

Native Plants for New England Rain Gardens

This plant list includes native plant species and cultivars that are adaptable, available, and have been widely successful in our northern New England region. It is a place to begin, but it is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all plants that may be used in rain gardens. Plant enthusiasts may want to consult other resources and try new plants on their own, but those who want a “Tried and True” list of plants to choose from may find all that they need right here. We use natives because rain gardens may border natural areas and we want to avoid introducing new non-native plants into the environment.

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PLANT LIST KEY



RAIN GARDEN PLANTING ZONE

The plant list identifies the ideal rain garden planting zone for each plant (characterized by soil moisture).

BASE: Periodic or frequent standing water may keep the root zone wet for several days at a time. After the initial establishment period, Base Zone plants should also be tolerant of dry periods up to two weeks during the growing season.

SLOPE: Periodically wet or saturated soils during larger storms. Plants in the Slope Zone can help to protect against erosion once established. Shallow residential rain gardens may not have a definitive slope zone.

BERM: Drier soils, infrequently subject to inundation or saturation. This zone may be a raised berm or simply the perimeter of the rain garden. Plants should be quite drought tolerant and blend into the existing landscape of the site.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Exposure - Plants are adapted to either full sun (≥ 6 hours of direct sunlight), partial sun (3-6 hours of direct sunlight), or full shade (≤ 3 hours of direct sunlight). Consider that some areas of the garden may be sunny and some made be shady and that the exposure may change throughout the seasons.

Soil Moisture - Clay soils tend to stay wet for longer periods than sandy, well-drained soils. There is also variation in soil moisture between the rain garden planting zones. Use the soil moisture preferences to choose plants that tolerate the conditions in your rain garden and to place them in the proper zone.

Plant Spacing - Mature size is given as a range because it varies greatly depending on cultivars and environment. The height and spread (width) of each plant is listed. Space plants to allow them to grow to their full size. Consider placing taller plants in the center or back of the garden with shorter plants layered under or in front of them. Ground covers work well on the berm.

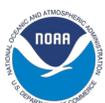
Bloom Period & Color - Consider how different colored flowers will complement each other in the garden. Select plants with early, middle, and late season blooms to provide interest and support pollinators throughout the season.

USDA Hardiness Zone - The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone is the standard used to indicate which plants can survive the winter based on the average annual minimum winter temperature for a given location. New England hardiness zones range from 3 in the northern parts of the region to 7 in the southern and coastal areas.

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References:

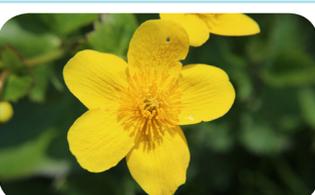
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University of New Hampshire
Cooperative Extension

Scientific Name Common Name	Rain Garden Zone			Soil Moisture	Light Exposure	Bloom Period & Color						Mature Size		USDA Hardiness Zone	Attractive to:	Plant Notes
	Base	Slope	Berm			May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Height (feet)	Spread (feet)			

PERENNIALS

 <small>Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension</small>	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i> Red columbine		•	•			•	•						1-2.5'	1'	3-8	  	Reseeds freely in the garden.
 <small>Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension</small>	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i> Swamp milkweed	•				 		•	•	•				3-6'	2'	3-9	  	Forms attractive pods which split and release hairy white seeds. Monarch larval host.
 <small>Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension</small>	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i> Butterfly milkweed			•				•	•	•				1-3'	1-1.5'	4-9	  	Does not like wet feet - keep on dry berm. Monarch larval host.
 <small>Pixabay</small>	<i>Caltha palustris</i> Marsh marigold	•				 	•							0.5-1'	1-1.5'	3-7		Provides bright yellow color early in spring before anything else blooms, then goes dormant in summer.
 <small>@Donald Cameron, 2015</small>	<i>Chelone glabra</i> White turtlehead	•				  				•	•			1-4'	1-2'	4-8	 	Larval host for Baltimore Checkerspot butterfly.
 <small>@Jason Sachs, 2015</small>	<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i> Common boneset	•				 				•	•			2-4'	2'	2-10	  	Prefers soil with a significant amount of organic matter.

