-30'	20-30'	Rounded form. Interesting "smoke-like" pink or purple flowers in early summer. Excellent fall color. Tolerates a variety of soils.
<i>Halesia diptera grandiflora</i> , Two winged silverbell	M	20-30	20-30'	Showy clusters of white flowers in spring. Showy fruit in fall. Good fall color. Grandiflora has more flowers than species.
<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i> , American witch hazel	M	15-20'	15-20'	Attractive small, fragrant flowers in late fall after leaves drop. Excellent fall leaf color. Useful for rain gardens and naturalized gardens. Full sun to part shade. Tolerates clay soil, deer.

SMALL TO MEDIUM EVERGREEN TREES	Growth Rate	Mature Height	Mature Width	Comments
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<i>Ilex opaca</i> , American holly	S	15-30'	10-20'	Screen. Red fruit in fall through winter. Best in full sun. Tolerates drought.
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i> , <i>pendula</i> Weeping Yaupon holly	M	10-20'	8-12'	Screen or specimen. Weeping form has cascading branches. It is by far the most common variety of tree form yaupon holly. Female plants will bear highly attractive red berries if a male (of any yaupon cultivar) is nearby; must buy in fall when berries are displayed to determine if the plant is male or female.
<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> , "Bracken's Brown Beauty", Bracken's Brown Beauty Southern magnolia	M	20-30'	15-25'	Showy, fragrant flower; glossy evergreen foliage. Compact, pyramidal habit. Specimen tree. All Southern magnolias require regular water and should not be grown in a lawn. (Messy leaf and fruit pod drop). All tolerate deer. Straight species Southern magnolias are too large for most properties.

<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> , "Little Gem", Little Gem" Southern magnolia	S	20-25'	8-12'	Screen, hedge, windbreak or specimen. Showy, fragrant flower, smaller than species. Flowers younger than any other cultivar. Full sun to part shade.
<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> , "Teddy Bear", Teddy Bear magnolia	M	15-20'	10'	Compact upright form. Excellent specimen, screen or hedge. Larger flowers than Little Gem.

<i>Magnolia virginiana</i> , Sweetbay magnolia	M	10-35'	10-35'	White, fragrant flowers. Specimen flowering tree; useful in rain gardens as it tolerates wet soils. Semievergreen although var. <i>australis</i> is more likely to be evergreen; it is also more treelike.
<i>Myrica cerifera</i> , Wax Myrtle	F	10-15'	8-10'	Tall screen. Open form, twisting branches. Grows well in sun to part-sun. Tolerates many soil types. Small, bluish-grey berries appear on female plants in fall & persist into winter. They are highly attractive to birds.
<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	M	10-15'	3-4'	Tall screen. Some arborvitae
"Emerald Green". Emerald Green arborvitae				cultivars are huge; this is more restrained.

SHRUBS

DECIDUOUS SHRUBS	Growth Rate	Mature Height	Mature Width	Comments
<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i> , Shadblow serviceberry	M	6-20'	15-20'	Prominent white flowers in early spring followed by edible berries. attractive to birds. Excellent fall color. Full sun & moist, well-drained soil. Shrubby habit.
<i>Callicarpa Americana</i> , American Beautyberry	F	8-10'	8-10'	Grown for large clusters of intensely purple berries born in fall. ("Welch's Pink" bears pink berries). Eaten by birds.

<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> , <i>Buttonbush</i>		5-12'	4-8'	Rain garden. Unusual pincushion like, fragrant white flower clusters attract butterflies & bees in June.
<i>Clethra alnifolia</i> , "Compacta", "Vanilla Spice" or "Sixteen Candles" Sweet pepperbush	M	3-5'	3-5'	Deciduous hedge or screen. Raingarden. Fragrant bottlebrush flowers in midsummer. Good fall color.
<i>Euonymus americanus</i>	M	4-6'	4-6'	Woodland specimen or deciduous hedge. Very showy fruits in fall; good fall color.

<i>Fothergilla gardenia</i> , <i>Dwarf witch alder</i>	M	2-5'	2-5'	Mass planting, low growing. Profuse, white "bottlebrush" flowers in early spring. Arching habit. Brilliant fall foliage color. Will sucker.
<i>Fothergilla x Mt. Airy Mt. Airy witch alder</i>	M	5-8'	5-8'	Larger flower clusters and mature size than <i>F. gardenia</i> ; otherwise similar.
<i>Hydrangea arborescens</i> "Annabelle"	F	3-5'	3-5'	Specimen. Very large white flower clusters in summer
<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> , "Sikes Dwarf" or "Pee Wee" or "Munchkin."	F	3-4'	3-4'	Specimen or mass planting. These are dwarf cultivars of a species that can grow to 12'. (It has many excellent cultivars). Long lasting spring flowers, excellent fall color and interesting winter bark. Tolerates drought.

<i>Hydrangea radiata</i> , "Samantha", Samantha Silverleaf hydrangea	F	3-8'	5-6'	Woodland plant. Showy, flat topped flower clusters. Does not tolerate drought.
<i>Hypericum frondosum</i> "Sunburst," Sunburst St. John's wort.	M	4'	4'	Mass planting; rain garden. Dense blue-green foliage. Large, showy yellow flowers that attract pollinators in June.

