

Woodland Gardens

Look to nature for inspiration and direction for design, plant selection and maintenance of woodland gardens. Observe plant combinations and placements, and aim for the same “feeling” in your garden. Curves and irregular shapes are more pleasing than straight lines. Use natural materials such as native stone and wood for outlining beds and paths. Locate planting areas as far away from tree roots as possible to avoid damaging the roots and to lessen competition for moisture and nutrients. However, wildflowers can be planted in pockets of improved soil among tree roots. Main paths through the garden should be wide enough for two people to walk side by side. Plan narrow paths or stepping stones into large beds for close-up viewing and maintenance access.

Plant most species in groups of three, five or more for a natural look. Use large plants like Jack-in-the-pulpit and black snakeroot singly as accents. Be sure the garden includes an understory of small native trees and shrubs for a smooth transition from tall trees down to the ground level herbaceous plants. Plan for all-season beauty with good foliage plants and species that bloom at different times.

Filtered shade is ideal for woodland plants. If the shade is too dense trees can be selectively removed or limbed up (remove lower branches to a height of 20”) to create partial or filtered shade and to improve air circulation. Areas beneath trees, especially shallow-rooted maples and beeches, can become quite dry in summer, so consider other shady locations for plants requiring a constantly moist soil.

A deep, humus-rich, slightly acid soil that retains moisture, but drains well is preferred by most woodland plants. Loosen soil to a depth of six to eight inches and mix in a two- or three-inch layer of organic matter such as compost or well-rotted leaves. Very poor soil can be replaced with a mixture of loam and compost.

Ample moisture, especially in spring, is necessary. Some species adapt to slightly dry soil in summer, but some require constant moisture through the growing season. A properly prepared soil and a two-inch layer of shredded leaves or very fine hardwood mulch will hold and conserve moisture. Supplemental watering will be necessary while plants are becoming established and during dry weather.

Maintenance. A woodland wildflower garden, properly planted with hardy, locally adapted species will remain attractive without high maintenance. A constantly decaying mulch will discourage weeds and add humus and nutrients to the soil. Organic fertilizers such as bonemeal and bloodmeal can be added as needed.



Color in the Woodland Garden

This is just a sampling of the native Virginia wildflowers suitable for different conditions of soil, moisture and shade in woodland gardens. All are perennial and can be propagated by seed; most can also be propagated by division. They're available from nurseries that propagate their plants or at VNPS chapter plant sales. Plants are listed by blooming season from early spring until frost. Most bloom in spring when maximum moisture and sunlight are available before the overhead canopy fills in.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) 4-8"; lovely, fragile white flowers; foliage attractive through summer in shade and rich, moist soil.

Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) 1-2'; beautiful and easy; pink buds open into porcelain blue bells; a spring ephemeral that goes dormant by early summer.

Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) 1-1.5'; mounds of ferny foliage and clusters of nodding blue flowers; attractive all season.

Canada Violet (*Viola canadensis*) 1'; pure white flowers have purplish tinge on back; very desirable species; spreads slowly. Cream violet (*V. striata*), also white, may spread rapidly.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) 1-3'; green hooded “flower”; bright red seed clusters add summer and fall interest; needs moist soil.

Woodland Poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*) 1-2'; bright yellow poppies; lobed foliage stays attractive in rich, moist soil; spreads quickly.

Wild Blue Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) 1-1.5'; spreads to form lovely drifts; should be in every woodland garden; also white form.

Merrybells (*Uvularia grandiflora*) 1.5-2'; clusters of lemon yellow flowers; nice foliage through summer, neutral to slightly acid soil.

Golden Ragwort (*Senecio aureus*) 2-3'; yellow daisies nice contrast for blues; basal foliage attractive through winter; adapts to dry soil; deadhead to prevent unwanted seedlings.

Wild Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra eximia*) 1-1.5'; pink flower clusters and ferny foliage; blooms sparingly through summer in rich, moist soil.

Shooting Star (*Dodecatheon meadia*) 1-2'; rosette of basal foliage and clusters of white flowers on tall stems; dormant by mid-summer.

Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) 1-2'; long blooming and easy; shades of magenta and pink; adapts to dry summer soil.

Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) 1-2'; easy to grow favorite; average soil fertility and moisture; red-yellow flowers attract hummingbirds.

False Solomon's Seal (*Smilacina racemosa*) 1-3'; showy white plumes and good foliage; attractive berries in fall.

Black Snakeroot (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) 4-6'; superb white-flowered accent or background plant; best in filtered shade and moist soil.

