

## Important Native Garden Definitions

**Spring Ephemerals** - These are perennial woodland wildflowers that do all their above-ground growth in a short period of time. They take advantage of spring sunshine before the deciduous trees leaf out and produce shade. Their above-ground growth often disappears by summer. They provide pollen for the early pollinating insects such as flies, little bees, and bumble bee queens coming out of hibernation.

**Woodland** – This term usually refers to land covered by deciduous (lose their leaves) trees that create shade or filtered sunlight. Deciduous woodland wildflowers have the ability to grow without direct sunlight. The soil is usually cooler and slower to dry out due to a layer of humus (decaying plant material) that typically covers the soil. Most woodland wildflowers rarely do well in full sun.

**Prairie** – These areas have few trees or shrubs and direct sun all day. The soil is warmer and dryer than in a woodland. Grasses and forbs (flowers) are the dominant vegetation.

**Wetland** - Land that has water at or near the surface during at least the growing season. Wetland plants in partial shade will tolerate slightly dryer conditions.

**Native Plant** – These are plants found naturally growing in an area before European settlement (in the Americas).

**Non-native Plants** – These are plants that have been introduced into an area from other areas. Some plants come from other states, countries, or are horticulturally developed from plants (native or non-native). For example, a specific species of a plant may be found growing in Illinois but it was not found growing in Wisconsin until it was introduced there by people. Purple Coneflower is an excellent example. This type of non-native is usually still used by native animals and is not as detrimental as a species from another continent.

Many non-natives (exotics) are not used by native birds, insects, and other wildlife. They generally do not have local predators such as insects and other herbivores to hold them in check. This allows them to out-compete native plants for resources.

**Exotic Plants** - These plants came into North America after European settlement. Many are classed as invasive species.

**Invasive Plant Species** – These non-native plants grow aggressively, out competing desirable plants. They are usually adaptable to a wide variety of growing conditions. Many invasive species are classed as noxious weeds by local communities.

**Pollinators** – These are animals (primarily insects) that help transfer pollen from one flower to another. Some are specific to a particular genus or species. Others are more general. Pollinators are responsible for about one-third of the food we eat. Bees are the

most important and efficient pollinators. Changes in climate, the use of chemicals, and loss of habitat are causing sharp declines in pollinators.

**Host plant** - These are plants that provide food for caterpillars. Some caterpillars only feed on specific kinds of plants. For example, if you want monarch butterflies you need to have milkweed plants for the adults to lay eggs on and for the caterpillars to eat.

**Perennial** – These are plants that live for more than two years. Many native plants are perennial. Perennials do not produce flowers during the first few years of their life. All their energy is used to produce roots and non-flowering parts. Once mature they usually produce flowers and seeds each year for many years. Blooming time is relatively short compared to annuals.

**Biennial**- These are plants that take two years to complete their life cycle. In the first year, they put down tap roots and usually only produce a basal rosette of leaves. In the second year, they put all their energy into producing flowers and seeds. They die off after their seed is produced.

**Annual** – These plants complete their life cycles in one year. Usually, germinate easily. Many plants we consider weeds are annuals. They usually produce flowers over a long period of time.

**Weed** - The best description of a weed is a plant out of place or in a place it is not wanted. Ecologically a weed is a pioneer species, occupying bare ground until perennials can come in and have time to get established making them valuable for the job of holding soil in place.

### **Growing conditions- light**

**Full Sun** - At least 6 hours of direct sunlight a day-preferably continuous.

**Part Sun/Part Shade** - **Part sun** is not the same as part shade. Part sun means that there is direct sunlight 4-6 hrs/day. The afternoon sunlight period is stronger than the morning sun and provides conditions closer to full sun. **Part shade** is less than 4 hrs/day of direct sun and has dappled sunlight the rest of the day or for the whole day. If a plant does not flower or does not grow well it may need more light. If a plant looks sunburned or “wilty” it may need less direct sun.

**Shade** – Means little or no direct sunlight. Sunlight can be blocked by tree leaves, buildings, or fencing. Solid shade provided by trees with dense, large leaves (such as Maples) may not allow most native flowers to grow except spring ephemerals. Buildings may provide shade that is too dense to grow plants with flowers. Remember that shade follows the sun creating shaded areas during different parts of the day.