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Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	 Eutrochium (formerly <i>Eupatorium</i>) purpureum Sweet Joe Pye weed	•				 								3-6'	3'	3-8	 	Popular cultivars include 'Gateway' (6' tall) and 'Little Joe' (3' tall). Other <i>Eutrochium</i> species are also suitable.
Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	 Gentiana clausa Closed gentian or Meadow bottle gentian	•				 								1-3'	1-2'	3-8		True blue flowers never fully open. Good understory plants.
Pixabay	 Geranium maculatum Spotted crane's bill			•										1'	1-1.5'	4-8	 	Geraniums come in many species and cultivars. 'Spessart' is a popular cultivar with pink early summer bloom. 'Rozanne' is a blue, late summer bloom.
@Arthur Haines, New England Wildflower Society	 Helenium autumnale Common sneezeweed	•												2-5'	3'	3-8	 	Orange and red-colored cultivars available.
Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	 Iris versicolor Blue iris or Blue flag	•				 								2-3'	2-3'	2-7	 	Sturdy plant with thick rhizomes. Great choice for placing near the rain garden inlet and outlet.
Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	 Lobelia cardinalis Cardinal flower	•				 								2-4'	2'	3-8	  	Lobelia will often reseed itself and migrate in the garden.

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PERENNIALS																		
	Lobelia siphilitica Great blue lobelia	•				 			•	•	•			1.5-5'	1-1.5'	4-8	  	Excellent for damp, clay soil.
	Monarda fistulosa Beebalm or Wild bergamot		•			 		•	•	•				4-5'	3'	3-8	   	There are many attractive cultivars of Monarda in a variety of colors. Powdery mildew is common, but not especially harmful.
	Penstemon digitalis Foxglove beardtongue	•	•	•		 			○	○				2-4'	1.5'	3-8	 	Reseeds freely.
	Rudbeckia laciniata Green-headed or Cutleaf coneflower	•	•			 			•	•	•			3-6'	3-4'	3-9	 	Spreads vigorously from underground rhizomes. Other Rudbeckias are also commonly used.
	Symphotrichum (formerly Aster) novae-angliae New England aster	•	•								•	•	•	2.5-6'	2-3'	4-8	 	Nectar source for Monarchs. Important pollinator plant in late fall.
	Symphotrichum (formerly Aster) novi-belgii New York American-aster	•									•	•	•	2.5-6'	3'	4-8		'Purple Dome' is a popular, compact variety (1.5 - 2' tall and slightly wider); purple with orange center flowers.

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PERENNIALS & GRASSES

 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	Verbena hastata Blue vervain or Swamp verbena	•												2-5'	2-3'	3-9	  	Tends to be tall and narrow; pinch the tops off to encourage branching and bushier growth.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	Vernonia noveboracensis New York ironweed	•												4-6'	2-4'	5-8	  	Good nectar source for Monarch butterflies.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	Zizia aurea Golden alexanders	•	•											1-2'	3-4'	4-9	  	Good choice for heavy, clay soils.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	Panicum virgatum Switchgrass or Panic grass		•	•										3-6'	2'	2-9	 	Caution - may spread by seed. Dotted Skipper larval host. Many new varieties available.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	Schizachyrium scoparium Little bluestem			•										2-3'	1'	3-8	 	Best suited for berm. Brown, bronze red in fall. Caution - may spread by seed.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	Sorghastrum nutans Indian grass		•	•										5-7'	2'	2-9	 	Caution - may spread by seed.

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SHRUBS

 @William Cullina, 2015	<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i> Red chokeberry	•	•																6-10'	3-5'	4-9		'Brilliantissima' is good for fall color. Red berries in fall. Small white flowers in spring. Prefers acidic soil.
 @Dawn Denizer, 2015	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> Buttonbush	•								○	○	○	○	○	○				3-6'	3-6'	3-9	  	Does best with consistently moist soil.
 @Donald Cameron, 2015	<i>Clethra alnifolia</i> Summersweet or Sweet pepper bush	•	•							○	○								4-8'	4-6'	4-9	   	Many cultivars available. Prefers acidic soil.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	<i>Comptonia peregrina</i> Sweet fern			•							●	●							2-4'	4-8'	2-6	 	Leaves fragrant when crushed. Prefers acidic soil.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i> Common witch-hazel	•	•																20-25'	20-25'	3-8		Yellow leaves in fall. Spreads by suckering.
 Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension	<i>Ilex verticillata</i> Common winterberry	•										○							4-12'	4-12'	3-9	  	Red berries in winter. Plant a compatible male pollinator. Prefers acidic soil.

