

Plant Virginia Natives Marketing Partnership Action Plan

Throughout Virginia, an increasing number of gardeners are becoming aware of the value and benefits of native plants, and demand for native plants is steadily growing.

In Virginia's coastal areas and west into the Virginia's Piedmont and mountains, regional native plant marketing campaigns and projects are encouraging gardeners to plant natives. The message: native plants offer everything the gardener wants – beauty, year round interest and color, variety, low maintenance and savings in time and money. Research prior to design of the campaigns showed that many homeowners plant primarily to beautify their property. Many also said they garden to attract and feed birds and butterflies. Using less water and fertilizer, and subsequent savings in time and money was also a leading factor in deciding what to plant.

The campaigns are combating both real barriers to the use of natives, such as a lack of knowledge about which plants are native, and perceived barriers, including a perception that natives are scraggly. Regional native plant guides and plant labeling and signage in retail centers are making an impact on demand for natives. However, more needs to be done in Virginia to remove persistent barriers to planting native. The most prevalent barrier is a lack of availability of native plants in the marketplace.

To capitalize on the growing interest in native plants, regional marketing efforts and the number of partner projects and programs focused on natives, the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality initiated a new collaborative partnership in the summer of 2011: to *identify and prioritize opportunities to collaborate on Virginia native plant communication and marketing efforts and form cohesive and coordinated messaging and strategies to increase local availability and use of native plants state-wide.*

The purpose of this partnership is to identify and prioritize opportunities to collaborate on Virginia native plant communication and marketing efforts and form cohesive and coordinated messaging and strategies to increase local availability and use of native plants state-wide.

As the list of current agencies, organizations and businesses engaged illustrates (next page), the partnership represents an array of public and private organizations and businesses interested in collaborating to increase the local and statewide availability and use of Virginia native plants.

AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED IN THE PLANT VIRGINIA NATIVES MARKETING PARTNERSHIP AND REGIONAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

Virginia CZM Program (Steering Team Co-Chair) *
Virginia Dept of Game and Inland Fisheries (Steering Team Co-Chair) *
Virginia Dept of Conservation and Recreation, Natural Heritage Division (Co-Chair)*
Albemarle County *
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay *
Arlington County *
Audubon Society
Butterfly Society of Virginia
Caroline County
Chesapeake Bay Foundation *
Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council *
Eastern Shore Resource Conservation & Development Council
Elizabeth River Project
Flora of Virginia *
Friends of the Rappahannock
Garden Clubs of Virginia
George Washington Regional Commission
Hampton Roads Planning District Commission *
Hermitage Museum and Gardens
Keep Norfolk Beautiful
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden *
Lynnhaven River NOW
Loudon Wildlife Conservancy
Mason Sustainability Institute
Maymont
National Wildlife Federation
Norfolk Botanical Gardens *
Northern Neck Land Conservancy
Northern Neck Planning District Commission *
Northern Virginia Regional Commission *
Piedmont Environmental Council *
Plants Map
Prince William Conservation Alliance
Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends
University of Virginia, Anheuser Busch Coastal Research Center

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Back Bay NWR & Eastern Shore of VA NWR
Virginia Cooperative Extension Service
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Dept of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs *
Virginia Dept .of Conservation and Recreation, State Parks Division
Virginia Dept of Environmental Quality *
Virginia Dept of Forestry *
Virginia Department of Transportation
Virginia Institute of Marine Science *
Virginia Living Museum
Virginia Master Gardener Program *
Virginia Master Naturalist Program *
Virginia Native Plant Society *
Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association *
Virginia Society of Landscape Designers
Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts *
Virginia State Beekeepers Association
Virginia State University
Virginia Tech – Hampton Roads AREC
Wetlands Watch *
Williamsburg Botanical Garden
York County

Nursery/Retail/Landscaping Reps:

- Bay Haven Landscapes
- Brent's Native Plantings *
- Gentle Gardener *
- Lancaster Farms
- Meg French Design *
- Natural Art Landscaping
- Nature by Design
- Nature's Palette
- Piedmont Nursery
- Sassafras Farm
- Southern Branch Nursery *
- The Natural Garden
- White House Natives *
- Wild Works of Whimsy

