

# Woodland Border Garden Native Plant Selections & Design

## What is a Woodland Border 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 Illinois woodland borders. 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).

## Woodland Border Garden Plants

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

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

- **Virginia Bluebells** (Latin name *Mertensia virginica*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - Blue flowers in early spring.
  - Attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.
  - Grows to 1 to 2 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.
- **Wild Columbine** (Latin name *Aquilegia canadensis*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - Red flowers in spring.
  - Grows to 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Wild Geranium** (Latin name *Geranium maculatum*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic 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.
- **Hairy Woodmint** (Latin name *Blephilia hirsuta*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - White flowers late spring through summer.
  - Attracts bees and butterflies.
  - Grows 1 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.

- **Blue Wild Indigo** (Latin name *Baptisia australis*) –
  - Full sun to part shade.
  - Mesic soil.
  - Blue flowers late spring into early summer.
  - Attracts bees and is a caterpillar host plant.
  - Grows 3 to 4 feet tall and 3 to 4 feet wide.
  - Drought tolerant.
- **Anise Hyssop** (Latin name *Agastache foeniculum*) –
  - Full sun to part shade.
  - Mesic soil.
  - Purple flowers summer into fall.
  - Attracts bees and butterflies.
  - Grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 3 feet wide.
  - Drought tolerant.
- **Smooth Blue Aster** (Latin name *Symphyotrichum laeve*) –
  - Full sun to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - Purple flowers late summer through fall.
  - Attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.
  - Grows 2 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide.
  - Drought tolerant.

**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 soil.
  - Green grassy foliage throughout the growing season, semi-evergreen in winter.
  - Attracts birds and is a caterpillar host plant.
  - Grows to 1 foot tall and 1 foot wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Bottlebrush Grass** (Latin name *Elymus hystrix*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - Green grassy foliage throughout the growing season.
  - Attracts birds and is a caterpillar host
  - Grows 2 to 5 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought.
- **Lady Fern** (Latin name *Athyrium filix-femina*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - Green foliage throughout the growing season.
  - Grows 1 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 3 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.

- **Cinnamon Fern** (Latin name *Osmunda cinnamomea*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Wet to moist soil.
  - Green foliage throughout the growing season.
  - Grows 2 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.

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

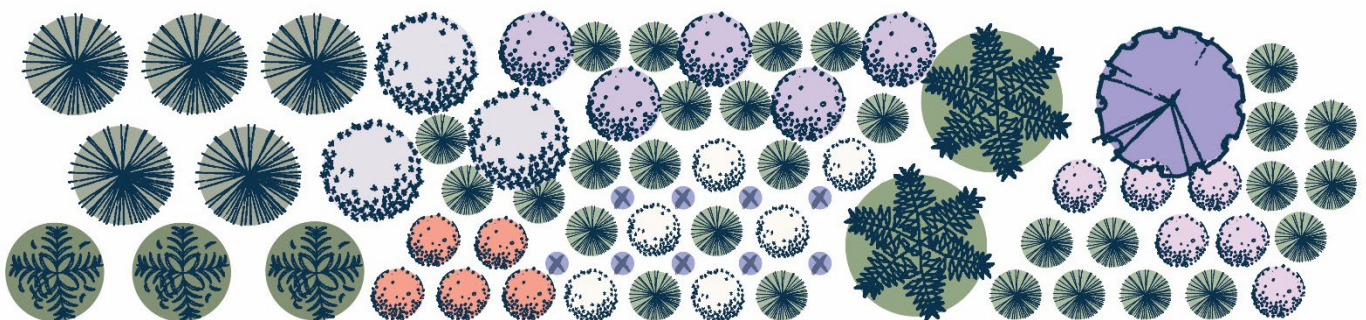
- **Winterberry** (Latin name *Ilex verticillata*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Wet to mesic soil.
  - White flowers in spring with red berries summer into winter.
  - Attracts bees and birds.
  - Grows 3 to 10 feet tall and 3 to 5 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.

## PLANTING DESIGN

### Example Design

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

- **3 Lady Fern** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping at the front left corner
- **5 Bottlebrush Grass** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping at the back left corner, behind the Lady Fern.
- **5 Wild Columbine** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping at the front of the garden, to the right of the Lady Fern.
- **3 Anise Hyssop** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping behind the Wild Columbine, to the right of the Bottlebrush Grass.
- **5 Smooth Blue Aster** spaced 2½ feet apart along the back edge of the garden, to the right of the Anise Hyssop.
- **6 Hairy Woodmint** spaced 2½ feet apart in a grouping to the right of the Wild Columbine, in front of the Smooth Blue Aster.
- **17 Pennsylvania Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart scattered between the Smooth Blue Aster and Hairy Woodmint groupings.
- **9 Virginia Bluebells** spaced 1½ feet apart scattered between the Hairy Woodmint and Pennsylvania Sedge.
- **2 Cinnamon Fern** spaced 3 feet apart to the right of the Pennsylvania Sedge, Virginia Bluebells, Hairy Woodmint, and Smooth Blue Aster planting.
- **6 Pennsylvania Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping at the front of the garden, to the right of the Cinnamon Fern.
- **6 Wild Geranium** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping behind the Pennsylvania Sedge and to the right of the Cinnamon Fern.
- **1 Blue Wild Indigo** at the back edge of the garden, behind the Wild Geranium.
- **6 Pennsylvania Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping to the right of the Blue Wild Indigo and behind the Wild Geranium.



## 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 woodland border garden native plant combinations that feature only three species are:*

### Option One:

- Pennsylvania Sedge
- Blue Wild Indigo
- Anise Hyssop

### Option Two:

- Wild Geranium
- Smooth Blue Aster
- Hairy Woodmint

### Rain Garden Options:

While the plants in this brochure are all shade- and part-shade loving species, they prefer a variety of moisture levels. For placement in a rain garden, they are best suited for slopes and higher 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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