

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET

Have gardening questions? Contact the **Master Gardener Help Line.**

At *Mass Hort, Wellesley*: mghelpline@masshort.org, 617-933-4929

At *Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Boylston*: hortline@towerhillbg.org, 608-869-6111 x104

Please visit our website for Help Line hours: <http://massmastergardeners.org/what-i-do/>



WHY GO NATIVE?

Native plants are indigenous to an established ecosystem. These plants have adapted to the climate and soils of our local area, to the extremes of temperature, to water availability, as well as to dealing with native pests or diseases that may attack them. These adaptations can take hundreds to thousands of years to develop without human intervention.

Natives help to maintain the diversity of life in an ecosystem. Our native plants have evolved together with a host of native organisms that rely on them for food and shelter while offering in return pollination or a taste for their predators. Plants and animals, including humans, rely on these ecological relationships to survive and maintain a habitable environment. The diversity of these ecosystems may be disrupted when new species are introduced.

Introduced species can become invasive, although the percentage of introduced species that become invasive is small compared to the number of species introduced in the United States each year. No one would refer to the lilac or apple tree, both from Asia, as invasive. However, Asian bittersweet climbs any fence or tree or pole, often bringing them down from additional weight after the heavy foliage of the vine has weakened the structure. Burning bush has a dense root mat that prevents any other plant from gathering food and nutrients where grows. Its seeds spread into our woods where they out-compete native plants that feed the wildlife. Austrian olive trees spread rapidly eliminating native trees.

Introduced species spread by wind, water, and wildlife to areas far beyond where they were planted. Once established, they can take decades to eradicate. Invasive plants can destroy our home landscape, clog our waterways and damage food crops. Controlling or eradicating invasive species costs in the billions each year.

Natives offer hardiness and beauty in your landscape. You sacrifice nothing by incorporating native plants into your landscape. Although some gardeners will plant only natives, you can combine native and nonnative plantings to create a beautiful landscape. Educate yourself about invasive plants in your area. Research what is native to your specific location and to your region. Use local resources to help you plan your landscape.

For more information on native and invasive plants: UMass Extension Introduced Pests Outreach Project – information on invasive species – www.massnrc.org/pests

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service – information on native and invasive plants in Massachusetts -www.plants.usda.gov

The New England Wildflower Society – information and native plants for sale – www.newfs.org

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics.

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