



THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA POSITION PAPER

The Garden Club of America supports independent, academic, peer-reviewed scientific research as the basis for formulating responsible public policy and legislation, as well as appropriate funding to ensure quality results. The Garden Club of America is a nonpartisan, issue-oriented advocate for a beautiful, healthy planet.

NATIVE PLANTS

A native plant is defined as one that has evolved over thousands of years in a specific geographic region, alongside local flora and fauna, without direct or indirect human intervention. Native plants include large canopy trees, understory trees, shrubs, perennials, vines, or grasses that are indigenous to an area.

The Garden Club of America is committed to preserving and expanding native plant habitats, helping build awareness about the importance of native plants in sustaining ecosystems, encouraging the removal of non-native, invasive plants, and supporting all efforts to help native bees, butterflies, birds, pollinators and other insects, and wildlife. All plants protect our planet's natural resources, including air, water, and soil. Their root systems help stabilize soil and control erosion, moderate floods, and reduce runoff during heavy rains, filter water, protect wetlands, reduce water needed for landscape maintenance, and sequester carbon. *Native plants* do all this and more because they have evolved over thousands of years alongside native bees, birds, and wildlife. Their complex relationship with fauna is extremely specialized and it cannot be substituted with exotic, non-native plants. A significant number of North American native species, including insects, caterpillars, birds, and other animals, are at risk of extinction because they cannot eat or are not well sustained by non-native plants. Loss of native habitats, spread of invasive species, climate change, and pesticide use are contributing to the biodiversity crisis.

To help support wildlife, many more native plants need to be planted, with varying bloom times, heights, shapes and colors. It is vital that existing laws and regulations protecting native plant species be strengthened and administered using current peer-reviewed science. To prevent critical loss of plant diversity, continued scholarship and innovative stewardship protocols should be encouraged. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 is America's landmark conservation legislation. The GCA encourages amendments to the act that strengthen measures to protect the nation's rare, endangered and threatened species — with a special emphasis on native plants — and create science-based recovery programs.

The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation, policy, and individual action that address the following:

- Promote awareness and conservation of native species whose status in the wild is listed as rare, endangered, or threatened.
- Encourage private and public landowners to increase the size of existing native habitats and replace lawn areas with native plant ecosystems through education, funding and other incentives.
- Support cooperative programs that work with local, state, and federal agencies to monitor and conserve rare plants, restore native habitat, expand the native tree canopy and remove non-native invasive plants on public lands.
- Support measures to prevent and control ecosystem damage caused by non-native invasive plants, deforestation, and habitat loss due to natural disasters, particularly those measures that increase the

native seed supply needed for ecological restoration.

- Support seed banks to preserve germplasm biodiversity and the genetic record of native plants.
- Encourage public land-use policies that incorporate native plants, control non-native invasive plants, discourage the inappropriate use of toxic pesticides and other chemicals, and preserve or restore healthy ecosystems.
- Increase funding for native plant protection and area restoration on public lands, including adequate funding for the hiring of scientists and trained plant experts to oversee these projects.
- Support continued development and implementation of federal field research projects to ensure sustainability of wild-collected medicinal plants.
- Encourage the production of more seed-grown neonicotinoid-free native plants by local growers to increase inventory and reduce the collection of endangered or rare plants in the wild.
- Support educational programs to expand awareness of the need to protect native plants and promote their increased use by landscapers and home gardeners.
- Advocate for public and private support for botanical research and education to ensure a well-trained workforce in botany, horticulture, and the plant sciences.