

People are a vital part of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Actions we take today can revive the Bay's health tomorrow and into the future

Plant and Care for Native Plants /Conservation Landscape

Conservation landscaping is a purposeful gardening practice that takes into account the impact your small garden has on the larger ecosystem and watershed. One aspect of conservation landscaping is using native plants, which are adapted to the local conditions and require less fertilizer and pesticides. Over the past half century, man-made changes to the American landscape have significantly reduced the biodiversity essential to support life. Habitat loss and dwindling biodiversity is primarily due to humans. The clearing of land for farming, grazing, mining, drilling, and urbanization impacts the 80% of global species who call the forest home.¹ Our natural landscapes are irreplaceable. They are critical to clean water, healthy ecosystems, vibrant communities and economies, climate resilience, cultural heritage, outdoor recreation, and local sense of place. Whether you are starting from a grass lawn or have existing natural areas on your property (or property belonging to your community, school, or congregation), conservation landscapes provide a unique beauty that helps preserve biodiversity, and often at half the cost of conventional landscapes.

What You Can Do to Help

By planting a conservation landscape, you can help make your yard more attractive to wildlife and retain precious rainwater.² Conservation landscapes are areas planted with locally native plants, designed to provide wildlife habitat, clean water and reduce the use of energy and chemicals. In areas where poor drainage prevents rain gardens, conservation landscapes use plants to absorb storm-water runoff.³

Not only will you be contributing to a healthier Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, but you can also spend valuable outdoor time as a family or with your congregation planting and caring for your conservation landscape.

Here are some of the positive environmental benefits of planting and caring for a conservation landscape.

1. Provides wildlife habitat.

Native plants attract a variety of birds, butterflies, and other wildlife by providing diverse habitats and food sources. Closely mowed lawns, on the other hand, are of little use to most wildlife.⁴



Figure 1
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/544916c3e4b09edc336b555e/t/5668a54905f8e24122e5ebcc/1449698633087/Rainscaping+Manual+Conservation+Landscape.pdf>

¹ <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2019/09/25/the-global-impacts-of-habitat-destruction/>

² <https://www.theconservationfoundation.org/conservation-home/earth-friendly-landscaping/>

³ <http://aawsa.org/conservation-landscapes>

⁴ <https://emswcd.org/native-plants/native-plant-benefits/>

2. Reduces the use of energy and chemicals.

Native plants do not require mowing with gas or electric lawn mowers, which cuts down emissions-generating energy use.

Currently, a lot of fertilizers are applied to lawns. Excess phosphorus and nitrogen (the main components of fertilizers) leads to runoff into lakes, streams, and rivers. This creates algae blooms which cause fish kills, skin rashes, bad odors, and foam and shoreline scums.

With native plants, toxic pesticides and herbicides are eliminated or significantly reduced. Nationally, over 70 million pounds of pesticides are applied to lawns each year, putting people and pets in contact with toxic chemicals on lawns. In addition, pesticides run off lawns and contaminate rivers, streams, and lakes.⁵

2. Absorb storm-water runoff.

Stormwater runoff is considered a major contributor to water quality degradation in the Chesapeake Bay region. Landscape conservation can solve drainage challenges and address erosion problems by increasing the soil's capacity to store water. Because of their deep root systems, many native plants can significantly decrease water runoff and, as a result, flooding.⁶

Websites for More Information

- Anne Arundel County Watershed Stewards Academy – [Conservation Landscapes](#)
- Ecological Landscaping Association – [Discover Ecological Landscaping](#)
- The Conservation Foundation – [Earth-Friendly Landscaping](#)

Behavior Change Campaign Examples

It is common to find it challenging to plant and care for conservation landscapes. Barriers to change include:

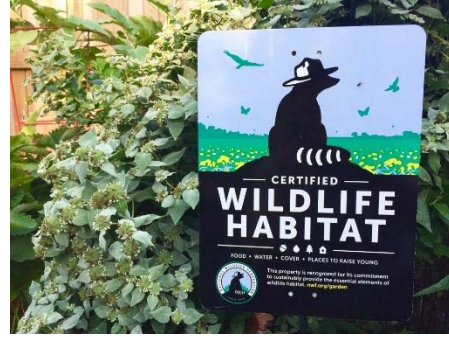
- **Time.** Finding the time to plant and care for a new landscape.
- **Lack of financial resources.** People might not have access to funds to buy the plants or if needed, to hire someone who could help design and/or plant the landscape.
- **Lack of tree knowledge.** Knowing which species to plant, where to plant them, and how to care for trees is not common knowledge and requires detailed information specific to that geographic area.
- **Values, beliefs and motivation.** Believing this single action matters and has an impact on protecting the environment is motivating.