*Representative on Steering Team

This **Action Plan** is the Plant Virginia Native Marketing Partnership's guide, or roadmap, for advancing its collective priorities over the next five years. It is not meant to be an annual operating plan tracking all the activities of the partnership's members as they relate to native plant education and communication. Rather, it describes the approach partners are collaboratively taking to better leverage resources and to promote coordinated activities. It also is a working document. As we advance our goals, new strategies may be needed, and new action items will become

apparent. The website www.PlantVirginiaNatives.org is a growing hub of information about the Virginia native plant related projects and resources members of the Partnership have to offer.

The Action Plan was informed by a prioritization exercise and discussions of a steering team of partnership members. This team, during a series of facilitated meetings, identified needs and collaborative projects that could be more effectively and efficiently addressed and supported through the partnership. To engage partners-at-large, two forums were held. *Increasing the Use of Virginia Native Plants: Social Marketing, Collaboration and Coordination*, in May 2013, was focused on gathering input on possible priorities for the partnership. In August 2013, the Team prioritized the following priorities: 1) Support development of a Virginia conservation landscaping certification; 2) Develop new strategies to help increase the availability of native plants including a framework and guidelines for native plant seed collection/propagation; and 3) Develop new coordinated/collaborated state-wide native plant marketing strategies. During a January 2014 forum, *Growing Our Community and Cultivating Our Ideas*, the steering team presented and solicited support for proposed partnership priorities and sought ideas on how to address these priorities. (See Appendices on page XX.)

The previous page indicates the partners who have been engaged through Partnership forums and meetings, regional native plant marketing campaigns, and participation on the Partnership Steering Team. Below is the perspective for participation in the partnership shared by some of the members:

[Virginia CZM Program/DEQ \(CHAIR\) -](#)

Native vegetation is undeniably a foundation of Virginia ecological integrity, and the Virginia CZM Program has been funding native plant restoration projects for decades. Increasing native vegetation will help the Virginia CZM Program achieve four of its 10 goals for “Coastal Resource Protection”: to protect and restore coastal habitats and species; to restore and maintain the quality of all coastal waters; to protect air quality; and to reduce or prevent losses of coastal habitat, life, and property.

[Virginia Dept of Wildlife Resources -](#)

Part of the agency’s mission statement is to “maintain optimum populations of wildlife” and to “provide educational opportunities for people to enjoy wildlife and habitat.” In order to “maintain optimum populations,” wildlife needs biologically diverse, ecologically sound habitat, and native plants are a key component of healthy habitat. Our Habitat Partners© Program is an outreach mechanism that teaches the public about the value of native plants in the landscape for habitat improvement and wildlife diversity.

[Virginia Dept of Conservation and Recreation, Natural Heritage Division -](#)

The Mission of DCR-DNH is to protect Virginia’s biodiversity. Native plants are an integral part of Virginia’s biodiversity. DCR-DNH is the primary partner in the Plant Eastern Shore Natives Campaign – from which the regional native plant marketing campaign model sprang.

[Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve of VA -](#)

This effort is important to overall Reserve goals – water quality, native species, ecological resilience.

[Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council](#) -

There is an intimate connection between our landscapes and how they are designed and managed, and the overall health of our natural resources, including the Chesapeake Bay. Native plants are key to creating “healthy” landscapes that protect water quality.

[Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden](#) -

Lewis Ginter is an educational institution committed to the use of ecologically beneficial landscapes with tremendous public outreach capabilities.

[Northern Virginia Regional Commission](#) -

The NVRC is a regional group that is funded by localities and hosts conversations and projects on sustainability issues, e.g. waste water, energy, native plants, etc.

[Piedmont Environmental Council](#) -

Promoting native plants is essential to what we do in the habitat program.

[Virginia Dept of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs](#) -

Domestic Sales and Market Development sections of VDACS works with VA horticulture and produce industries. Sell more VA Grown plants.

[Virginia Institute of Marine Science](#) –

VIMS coordinates the Living Shorelines initiative, assists property owners, industry and local governments with riparian buffer restoration and regulatory compliance (Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act), wetlands and shoreline plantings.

