

Why native plants? Our birds + pollinators need them to survive.

Pollinators like the Royal Fritillary Butterfly are disappearing from Pennsylvania because their habitat is disappearing. These butterflies can only lay their eggs on native violet plants—their host plant. Many of us consider violets a weed. We spray them with pesticides to make our lawns look perfect. The Royal Fritillary is in big trouble.



Monarch Butterflies can only lay their eggs on milkweed plants. Pennsylvania gardeners pull up milkweed plants because once they bloom, they get big. They don't look "pretty" like marigolds, geraniums, petunias and other popular non-native plants that we buy and plant every summer. So monarchs are becoming extinct.

NATIVE PLANTS are species of plants, shrubs and trees that grew in Pennsylvania 500 years ago—before European settlers arrived. Ninety percent of our native insects are specialists that feed on three or fewer families of plants. They cannot eat the exotic plants that have become common in our yards.

Pennsylvania birds cannot find enough caterpillars and other insects in our yards to feed to their young. In the past 50 years, North America has lost 29% of the bird population. Billions of Birds have been lost. A landmark study of suburban Maryland backyards found that the typical yard does not have enough insects to support all the birds that need them. Baby birds can't eat bird seed. Baby birds need thousands of caterpillars to survive the first two weeks of life.

In the next 50 years, what we plant in our yards will determine the kind of wildlife that we have in Pennsylvania. Oak trees are gigantic bird feeders. They support more than 500 species of beneficial insects and pollinators. By planting natives, gardeners can help retain our natural history and the beauty and diversity of Penn's Woods.



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