Hairy Ruellia (*Ruellia carolinensis*) 1-2'; lavender flowers lasting just one day in mid-summer; adapts to dry soil.

Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*) 2-3'; showy, easy and long-blooming with 2 hours of sun or bright, filtered shade.

Cardinal Flower (*L. cardinalis*) 2-5'; bright and beautiful with 2 hours of sun or bright, filtered shade; attracts hummingbirds.

Blue Stemmed Goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*) 1-2'; graceful yellow sprays nice with ferns; adapts to slightly dry soil.

White Wood Aster (*Aster divaricatus*) 1-2'; nice drifts of color until frost; deadhead to prevent unwanted seedlings.

Native Ground Covers

In addition to their flowers, these shade loving deciduous and evergreen ground covers provide attractive foliage through the year. Use them for edgings, as fillers among taller plants and to replace the foliage of spring ephemerals that have gone dormant.

Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*) 6"; heart-shaped leaves form dense ground cover; maroon flowers in early spring.

Green and Gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*) 4-8"; clumping and creeping forms with bright yellow flowers early spring and into summer if soil stays moist.

Dwarf Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*) 3-8"; blue flowers late April into May; dainty sword-shaped foliage; needs bright filtered shade and slightly moist soil.

Creeping Mint (*Meehania cordata*) 2-4"; slow growing creeper with soft, fuzzy leaves and showy tubular blue flowers in May. Unusual and choice.

Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*) 2-4"; small, leathery evergreen leaves on trailing stems; pinkish white flowers in May and bright red berries in winter.

Allegheny Pachysandra (*Pachysandra procumbens*) 4-8"; mottled foliage is almost evergreen; white flowering spikes in April. Spreads slowly into dense mats.

Creeping Phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*) 2-8"; ground hugging foliage is almost evergreen; pinkish-lavender flowers in spring; also blue-, white- and purple-flowered forms.

Wild Stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*) 2-6"; fleshy-leaved, semi-evergreen trailer sends up 4-6" dainty white flowering stalks in May. Needs good drainage.

Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) 0.5-1'; fluffy white flowers late April into May; many cultivars of running and clumping forms available.

Plant Sources

Nurseries and garden centers are stocking more and more native plants and are good sources as are local plant sales (see reverse).

Nursery sources of native plants, a list of mail order and retail nurseries that sell propagated plants, is available from:

VNPS, Blandly Experimental Farm
400 Blandly Farm Rd., Unit 2
Boyce, VA 22620
540-837-1600
www.vnps.org



Woodland Ferns

Ferns are wonderful foliage plants to combine with wildflowers in woodland gardens. They come in a variety of sizes, shapes, textures and shades of green, and can be used as fillers, accents or ground covers. Cultivation requirements for these species are similar to those for the wildflowers and ground covers included here. In general, crown forming species spread slowly into large, single clumps while those with underground creeping rhizomes spread more quickly into drifts or mats.

Maidenhair (*Adiantum pedatum*) 1-2'; circular fronds atop wiry stems; graceful and very beautiful; needs rich, slightly moist soil.

Lady (*Athyrium filix-femina*) 1-3'; intricately cut lacy fronds arise from creeping rootstock; tolerates sun in wet soil; some plants have red stems.

Marginal Wood (*Dryopteris marginalis*) 1-2'; stiff, dull olive-green fronds rise in vase shape from central crown; drought tolerant.

Ostrich (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) 3-5'; plume-shaped fronds in narrow, vase shape; creeping crown-forming rhizomes; spreads quickly.

Cinnamon (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) 2-5'; erect clusters of outer fronds with inner fertile fronds that turn brown. Good in wet areas.

Christmas (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) 1-1.5'; dark green, leathery fronds are evergreen; adapts to dry soil.

Southern or Broad Beech (*Thelypteris hexagonoptera*) 1.5-2'; broad, triangular fronds; creeping rhizomes; may spread rapidly in fertile soil.

New York (*T. noveboracensis*) 1-2'; soft, delicate, lime-green fronds; tolerates sun in wet soil; spreads quickly from creeping rootstock.

Prince William Wildflower Society, a Chapter of the VNPS, holds a wildflower plant sale on the Saturday before Mother's Day at Bethel Lutheran Church, Sudley Rd. & Plantation Ln., Manassas. The chapter holds regular membership meetings, sponsors garden tours, walks and other events. Information, Nancy Arrington, 703-368-9711.

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Wildflowers for Woodland Gardens



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