<i>Ilex verticillata</i> , "Red Sprite" or "Berry Poppins" Winterberry holly	S	3-4' ("Berry Poppins" is smaller and more compact).	3-4'	Dense red berries that are highly visible in winter since it is deciduous. Requires a male pollinator, Jim Dandy for Red Sprite and Mr. Poppins for Berry Poppins.
<i>Itea virginica</i> , Virginia Sweetpire, "Little Henry," Merlot" and "Henry's Garnet."	M-F	3-5' Little Henry and Merlot are dwarf and compact, maturing at ½ size of Henry's Garnet.	3-5'	Hedge, edging, mixed shrub border. Showy white flowers on curving spikes blooming in late spring. Flowers are slightly fragrant. Handsome fall color. Will sucker. Once established can tolerate drought but prefers moist soil. Does well in shade. "Henry's Garnet" is the largest of the 3 listed cultivars.
<i>Rhododendron canescens</i> , Piedmont azalea	S	To ` 16'	To 16'	Specimen. Excellent naturalizer. Fragrant, pink flowers, Showy fall foliage. Needs moist soil and no more than part sun.

<i>Rhododendron austrinum</i> , Florida flame azalea	S	To 16'	Clump-forming	Specimen. Excellent naturalizer. Honeysuckle like yellow to orange flowers. Showy fall foliage. Delicate, open form. This native azalea can take our Piedmont heat.
<i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i> , Highbush blueberry-many cultivars	M	4-12'	4-12'	Hedge. Blueberry bushes make great landscape plants as well as producing edible fruit. The many cultivars differ in ultimate size and whether they are early, mid or late season in their harvest. Pretty, bell-shaped white flowers in spring, edible fruit in early summer and excellent fall color. Needs full sun and rich, organic soil.
<i>Viburnum acerfolium</i> , Maple-leaf viburnum	M	3-6	2-4	Shrub border specimen or hedge. Showy spring flowers followed by bluish black fruit in fall. Excellent reddish-purple to magenta fall color. Full sun to part shade but tolerates full shade. Attracts birds & butterflies.

EVERGREEN SHRUBS	Growth Rate	Mature Height	Mature Width	Comments
<i>Agarista populifolia</i> , "Leprechaun" Syn. <i>Leucothoe poulifolia</i> , Florida leucothoe or Hobblebush		4'	4'	Attractive arching, loosely rounded form that can be sheared into a hedge. White bell-shaped flowers in April & May. Glossy green foliage.

<i>Ilex glabra</i> , Winterberry holly "Shamrock"	S	3-4'	3-4'	Hedge; can be sheared to resemble boxwood. Jet black berries on female plants (needs a male pollinator) in fall. Prefers rich, consistently moist, acidic soils in full sun. Good shade tolerance, however.
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i> "Carolina Ruby."	S	4'	4'	Female cultivar of yaupon holly with very heavy berry production. A new cultivar and not yet common in trade.
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i> "Schillings"	S	2-3'	3-4'	Boxwood substitute. Like Nana except smaller. Usually maintained at 23'. Considered to be superior.
<i>Ilex vomitoria</i> "Nana"	S	4-7'	To 10'	Boxwood substitute. Small, dense, evergreen foliage. Nana is the most common dwarf cultivar. It is usually sheared to keep it small; it will grow fairly large if left alone. Deer resistant. It is male and therefore has no berries. Will sucker.
<i>Illicium floridanum</i> , "Halley's Comet" Florida Anise Tree	M	8-10'	8-10'	Red flowering specimen or mass planting. Leaves are anise scented. "Miss Scarlet" is a ½ size, compact cultivar. Species and cultivars require some shade.

<i>Illicium parviflorum</i> , Small anise tree	M	8-10'	8-10'	Tough evergreen for mass planting and screening. Leaves are anisescented. "Florida" Sunshine has yellow leaves.
<i>Leucothoe fontanesiana</i> , Mountain doghobble	M	3- 6'	4'	Unsheared hedge. Tall arching canes bear attractive white bell like flowers. Forms dense thickets in wild. Requires moist soil and some shade.
<i>Myrica cerifera</i> "Don's Dwarf"	M	4-6'	4-6'	Small hedge; other mass planting. Compact form. Available in both male & female; berries on female plants.
<i>Prunus Caroliniana</i> , "Compacta". Compact cherry laurel.	M	8-10'	6-8'	Hedge. Matures at half the size of species.
<i>Viburnum obavatum</i> , "Reifler's Dwarf"	M	4-5'	4-5'	Good foundation plant; hedge. Blooms in spring, mostly evergreen
<i>Viburnum obovatum</i> , Mrs. Shciller's Delight	M	2-5	3-5	Somewhat smaller than Reifler's Dwarf.

