

# Dry Woodland Garden Native Plant Selections & Design

## What is a Dry Woodland garden?

Shaded areas of the yard can be challenging places for grass to grow. Luckily, Illinois has dozens of native plant species that thrive in shade. Instead of a traditional lawn, consider shade-loving groundcovers, like sedges and ferns. For interest, add other shade plants that are taller and bloom.

This guide features a planting plan focused on natives typically found in dry Illinois woodlands. The plan creates year-round interest for homeowners and extends the foraging season for pollinators. Additionally, native plants help soak up rainfall and can be used in rain gardens. For more information, visit the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture website: [extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture](https://extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture).

## Dry Woodland Garden Plants

This example garden design utilizes plants that grow in shade to part shade conditions with dry soil moisture.

**Wildflowers** – To extend pollinator foraging seasons, this selection of wildflowers includes species that bloom from April to October.

- **Woodland Phlox** (Latin name *Phlox divaricata*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil moisture.
  - Lavender flowers in spring.
  - Attracts bees and butterflies.
  - Grows 1 to 2 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Wild Columbine** (Latin name *Aquilegia canadensis*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to dry soil.
  - Red flowers in spring.
  - Attracts bees and hummingbirds.
  - Grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Wild Geranium** (Latin name *Geranium maculatum*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil.
  - Pink flowers in spring.
  - Attracts bees and butterflies and is a caterpillar host plant.
  - Grows 1 to 2 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Tall Anemone** (Latin name *Anemone virginiana*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil.
  - White flowers late spring to early summer.
  - Attracts bees.
  - Grows 1 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Drought tolerant.

- **False Solomon's Seal** (Latin name *Maianthemum racemosum*) –
  - Part shade.
  - Moist to dry soil.
  - White flowers late spring into summer.
  - Attracts bees and birds.
  - Grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Drought tolerant.
- **Prairie Alumroot** (Latin name *Heuchera richardsonii*) –
  - Part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil.
  - Greenish-white flowers in early summer.
  - Attracts bees.
  - Grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Woodland Sunflower** (Latin name *Helianthus divaricatus*) –
  - Part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil.
  - Yellow flower mid-summer to early fall.
  - Attracts bees, butterflies, and birds and is a caterpillar host plant.
  - Grows 2 to 6 feet tall and 1 to 3 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Short's Aster** (Latin name *Symphotrichum shortii*) –
  - Part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil.
  - Pinkish-purple flowers in fall.
  - Attracts bees, butterflies, and birds and is a caterpillar host plant.
  - Grows 2 to 4 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.

**Other** – Grasses, sedges, and ferns add texture and seasonal interest to the garden. Some also act as groundcovers, which help to maintain moisture levels and suppress weed growth.

- **Pennsylvania Sedge** (Latin name *Carex pensylvanica*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil.
  - Green grassy foliage throughout the growing season, semi-evergreen in winter.
  - Seeds are attractive to various birds and is a caterpillar host plant.
  - Grows to 1 foot tall and 1 foot wide.
  - Tolerates drought.

- **Christmas Fern** (Latin name *Polystichum acrostichoides*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to dry soil.
  - Dark green foliage throughout the growing season, semi-evergreen in winter.
  - Grows 1 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.

**Shrubs** – Shrubs add structure and seasonal interest to the garden.

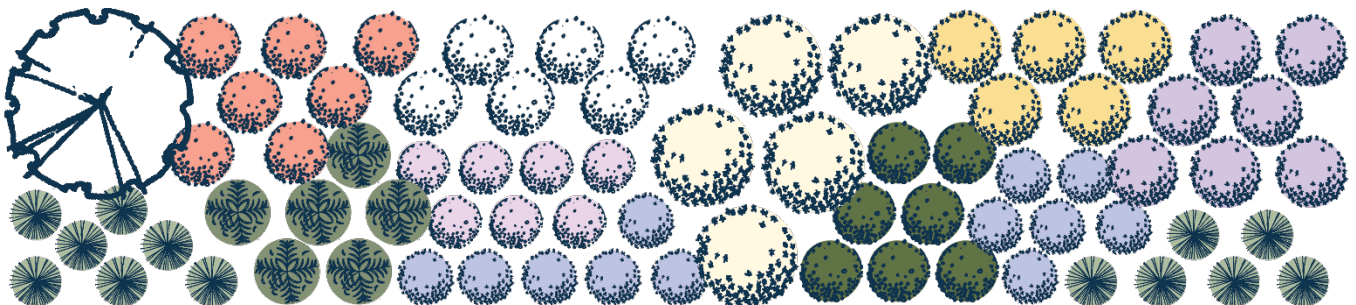
- **Maple Leaf Viburnum** (Latin name *Viburnum acerifolium*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Mesic to dry soil.
  - White flowers late spring into summer with blue berries summer into winter.
  - Attracts bees, butterflies, and birds.
  - Grows 2 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.

## PLANTING DESIGN

### Example Design

In this example design for planting a rectangular 6 foot wide by 25 foot long dry woodland garden, you will need:

- **7 Pennsylvania Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping at the front left corner.
- **1 Maple Leaf Viburnum** at the back left, behind the Pennsylvania Sedge.
- **6 Christmas Ferns** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping to the right of the Pennsylvania Sedge.
- **7 Wild Columbine** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping behind the Christmas Fern, to the right of the Maple Leaf Viburnum.
- **6 Woodland Phlox** spaced 1½ foot apart along the front edge, to the right of the Christmas Fern.
- **7 Wild Geranium** spaced 1½ foot apart in a grouping behind the Woodland Phlox, to the right of the Christmas Fern.
- **6 Tall Anemone** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping along the back edge behind the Wild Geranium.
- **5 False Solomon's Seal** spaced 3 feet apart in a grouping from the front of the garden to the back, to the right of the Woodland Phlox, Wild Geranium, and Tall Anemone.
- **7 Prairie Alumroot** spaced 1½ feet apart in a grouping at the front, to the right of the False Solomon's Seal.
- **5 Woodland Sunflower** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping at the back, behind the Prairie Alumroot and to the right of the False Solomon's Seal.
- **6 Woodland Phlox** spaced 1½ foot apart in a grouping to the right of the Prairie Alumroot.
- **7 Pennsylvania Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping at the front right corner.
- **7 Short's Aster** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping at the back right corner.



## Additional Planting Options

If you have more space, duplicate the planting plan located on the inside of this brochure. For less space, consider limiting your garden to three species.

*Two options for dry woodland garden native plant combinations that feature only three species are:*

### Option One:

- Woodland Phlox
- False Solomon's Seal
- Pennsylvania Sedge

### Option Two:

- Prairie Alumroot
- Wild Geranium
- Short's Aster

### Rain Garden Options:

The plants in this brochure are all shade-loving species that prefer dry soils. For placement in a shaded rain garden, they are best suited for high banks.

## WHERE TO FIND PLANTS AND MORE INFORMATION

The plant palette is inspired by the Red Oak Rain Garden: <https://redoakraingarden.org/>. The Illinois Native Plant Society webpage lists sources of native plants: [illinoisplants.org](http://illinoisplants.org). For more information about plants, go to the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture website: [extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture](http://extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture).

## PUT YOUR NATIVE PLANT GARDEN ON THE MAP

You can be part of a network of native plantings by registering your Illinois native plant garden or rain garden. This helps build community and encourage native plant use. Add your native plant garden to the map: [go.illinois.edu/GardenMap](http://go.illinois.edu/GardenMap).

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