

Plant This

not That

Middle Peninsula Master Naturalists
Machicomoco State Park
Earth Day Celebration 2026

Sources: Virginia DCR
VA Dept. of Forestry
VA Native Plant Society
Plant Virginia Natives

SOUTHEAST VIRGINIA · COASTAL PLAIN · NATIVE PLANT GUIDE

- Native plant — evolved here, supports local wildlife
- Invasive plant — introduced, displaces native species
- HIGH invasiveness rank (Virginia DCR)
- MEDIUM invasiveness rank

✦ Plant THIS (Native)

✕ Not THAT (Invasive)

TREES

Flowering Dogwood

Cornus florida

POLLINATORS BIRDS PART SHADE SPRING BLOOMER

Virginia's state tree and flower. **White bracts in spring**, brilliant red berries loved by 36+ bird species in fall. Thrives in understory. Iconic Coastal Plain tree — looks like it belongs here because it does.

Callery / Bradford Pear

HIGH

Pyrus calleryana

COMMON IN NURSERIES SPREADS BY BIRDS

Sold as sterile, but **hybridizes with wild stock** — thorny invasive offspring crowd roadsides and fields. Distinctive foul odor in bloom. Virginia law will require invasive warning signage by January 2027.

Eastern Redbud

Cercis canadensis

EARLY POLLINATORS EDIBLE FLOWERS FOREST EDGES

Stunning **magenta-pink blooms directly on bark** in early April before leaves emerge. Native bees emerge specifically to find it. Small tree — perfect for yards. Fall heart-shaped leaves turn golden-yellow.

Tree-of-Heaven

HIGH

Ailanthus altissima

ALLELOPATHIC SPOTTED LANTERNFLY HOST

Releases **chemicals that suppress surrounding plants**. Fast-growing, seeds prolifically, invades disturbed areas. Primary host plant for spotted lanternfly, a serious agricultural pest spreading through Virginia.

SHRUBS

American Beautyberry

Callicarpa americana

STRIKING BERRIES BIRDS & DEER PART SHADE OK

Brilliant magenta-purple berry clusters in fall — one of the most eye-catching native shrubs. Easy to grow in sun or part shade. Berries loved by mockingbirds, cardinals, robins, and deer. Unique to the Southeast.

Burning Bush

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Euonymus alatus

STILL SOLD IN NURSERIES SPREADS TO FORESTS

Popular for fiery red fall color, but **escapes into forest edges** and natural areas via bird-dispersed seeds. Crowds out native understory plants. No significant wildlife food value. Native beautyberry gives you the drama without the harm.

Winterberry Holly

Ilex verticillata

WINTER INTEREST BIRD MAGNET WET SITES

Brilliant red berries on bare stems all winter — spectacular against snow or brown grass. Robins, cedar waxwings, and bluebirds flock to it. Grows in wet or moist soils — perfect near low areas of the yard or near drainage ditches.

Japanese Barberry

HIGH

Berberis thunbergii

THORNY THICKETS DEER TICK HABITAT

Spreads aggressively into forests, forming **thorny thickets that crowd out native plants**. Studies link it to higher deer tick and Lyme disease rates — it creates warm, humid microhabitats ticks prefer. Widely sold but deeply problematic.

Virginia Sweetpire

Itea virginica

FRAGRANT BLOOMS FALL COLOR ADAPTABLE

Fragrant **white bottlebrush flowers in early summer**. Outstanding crimson-to-orange fall color that lasts weeks. Tolerates wet or dry, sun or full shade. Low maintenance once established. Native to Southeast Virginia Coastal Plain.



Nandina / Heavenly Bamboo

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Nandina domestica

TOXIC BERRIES SPREADS INTO WILD

Red berries contain **cyanide compounds toxic to birds** — cedar waxwing deaths documented after eating them. Spreads into moist woodlands and stream banks. Evergreen appeal, but the cost to wildlife is too high. Banned in some states.

GROUNDCOVERS & VINES

Trumpet Honeysuckle

Lonicera sempervirens

HUMMINGBIRDS SEMI-EVERGREEN TRELLIS VINE

Scarlet-orange tubular flowers made for hummingbirds — blooms spring through fall. Non-aggressive twining vine, perfect on a trellis or fence. Tolerates heat and humidity. Red berries attract songbirds. Well-behaved in the garden.



Japanese Honeysuckle

HIGH

Lonicera japonica

SMOTHERS NATIVES YEAR-ROUND THREAT

Fragrant but **destructive** — **twines around and kills native shrubs and trees**. Evergreen in our mild winters, so it gains a head start each spring. One of the most ecologically damaging invasive vines in Southeast Virginia. Common on forest edges and roadsides.

Golden Ragwort

Packera aurea

GROUNDCOVER SPRING BLOOMER SHADE OK DEER RESISTANT

Cheerful **yellow daisy-like flowers in early spring**, then spreads to form a dense evergreen groundcover in shade. Outcompetes weeds naturally. Supports specialist native bees. An excellent alternative to English ivy under trees.



English Ivy

HIGH

Hedera helix

KILLS TREES FOREST FLOOR DESTROYER

Smotheres forest floors and **climbs and girdles mature trees, killing them**. Creates "ivy deserts" where no native plants can establish. Provides almost no food value for native wildlife. One of the most common landscape plants — and one of the most harmful.

PERENNIALS, WILDFLOWERS & GRASSES

Little Bluestem

Schizachyrium scoparium

NATIVE GRASS BIRDS LOVE SEEDS DROUGHT TOUGH
FALL COLOR

Blue-green summer color turns rich copper-red in fall — stunning in mass plantings. Seeds feed juncos, sparrows, and finches through winter. Drought-tolerant once established. A key species for coastal plain meadow gardens. Deer resistant.



Japanese Stiltgrass

HIGH

Microstegium vimineum

FOREST UNDERSTORY SPREADS BY DEER

Spreads rapidly along trails, forest floors, and wet areas, **carpeting the ground and crowding out native wildflowers** and seedlings. Deer avoid it but spread seeds on hooves. Produces thousands of seeds per plant annually. Extremely difficult to eradicate.

Swamp Milkweed

Asclepias incarnata

MONARCH HOST PLANT NATIVE BEES WET SITES PINK BLOOMS

Essential host plant for monarch butterfly caterpillars — monarchs cannot reproduce without milkweed. Pink flower clusters also support many native bees. Thrives in moist or wet soils. Beautiful in rain gardens or near stormwater areas near the Chesapeake Bay watershed.



Autumn Olive

HIGH

Elaeagnus umbellata

NITROGEN FIXER OUTCOMPETES NATIVES

Fixes nitrogen, allowing it to **invade poor soils and out-compete native plants**. Produces up to 80 lbs of berries per plant, spread widely by birds. Creates dense thickets that eliminate native wildflower meadows. Hard to remove once established.

FIND NATIVE PLANTS

DCR Native Plant Finder: dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/nativeplants

Plant Virginia Natives Hampton Roads guide (free PDF): plantvirginiannatives.org

VA Native Plant Society nursery list: vnps.org

INVASIVES INFO & ID

VA Invasive Plant Finder: dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspinfo

VA Dept. of Forestry invasive guide: dof.virginia.gov
Free Throwing Shade VA native tree discounts at select nurseries: dof.virginia.gov

WHY IT MATTERS HERE

Invasive plants cost Virginia an estimated **\$1 billion/year** in removal costs. The Chesapeake Bay watershed depends on native plant roots to filter pollution from our tidal rivers. Every yard counts — one native plant at a time.