[Virginia Native Plant Society](#) -

The VNPS mission/goal is to educate and promote the use of native plants in promotion of a better environment. Pollinator education and preservation of native plants to assist the local economy of farmers is important.

[Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association](#) -

VNLA is participating in the Partnership to enhance and promote opportunities for VA Nursery and Landscape Association members in VA Grown/VA Native plants. Members provide and install the native plants.

[Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#) -

Virginia’s SWCDs support and promote use of native plants in educational programming, as well as through an Urban BMP Conservation Program (rain gardens, buffers, conversion turf to native, natural resource conservation, water quality) and VCAP – VA Conservation Assistance Program.

[Wetlands Watch](#) -

Wetlands restoration and protective buffers could not happen without readily available native wetland plants. There is reported lack of native wetlands and buffer plants to do existing projects and many partners report a need to order from out of state. Consistent native plant knowledge and appreciation for native plants is also needed.

The Plant Virginia Natives Marketing Partnership Action Plan Goals and Strategies

| Virginia Native Plant Marketing Collaboration | |
|---|--|
| Goal 1 | Increase collaboration and coordination among partners engaged in native plant education, communication and marketing. |
| | Strategy A: Garner support for partnership efforts through enhanced visibility. |
| | Strategy B: Offer forums and tools that foster and support partner relationship building and collaboration to advance the goals of the partnership. |
| | Strategy C: Identify and secure resources – financial, policy and legislative – to support partnership goals and activities. |
| Native Plant Availability | |
| Goal 2 | Increase Virginia Grown native plant stock by 25%. |
| | Strategy A: Establish a rapport with growers in Virginia. |
| | Strategy B: Determine native plant stocks at Virginia nurseries and interest and barriers to growing more natives. |
| | Strategy C: Determine Propagation Protocol Needs. |
| | Strategy D: Determine three-five native species for growers to propagate as a test market, which will increase the state-wide availability of these species. |
| | Strategy E: Increase the availability of native plants at local plant retailers by compiling and share a comprehensive list of growers who specialize in propagating native plants. |
| | Strategy F: Interview/survey national chains or “Box Store” buyers to determine if and what native plants they already provide. |
| | Strategy G: Arrange pitches/presentations at state-level sales office for Home Depot, Lowes, Walmart etc. |
| | Strategy H: Suggest three-five native species for national chains or “Box Stores” to sell as a test market, which will increase the statewide availability of these species. |
| Goal 3 | Increase the availability of native plants at local plant retailers by # or %. (this percentage has not been established). |
| | Strategy A: Establish a long-term relationship or personal rapport with owners and managers of local garden centers. |
| | Strategy B: Increase the availability of native plants at local plant retailers by suggesting three-five native species for providers to sell as a test market, which will increase the statewide availability of these species. |
| | Strategy C: Identify economically viable alternatives to currently marketed known invasives. |

Native Plant Use

Goal 4

Increase market demand and use of Virginia native plants by:

1. Landscape and land use professions (inc. engineers, L.A.'s , anyone who specify for land development/use)
2. Homeowners
3. Landscaping and demonstration restoration projects on public lands (state, federal) and also private (landowners or non-profit ownership)

Strategy A: Conduct research on the current knowledge of value of native plants and use, and any negative perceptions and other social or physical barriers that hinder or discourage consumer use of natives.

Strategy B: Develop additional regional native plant campaigns.

Strategy C: Develop new statewide marketing strategies or statewide marketing campaign.

Strategy D: Develop the native plant criteria of the CCLC CBLP core curriculum.

Strategy E: Develop and share a working list of designers who specialize in the use of natives plants.

Strategy F: Compile and share a comprehensive list of retailers who specialize in native plant sales.

Strategy G: Survey state properties and interview state land managers to assess the extent to which native plants are available and being used in Commonwealth projects. Implement state policy for planting natives consistently across all agencies.

Strategy H: Survey county weed ordinances and develop Virginia-specific model weed ordinances that provide for more naturalized landscapes, in support of native plant use.

