

# Shade Gardening with Natives

by Patricia Sutton

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## RESOURCES:

*Bringing Nature Home, How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*, by Douglas Tallamy. Timber Press, 2007. See pages 294-300 for a list of “Native Plants With Wildlife Value and Desirable Landscaping Attributes for the Mid-Atlantic and Middle States.” This list covers “Shade and specimen trees,” “Shrubs and understory trees,” “Ground Covers” all of which are suitable in shady sites.

*Nature’s Best Hope, A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*, by Douglas Tallamy. Timber Press, 2019. Doug Tallamy helps us comprehend the extent of the damage we’ve done around the globe by favoring non-native and often invasive plants. He also offers a solution by urging homeowners to take environmental action into their own hands, one yard at a time, working towards landscaping with 70% native plants, including Keystone Plants that support more life (oaks, black cherry, willows, etc.). Tallamy describes this solution as a Homegrown National Park.

*The Nature of Oaks, The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees*, by Douglas Tallamy. Timber Press, 2021. Tallamy’s latest book is dense with fascinating, hard-to-find, and beautifully presented information about oaks and how important they are in so many ways, all presented in an easy-to-understand way. *Oaks* builds on Tallamy’s other two excellent books. As a long-time naturalist, wildlife gardener, and educator I almost always first turned to "The Birder's Handbook" to liven up my knowledge base and programs I gave. Combined, Tallamy's three books strike me as the perfect "Naturalist's Handbook" or "Gardener's Handbook."

*The Living Landscape*, by Rick Darke & Doug Tallamy. Timber Press, 2014. This book is the next chapter to your education, introducing you to how important it is to consider all the “layers” that make up a healthy, functioning ecosystem (ground covers, perennials, shrubs, understory trees, and canopy trees). Pages 289-366 include charts of selected plants and their landscape functions region-by-region.

*The Natural Shade Garden*, by Ken Druse. Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1992. Natives are not the focus, but many are used and recommended.

## PLANT FINDER SITES:

Since Doug Tallamy’s first book, *Bringing Nature Home*, he has shared a list of the top 20 woody plants and the top 20 perennials used by butterflies and moths as host plants to create the next generation. This list could be found on his website: *Bringing Nature Home*. Today Tallamy refers to these plants as the “Keystone Native Plants.” Tallamy is partnering with other organizations to share this crucial information across the country:

1. Tallamy’s original website goes directly to Homegrown National Park: <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/> . Under the top header “Tallamy’s Hub” you can find links to interviews, videos, podcasts, and webinars with Doug Tallamy. Under “Resources” you can find links to sites that can generate a list of the best native plants in your area, plant and seed sources, landscape designers and gardeners, etc.
2. For an annotated list of the Keystone Native Plants for your area, go to the National Wildlife Federation Garden for Wildlife website: <https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/About/Resources/guides> . Here you’ll find ten different “Keystone Native Plants” Ecoregion handouts (as of Nov. 2021), with others undoubtedly planned. This plant list should be the backbone of your plantings. If you live in southern New Jersey, like me, scroll down to “Eastern Temperate Forests - Ecoregion 8” (covers nearly all of the East):  
<https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/About/Native-Plants/keystone-plants-by-ecoregion>
3. Audubon Native Plants Database utilizes Tallamy’s data: <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>