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 <p>Morella (formerly <i>Myrica</i>) caroliniensis Small bayberry</p>		•	•	💧	☀️ 🌅	●	●	●						●	●	●	5-10'	5-10'	2-9	🐦	Small, fragrant, waxy berries.
 <p>Physocarpus opulifolius Common ninebark or Eastern ninebark</p>	•	•	•	💧 💧 💧	☀️ 🌅			○	○								5-8'	4-6'	2-8	🐝 🐦	Purple-leaved cultivars are popular. Tolerates clay soils.
 <p>Rhus aromatica Fragrant sumac</p>		•	•	💧	☀️ 🌅	●	●							●	●		2-6'	6-10'	3-9	🐝 🦋 🐦	Use 'Gro-lo' only, as others are too large. Prefers acidic soil.
 <p>Swida (formerly <i>Cornus</i>) amomum Silky dogwood</p>	•	•		💧	☀️ 🌅			○	○					●			6-12'	6-12'	4-8	🐦	Clusters of blue berries in summer.
 <p>Swida (formerly <i>Cornus</i>) racemosa Gray dogwood</p>	•			💧	☀️ 🌅				○								4-15'	10-15'	4-8	🦋 🐦	Creamy, white flowers and berries in late summer. Spreads by suckering.
 <p>Swida (formerly <i>Cornus</i>) sericea Redosier dogwood</p>	•			💧 💧	☀️ 🌅	●		○	○						●		6-10'	6-10'	3-8	🦋 🐦	Prune old stems out to encourage young, red stems the next winter.

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 <p><i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i> Lowbush blueberry</p>	•	•								○		●	●	●	●			0.5-2'	2'	2-5		Does well in acidic, poor soil. Small blueberries. Burgundy fall foliage.	
 <p><i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i> Highbush blueberry</p>	•	•								○		●	●	●	●			6-12'	8-12'	3-7		Prefers acidic soil. Large blueberries and good fall color.	
 <p><i>Viburnum dentatum</i> Arrowwood</p>			•						●	●				●	●			6-9'	6-15'	3-8		Attractive flowers and berries. Susceptible to Viburnum leaf beetle.	
 <p><i>Viburnum lentago</i> Nannyberry</p>	•	•								○				●	●	●			14-16'	6-12'	2-8		Berries eaten by many species of birds and wildlife.
 <p><i>Viburnum opulus</i> Cranberrybush</p>			•							○	○			●	●	●			8-12'	10-15'	3-8		Attractive flowers and berries. Susceptible to Viburnum leaf beetle.

SHRUBS

Cathy Neal, UNH Coop. Ext.

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@Donald Cameron, 2015

@Arthur Haines, New England Wildflower Society

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 <p>Athyrium angustum Northern lady fern</p>	•																1-2'	1'	3-8		Hybrids equally suitable.
 <p>Dryopteris marginalis Marginal wood fern</p>		•	•														1-3'	1.5'	3-8		Leathery, blue-green.
 <p>Matteuccia struthiopteris Ostrich fern</p>	•																3-6'	2.5'	3-8		Large, arching fronds.
 <p>Onoclea sensibilis Sensitive fern</p>	•																2-3'	1.5'	2-10		Spreads easily to form large colonies.
 <p>Osmunda claytoniana Interrupted fern</p>		•															3-4'	3'	2-8		Best in acidic soil with consistent moisture.
 <p>Osmunda regalis Royal fern</p>	•																3-6'	1.5'	3-10		

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FERNS

 ©Donald Cameron, 2015	<i>Osmundastrum cinnamomeum</i> Cinnamon fern	•																3-5'	3'	2-10		Large, grows in clumps.
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RUSHES & SEDGES

 ©Donald Cameron, 2015	<i>Carex pensylvanica</i> Pennsylvania sedge		•	•														0.5-1'	0.5'	4-8		
 ©Arthur Hoines, New England Wildflower Society	<i>Carex stricta</i> Tussock or Upright sedge	•																2-3'	1'	5-8	 	Eyed Brown larval host.
 ©Donald Cameron, 2015	<i>Carex vulpinoidea</i> Common fox or Fox sedge	•																1-3'	1.5'	3-7		Red, brown fruit.
 ©Marilee Lovitt, 2015	<i>Juncus effusus</i> Common or Soft rush	•	•															6.5'	1'	2-9		Tolerant of diverse conditions. Thrives in full sun, finely textured soils.