Strategy I: Encourage inclusion of native plants in local policies and ordinances, including erosion and sediment control and stormwater management.

Strategy J: Update Architectural Review Board's "list" of requirements for site planning (many cities and counties have "Beautification" or "Revitalization" programs).

Native Plant Marketing Partnership Communication and Capacity

Goal 1: Increased collaboration and coordination among partners engaged in native plant education, communication and marketing.

Strategy A: Garner support for partnership efforts through enhanced visibility.

| Action |
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| Consider selecting a new name for the partnership. |
| Design a logo for the partnership. |
| Create new Virginia Native Plant website. Establish on-line tool(s) to support communication among partners. |
| Identify opportunities for articles about the partnership and its collaborative efforts in print media. |
| Presentations/Exhibits at Events. |
| Develop and distribute a regular Virginia Native Plant Marketing E-News. |
| Establish a link to the partnership webpage from all partner member websites. |

Goal 1 - Strategy B: Offer forums and tools that foster and support partner relationship building and collaboration to advance the goals of the partnership.

| Action |
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| Co-Host Statewide Plant Virginia Natives Summit |
| Hold 2 one day forums each year |
| Create a Partnership Resources Directory |

Goal 1 - Strategy C: Identify and secure resources – financial, policy and legislative – to support partnership goals and activities.

| Action |
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| Identify partnership actions/projects needing funding and match to possible funding sources |
| Identify issues that might be addressed through changes in state policy and possibly legislative support or action. |
| Pursue native plant recognition/ proclamation by Governor and General Assembly |

Native Plant Availability

Goal 2: Increase Virginia Grown native plant stock by 25%.

Strategy A: Establish a rapport with growers in Virginia.

VNLA stressed the need for the team to understand the workings of the commercial plant market when considering the best methods to work in partnership with the commercial community to increase the availability and sales of Virginia natives.

| Action |
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| Attend Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association (VNLA) Member Events. |
| Expand Grower Representation on Partnership. |
| Illustrate Growing Demand for Natives to Growers. |
| Arrange a tour(s) for partnership members at nurseries. |
| Engage growers and retailers in a Virginia Native Plant Summit or Symposium. |

Goal 2 - Strategy B: Determine native plant stocks at Virginia nurseries and interest and barriers to growing more natives.

| Action |
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| Develop survey of growers/landscapers on use of natives. |
| Distribute survey. |
| Distribute survey results. |

Goal 2 - Strategy C: Determine Propagation Protocol Needs.

| Action |
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| Interview growers to determine what they already propagate. |
| Conduct a literature search to determine existing protocols for Virginia species – add more detail. |
| Compile and share inventory of existing protocols (on-line or other method of delivery). |
| Identify key academic partners . |

Goal 2 - Strategy D: Select and suggest three-five native species for growers to propagate as a test market, which will increase the state-wide availability of these species.

The purpose is to encourage the growers to propagate native species likely to sell well, which will fuel the growers' subsequent success.

| Action |
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| Determine which species to encourage. |

Goal 2 - Strategy E: Compile and share a comprehensive list of growers who specialize in propagating native plants.

| Action |
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| Identify native plant growers in the Virginia Growers Guide. |
| Include a list of growers with an inventory of native plants on a new partner website. |

Goal 2 - Strategy F: Interview/Survey national chains or “Box Store” buyers to determine if and what native plants they already provide.

| Action |
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Goal 2 - Strategy G: Arrange pitches/presentations at state-level sales office for Home Depot, Lowes, Walmart etc.

| Action |
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| Identify the corporate plant buying decision-makers. |
| Create a presentation for this audience. |

Goal 2 - Strategy H: Suggest three-five native species for national chains or “Box Stores” to sell as a test market, which will increase the statewide availability of these species.

| Action |
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Goal 3 - Strategy A: Establish a long-term relationship or personal rapport with owners and managers of local nurseries, garden centers, etc.

The purpose is to have one-on-one conversations to identify concerns, reduce barriers and dispel negative perceptions. Approach will need to be specific to each provider.

