

Native Plants

Native plants seem to be all the rage in horticulture circles these days, and for good reason. Our native flora are far more resilient than non-native species and provide a multitude of benefits for local wildlife and pollinators. For too long, gardeners have planted many species that are not naturally occurring in North America. In many cases, these plants are ill-suited to survive our climatic extremes and provide little benefit to insects and animals. More concerning, is the fact that many of these plants have become invasive, escaping cultivation and spreading into forests and woodlands.



Justin Stefanski,
Extension Agent II

They easily outcompete native plants and quickly become the dominant species. The list of invasive plants in Tennessee often comes as a shock for home gardeners. Some of our most commonly used plants are now listed as invasive, including burning bush, winter creeper euonymus, mimosa, English ivy, Bradford pear, and wisteria. Chinese privet and Japanese honeysuckle are two of the worst perpetrators, and both plants were once commonly sold to unsuspecting home gardeners. The transition away from non-native species to native species has been one of the greatest conservation successes in recent times.

Fortunately for us here in middle Tennessee, we are located in one of the most biological diverse biomes in the country. The cedar glades are home to numerous endemic species of plants and animals, that are entirely unique to our area. Many of the plants found in the glades are specially adapted to grow in poor soil, and are able thrive in both wet and dry conditions. These unique plant communities help to support an array of animals and pollinators. While a cedar glade may not look like much from afar, learning about the incredible diversity found within them makes one appreciate what a precious habitat they truly are.

If you would like to learn more about gardening with native plants and cedar glades, then you are in luck. Later this spring, I will be hosting a course that is specifically geared toward both topics. This three-part series will cover the benefits of native plants, how best to incorporate them into home landscapes, and other unique information related to cedar glades. Three in-classroom sessions will take place from 6:00-7:30 pm, meeting on March 26th, April 2nd, and April 9th. Three field hikes will also be included in the course. These hikes will take place at local natural areas and will highlight the unique plants found within cedar glades in their natural habitat. The dates for the hikes will be announced during the course.

I hope you consider signing up for this unique course, which is guaranteed to expand your knowledge and appreciation of our local plant communities and unique habitats. Class size is limited, so register now to ensure your spot in the course. To do so, please call the Rutherford County Extension office, at 615-898-7710. The cost for attending will be \$30 per participant. For questions, please feel free to contact me at jski@utk.edu or at our office line listed above.

Happy Gardening!



Springtime in the cedar glades (photo J. Stefanski)