⁵ <https://emswcd.org/native-plants/native-plant-benefits/>

⁶ <https://emswcd.org/native-plants/native-plant-benefits/>

❖ National Wildlife Federation – Certified Wildlife Habitat

The National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat campaign is a certification program to promote conservation landscapes in yards, balcony container gardens, schoolyards, work landscapes, or roadside greenspaces. Once certified, you can share your accomplishment and commitment to helping wildlife with your whole neighborhood by purchasing and posting an exclusive Certified Wildlife Habitat® sign. **(Prompts)**



- **Places of Worship:** In addition to [case examples of various places of worship creating wildlife habitats](#), NWF created the [Sacred Grounds Program](#) that provides information and resources for places of worship. **(Targeted Communications)**

❖ Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program – Native Plant Marketing Campaign

The Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program implemented a [Native Plant Marketing Campaign](#) to increase local interest in and demand for native plants. The campaign’s goals include improving the supply of locally available native plants and creating places where people can visit and see native plants.

- Messaging focus: Native plants are beautiful, economical and environmentally the right choice. **(Targeted Communications)**
 - **Native plants do well because they are adapted to our climate.** Using native species in landscaping is more cost effective than maintaining cultivated landscapes. Native plants often require less water, fertilizer and pesticide, thus adding fewer chemicals to the landscape and maintaining water quality in nearby rivers and streams. Fewer inputs mean time and money saved for the gardener.
 - **Native plants support a vast network of wildlife.** Native plants increase the presence of desirable wildlife, such as birds and butterflies, and provide sanctuaries for these animals as they journey between summer and winter habitats.
 - **The natural habitat you create with native plants can become an outdoor classroom for children,** or a place for you to find peace and quiet after a busy day.
- Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program chose images to counter concerns raised in surveys that native plants are ‘scraggly and ugly.’ **(Prompts)**

ADVANTAGES OF NATIVE PLANTS

- Natives can save money on landscaping
- Natives are low maintenance
- Require little or no watering, fertilization, or pesticides once established



Image by Scott DeWitt

WHY DO YOU PLANT? "SURVEY SAID..."

For beauty (92-94%)
Like to feed birds and butterflies (82%)
For relaxation & feeling close to nature (82%)

WHY NOT NATIVES? FOCUS GROUPS SAID...

Natives are scraggly and ugly
Lack of availability locally
Uncertainty about what is native



Example Messages

These messages about planting and caring for native plants or a conservation landscape could be used in congregational outreach campaigns:

1. **Beautifying your yard while conserving water and creating habitat for wildlife can be easy and rewarding.** Adding native plants can help you save money, mow less, see more birds and butterflies, and enjoy a functioning yard with fewer problems and less effort.⁷ (incentive)
2. **Conservation starts in your garden.** Many gardeners view their gardens as separate and isolated from the larger landscape. In reality, the larger landscape is a connected patchwork of ecosystems that support life. Having a non-native, invasive species in your garden impacts a local natural area. Planting a diversity of plant species, including natives, benefits wildlife, helps manage stormwater, and reduces the need for fertilizer.⁸ (targeted messaging to gardeners)
3. **Conservation landscaping: start small.** Even planting one or two native plants can make a difference in your local ecosystem. Native plants help connect yards and other community properties to create natural “stepping stones” or green corridors. (targeted messaging to gardeners)
4. **Bee-based messaging.** Using native plants in conservation landscape helps protect bees and encourages pollination. (targeted messaging)
 - Save a bee, save the world!
 - A future without bees would really sting! Help save the bees!
 - Bees need us, protect habitat today!

⁷ <https://www.theconservationfoundation.org/conservation-home/earth-friendly-landscaping/>

⁸ <https://www.nybg.org/blogs/plant-talk/2018/12/garden-news/conservation-starts-in-our-gardens-2/>

The above messages could be used in various outreach strategies with your congregation, such as the following:

1. **Use the free [Conservation Landscape Tools and Resources](#)** developed by the Anne Arundel County Watershed Stewards Academy to plant and care for a conservation landscape at your residence or at the congregation.
 - Consider having your sacred grounds become a [certified Wildlife Habitat](#).
2. **Share information with your congregation in a newsletter or on your website** about planting and caring for a conservation landscape.
3. **Encourage local master gardeners or town beautification committee to host a native plant sale** at your congregation in the spring or organize a tour of local native plant gardens.