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4. National Wildlife Federation Native Plant Finder utilizes Tallamy's data. The site is highly educational, not only sharing the number of butterfly and moth species that need to lay their eggs on each specific plant, but also including a gallery of the top 15 species that do so. A number of photos are missing of native plants and caterpillar species, but the site is a work in progress with photos and information being added regularly. <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>
5. If you live in NJ, The Jersey-Friendly Yards Website is excellent and has many helpful resources. Use their searchable plant database to help you select plants for your site. The database has many filters including a "native plants only" filter showcasing @ 300 natives, as well as filters for wildlife value, region, ecoregion (including barrier island/coastal, Pinelands), deer resistant, light requirement, soil type, soil moisture, drought tolerance, salt tolerance, bloom color, bloom time, plant type, and more. Once you've generated a list, look up each plant to learn more about it and see photos. Plant details include "Light Needs of Plant," including both "Optimal Light" and "Light Range." For shade gardening, refer to the optimal light requirements so your plants are more likely to survive and thrive. The site also includes a list of nurseries that sell natives county-by-county. [www.jerseyyards.org/jersey-friendly-plants/](http://www.jerseyyards.org/jersey-friendly-plants/)
6. If you live in South Jersey, use Mike Crewe's excellent online field guide to all plants and wildlife of Cape May County: <http://www.capemaywildlife.com/> Here is the direct link to his online "Cape May Plants - an Identification Guide" in Taxonomic Order (or you can choose Alphabetical Order): [http://www.capemaywildlife.com/templates/list\\_plant\\_taxo.html](http://www.capemaywildlife.com/templates/list_plant_taxo.html)
7. Prairie Nursery: [www.prairienursery.com/](http://www.prairienursery.com/) Under the top header "Plants & Seeds" click on "Plants for Shaded Areas." When you scroll down through the generated plants, choose one and select "View Product." This will take you to "Cultural Details" (on the left) and "Description" (below), key information that will help you select plants for your site. Be sure to click on "Range Map" (to right of "Description") to see whether or not the plant's native range includes your state or area.
8. Prairie Moon Nursery: [www.prairiemoon.com/](http://www.prairiemoon.com/) Scroll down to "Natives for Shade" to generate a list of plants. You can further filter your list by checking boxes in the left column. Choose a plant on the generated list and select "View Product." This will take you to information "About" the plant with "Details" (on the right). Be sure to click on "Range Map" (to right of "About") to see whether or not the plant's native range includes your state or area.
9. Learn if a plant is native (to your area) or not native at the USDA Plants Database website: <https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/home>
10. On the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center website: <http://wildflower.org/> use their "Native Plants Database" to search for natives in your area narrowing the search based on plant type (tree, shrub, wildflower, etc.), conditions (sun, shade, dry, wet), and specifics (bloom time, bloom color, height).
11. Each late winter / early spring I update a handout that includes "Some Sources of Native Plants" in this region. It can be found on my website here (and includes many native plant sources not included on the other sites): <http://www.patsuttonwildlifegarden.com/some-sources-native-plants/>

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## NATIVE SHADE GARDENS TO VISIT

**in SPRING and in FALL to see shade-loving natives in the landscape**

(summer is the quietest season for shade gardens, lots of green growth, but little color)

**Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve** is a 134-acre nature preserve and botanical garden in New Hope, PA, featuring hundreds of species of native plants in woodlands and meadows, all protected by a 100-acre deer enclosure that was erected in 1994 (27 years ago). 1635 River Road, New Hope, PA 18938; 215-862-2924; <http://www.bhwp.org/>. Check the "What's in Season" link on their website to learn of all the native trees, shrubs, vines, and wildflowers flourishing there season-by-season: <http://bhwp.org/visit/whats-in-season/>. They have a robust native plant nursery that will reopen April 2022: <https://bhwp.org/grow/native-plant-nursery/>. Non-members are charged an admission fee.

**Mt. Cuba Center** is a non-profit 7-acre botanical garden (jam packed with natives!!!!) located in Hockessin, DE, near Wilmington, in the gently rolling hills of the Delaware Piedmont. 3120 Barley Mill Rd, Hockessin, DE 19707; 302-239-4244; <http://mtcubacenter.org/>. Gardens are open for visitation April through November; classes year-round. You can take a "Virtual Tour" of the gardens on their website (including 3 different seasons: spring, summer, & fall): <https://mtcubacenter.org/visit/tour/spring/>. They used to offer plant lists on their website: "Spring and Summer Plant List" and the "Late Summer and Fall Plant List." Maybe request these lists upon visit or call for a copy. Study before your visit (by browsing through a wildflower guide). This way you won't be overwhelmed (as I was) when you see so many lovely natives in bloom and it will help you keep track of and ID all you see. At the website you can also purchase tickets to tour the Mt. Cuba gardens.

**Ashland Nature Center** (only 1.1 miles from Mt. Cuba) serves as Delaware Nature Society's headquarters with 130 acres of woods, meadows, marsh, the Red Clay Creek, and 4 miles of nature trails to explore. The center is beautifully landscaped with natives. 3511 Barley Mill Rd, Hockessin, DE 19707; <http://www.delnature.org/AshlandNatureCenter>; 302-239-2334.