

# Woodland Garden Native Plant Selections & Design

## What is a 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 average 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).

## Woodland Garden Plants

This example garden design utilizes plants that grow in shade to 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.

- **Jack-in-the-Pulpit** (Latin name *Arisaema triphyllum*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Mesic soil.
  - Green/red flowers in spring.
  - Attracts birds.
  - Grows to 1 to 2 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.
- **Prairie Trillium** (Latin name *Trillium recurvatum*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - Red flowers in spring.
  - Grows to 2 to 3 feet tall and up to 1 foot wide.
  - Tolerates drought but may yellow and droop.
- **Jacob's Ladder** (Latin name *Polemonium reptans*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Mesic soil.
  - Blue flowers in spring.
  - Attracts bees and butterflies.
  - Grows 1 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.
- **Canada Anemone** (Latin name *Anemone canadensis*) –
  - Part shade.
  - Moist to mesic soil.
  - White flowers late spring into early summer.
  - Attracts bees.
  - Grows 1 to 2 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Tolerates drought but may yellow and droop.

- **Goatsbeard** (Latin name *Aruncus dioicus*) –
  - Full sun to part shade.
  - Wet to mesic soil.
  - White flowers late spring into early summer.
  - Attracts bees and butterflies.
  - Grows 4 to 2 feet tall and 2 to 4 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.
- **Black Cohosh** (Latin name *Actaea racemosa*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Moist to dry soil.
  - White flowers in summer.
  - Attracts bees and birds.
  - Grows 3 to 7 feet tall and 2 to 4 feet wide.
  - Drought tolerant but may yellow and droop.
- **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 and is a caterpillar host plant.
  - 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.
- **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.
- **Tufted Hairgrass** (Latin name *Deschampsia caespitosa*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Wet to mesic soil.
  - Grassy foliage throughout the growing season.
  - Grows 2 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.

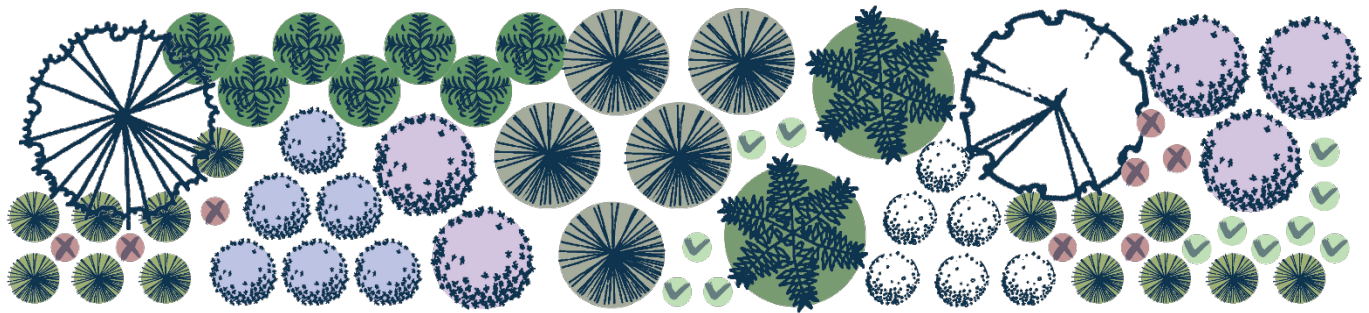
- Cinnamon Fern (Latin name *Osmunda cinnamomea*) –
  - Full to part shade.
  - Wet to moist soil.
  - Green foliage throughout the growing season.
  - Grows 2 to 4 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide.
  - Does not tolerate drought.

## PLANTING DESIGN

### Example Design

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

- **6 Pennsylvania Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping at the front left corner.
- **3 Prairie Trillium** spaced 1 foot apart scattered between the Pennsylvania sedge.
- **1 Goatsbeard** at the back left corner, behind the Pennsylvania Sedge and Prairie Trillium.
- **6 Jacob's Ladder** spaced 1½ feet apart in a grouping to the right of the Pennsylvania Sedge and Prairie Trillium.
- **2 Smooth Blue Aster** spaced 2 feet apart to the right of the Jacob's Ladder.
- **7 Christmas Fern** spaced 1½ feet apart along the back edge of the garden, to the right of the Goatsbeard.
- **5 Tufted Hairgrass** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping to the right of the Smooth Blue Aster and Christmas Fern.
- **5 Jack-in-the-Pulpit** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping to the right of the Tufted Hairgrass.
- **2 Cinnamon Fern** spaced 2 feet apart to the right of the Jack-in-the-Pulpit and Tufted Hairgrass.
- **6 Canada Anemone** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping to the right of the Cinnamon Fern, towards the front of the garden.
- **1 Black Cohosh** at the back edge of the garden, to the right of the Cinnamon Fern.
- **7 Pennsylvania Sedge** spaced 1 foot apart along the front right corner of the garden, to the right of the Canada Anemone and in front of the Black Cohosh.
- **5 Prairie Trillium** spaced 1 foot apart scattered between the Pennsylvania Sedge and the Black Cohosh.
- **3 Smooth Blue Aster** spaced 2 feet apart in a grouping at the back right corner of the garden, to the right of the Black Cohosh and Prairie Trillium.
- **7 Jack-in-the-Pulpit** spaced 1 foot apart in a grouping between the Pennsylvania Sedge and Smooth Blue Aster on the right edge of the garden.



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

### Option One:

- Jacob's Ladder
- Goatsbeard
- Cinnamon Fern

### Option Two:

- Canada Anemone
- Smooth Blue Aster
- Tufted Hairgrass

## 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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