INVASIVE PLANTS TO AVOID PLANTING AND TO REMOVE – SEE DAVIDSON LANDS CONSERVANCY'S "TOP INVASIVE PLANTS" (DAVIDSONLANDS.ORG)

INVASIVE LANDSCAPE PLANTS	COMMENTS	NATIVE ALTERNATIVES
<i>Albizia julibrissin</i> , Mimosa or Silktree	Deciduous tree 10-50' tall with feathery leaves and showy pink blossoms. Forms colonies from root sprouts and spreads by abundant animal and water-dispersed seeds.	Fringe tree, Flowering dogwood, Redbud, Serviceberry

<i>Alianthus altissima</i> , Tree of Heaven	Deciduous tree to 80'. Forms dense stands by root sprouts and prolific wind and water-dispersed seeds.	Chalk maple, southern sugar maple, red maple
<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> , Japanese barberry	Thorny shrub to 6'. Shade tolerant. Forms dense thickets, especially in mature forests.	Maple-leaf viburnum,
<i>Buddleja davidii</i> , Butterfly bush	Despite its attraction to adult butterflies, their larvae cannot survive on the leaves.	Buttonbush, Oakleaf hydrangea
<i>Eleagnus</i> species: Russian olive, Silverthorn, Autumn olive	Fast growing, deciduous, thorny trees or shrubs to 35'. Silverthorn canes will readily invade tree canopies. All are spread by birds that eat its fruits.	Hearts-a-bustin', Wax myrtle, mapleleaf viburnum
<i>Euonymus alatus</i> , "Burning Bush",	Multi-stemmed shrub to 12'. Wintercreeper Forms a dense groundcover that rapidly climbs into tree canopies. All colonize by root suckers and spread by animal-dispersed seeds. All forms are widely planted as ornamentals.	Witch alder, Highbush blueberry, Oakleaf hydrangea
<i>Euonymus pungens</i> , Silverthorn	Fast growing shrub with fragrant spring flowers. Tentacle-like shoots can quickly overtake neighboring trees and shrubs. A maintenance nightmare.	
<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i> , Roseof-Sharon	Erect shrub 8-12'. Showy flowers in mid to late summer. Self-seeds profusely.	
<i>Ligustrum</i> species. Glossy privet, Chinese privet, Japanese privet	Chinese privet forms dense colonies, especially along bottom land. Shade tolerant. Glossy privet invades same habitats as Chinese privet but generally not as abundantly.	Carolina cherry laurel, Yaupon holly, Inkberry holly, Wax myrtle.
<i>Lonicera maackii</i> , <i>L. morrowii</i> , <i>L. tatarica</i> , <i>L. fragrantissima</i> , all commonly known as Bush honeysuckle.	Upright, arching-branched shrubs up to 10' Forms dense thickets in open forest and forest edges. Relatively shade tolerant. Colonize by root shoots and spread by abundant animal-dispersed fruit.	Native bush honeysuckles, <i>Diervilla</i> spp.

<i>Mahonia bealii</i> , Leatherleaf mahonia	Leathery evergreen leaves with spines. Early spring flowers and blue berries.	Florida leucothoe, yaupon hollies, dwarf winterberry holly
<i>Morus alba</i> , White mulberry	Deciduous medium size tree introduced from China to support a domestic silk industry. Displaces native red mulberry. Prolific blackberry like fruit beloved of birds.	Ironwood
<i>Nandina domestica</i> , Heavenly bamboo	Shade tolerant. Forms colonies from root suckers and spreads by animaldispersed seeds. Rapidly escapes from cultivation. Cultivars bred for red foliage color are generally seedless and those with white berries are reported to be sterile, making them less problematic, but you have to be certain.	Florida leucothoe, yaupon hollies, dwarf winterberry holly
<i>Paulownia tomentosa</i> , Princesstree	Deciduous tree to 60' tall. Abundant showy flowers in early spring. Fragrant. Forms colonies from root sprouts. Spreads by wind and waterdispersed seeds.	Chalk maple, southern sugar maple, red maple
<i>Phyllostachys aurea</i> & other P. spp. , Bamboo	Upright stems form a total monoculture, spreading from rhizomes.	
<i>Poncirus trifoliata</i> , Trifoliolate orange.	"Flying Dragon" is a common cultivar. Viciously long, sharp thorns. Once established, it forms impenetrable, many-stemmed, hedges over 6 feet tall, completely dominating the shrub and herb layer.	
<i>Pyrus calleryana</i> "Bradford", Bradford pear.	Short-lived, weak-wooded small tree with profuse, showy flowers in spring. It was promoted as being sterile; this has not proven to be the case.	Flowering dogwood, Fringe tree, Two winged silverbell, Serviceberry.
<i>Rosa multiflora</i> , Multiflora rose	Long, climbing, thorned canes to 10'. Forms dense, impenetrable thickets. Spreads by root suckers and animaldispersed seeds.	Native roses such as <i>R. Carolina</i> Carolina rose
<i>Spiraea japonica</i> , Japanese spirea	Small deciduous shrub with showy pink flowers. Once established,	Sweet pepperbush, Sweetspire.
	spiraea grows rapidly and forms dense stands that outcompete much of the existing native herbs and shrubs.	

<i>Wisteria sinensis</i> and <i>W. floribunda</i> , Chinese and Japanese wisteria	Extremely aggressive woody vining perennial.	<i>W. frutescens</i> , "Amythest Falls", native wisteria
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