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| Identify native plant retailers. |
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| Develop conversation “script.” |
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| Share native plant retailer info with VNPS. |
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| Create Interactive map of native plant providers. |
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| Develop native plant kits. |
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Goal 2 - Strategy B: Increase the availability of native plants at local plant retailers by suggesting three-five native species for providers to sell as a test market, which will increase the statewide availability of these species.

The purpose is to encourage the local retail native plant providers to sell native species likely to sell well, which will fuel the retailers’ subsequent success.

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Goal 2 - Strategy C: Identify economically viable native alternatives to currently marketed known invasives.

The purpose is to determine how invasive species will be addressed in the state-wide native plant marketing campaign, and by partnership members.

| Action |
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| Help educate homeowners about invasive non-natives, and native alternatives. |
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Native Plant Use

Goal 4: Increase demand and use of plants native to Virginia by:

- Landscape and land use professions (including engineers, L.A.'s , anyone who specifies for land development/use on private and commercial properties)
- Individual homeowners and homeowner associations
- Public agencies (Landscaping and demonstration restoration projects on public lands (state, federal) and also
- Private landowners or non-profit ownership (schools, universities, faith institutions, etc.)

Strategy A: Conduct research on the current knowledge of value of native plants and use, and any negative perceptions and other social or physical barriers that hinder or discourage consumer use of natives.

As a part of this, we need to prioritize the target audiences for the research and engage the partnership members in conducting the assessment. Based on the results, identify target audiences for initial new marketing strategies, the implementation of which would be conducted in a collaborative and coordinative manner through the partnership and its members.

| Action |
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| Create on-line photo gallery of Virginia native plants to feature the beauty and variety of natives – organize by region. |
| Survey general perceptions – plants, site design of institutions, commercial properties etc. |

Goal 4 - Strategy B: Develop additional regional native plant campaigns.

| Action |
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| Expand native plant region map to include entire state. |
| Share regional campaign results. |
| Engage regional campaign partners in the native plant marketing partnership. |
| Increase/Continue funding for regional campaigns. |
| Enhance federal partner participation in regional campaigns. |

Goal 4 - Strategy C: Develop new statewide marketing strategies or statewide marketing campaign.

| Action |
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| Outline specific goals of a state-wide campaign. |
| Identify other partners that should be invited to participate in development and implementation of a statewide native plant campaign strategy. |
| Identify and pursue source of funding to support a state-wide native plant marketing campaign. |
| Provide native plants to realtors with brochure, that they can give as house-warming gifts to new buyers. |

Strategy D: Develop the native plant criteria of the Chesapeake Conservation Landscape Council – Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Certification Program core curriculum.

| Action |
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| Establish a sub working group of partners to assist in development of the plant module for the certification. |

Goal 4 - Strategy E: Develop and share a working list of designers who specialize in the use of natives plants.

| Action |
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| Identify and develop list of designers/landscapers using native plants. |
| Promote designers/ landscapers using natives. |
| Attend VSLD meetings. |

Goal 4 - Strategy F: Compile and share a comprehensive list of local retail centers who sell Virginia native plants.

| Action |
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| See Goal 4, Strategy B; Goal 2, Strategy E. |

Goal 4 - Strategy G: Survey state and local properties and interview state and local land managers to assess the extent to which native plants are being used in Commonwealth projects. Implement state policy encouraging planting natives consistently across all agencies.

| Action |
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| Review state and local land vegetative management plan criteria. |
| Provide support to state agency public native planting projects. |

Goal 4 - Strategy H: Encourage inclusion of native plants in local policies and ordinances, including erosion and sediment control and stormwater management.

| Action |
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| Incorporate native plant information and use in updates to the Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control and Stormwater Management Handbooks. |
| Include native plants in the stormwater grant application process. |
| Develop model language. |
| Share case studies. |

Goal 4 - Strategy I: Survey local weed ordinances and develop Virginia-specific model weed ordinance that provides for more natural landscapes, in support of native plant use.

| Action |
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| Select a pilot region to review locality weed ordinances. |
| Work with locality to serve as a model. |

Goal 4 - Strategy J: Update Architectural Review Boards “list” of requirements for site planning (many cities and counties have “Beautification” or “Revitalization” programs).

| Action |
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