



Tennessee Native Rain Garden Plant Recommendations

Background

Rain gardens are shallow, bowl-shaped depressions that catch and soak in rainwater runoff from rooftops and pavement. They are managed to support a variety of deep-rooted native plants that promote infiltration over time. They can also provide food and cover for a variety of desirable wildlife, like songbirds, pollinators, and beneficial insects. All plants contained in this list are native to a region of Tennessee and can tolerate the cycles of inundation and drying expected in rain gardens.

How to Use This List

This list of recommended rain garden plants is organized by plant type. The “Location” column to the far left contains information related to placement in the rain garden, where lower or “L” corresponds with the base of the bowl and persistently wet soil conditions, middle or “M” corresponds with the middle or moderately wet soil conditions, and upper or “U” corresponds with areas near the lip or perimeter where the soil is driest. The plants highlighted in the “ALL STARS” category are ones that have been observed to establish and persist under challenging management conditions. These plants may be best used in low-maintenance scenarios or as replacements where others have failed.

Since there are over 2,400 species of vascular plants documented in Tennessee, there are certainly others that may thrive in rain gardens and qualify for this list. Similarly, as we gain more experience with rain gardens and observe longer maturation periods, those with shortcomings may be removed from this list. As such, this is an evolving list that will be updated frequently and published with a date in the footnote. If you have suggestions or observations you would like to contribute to this effort, please email those to raingardens@tennessee.edu.

Rain Garden All-Stars

Common Name	Latin Name	Height (ft)	Spread (ft)	Location	Light	Pollinators	Birds	Winter Interest	Drought	Clay Soil	Aggressiveness	Bloom or Winter Interest Information												Maintenance Notes		
												J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D			
Ferns, Grasses, Sedges and																										
Christmas Fern	<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i>	1-2	1-2	U-M	PSh-Sh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Areate at base in poorly drained soils.	
Cinnamon Fern*	<i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>	3-6	2-4	M-L	PSh-Sh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Do not allow it to dry out.	
Sensitive Fern	<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i>	3-4	3-4	M-L	PSh-Sh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Do not allow it to dry out.	
Switch Grass*	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	3-6	2-3	M-L	S-PS								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cut back to ground in late winter/ early spring.	
Common Rush*	<i>Juncus effusus</i>	2-4	2-4	L	S-PS								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	May cut back in early spring; may be divided.	
Cherokee Sedge	<i>Carex cherokeensis</i>	0.5-1	0.5-1	M-L	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cut back to ground in late winter.	
River Oats	<i>Chasmodon latifolium</i>	2-5	1.5-2	M	S-PS								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cut back to ground in early spring.	
Joe Pye Weed*	<i>Eutrochium purpureum</i>	5-7	2-4	M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cut to the ground in late winter.	
Orange Butterflyweed*	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	1-2.5	1-1.5	U-M	Sun								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Does not transplant well.	
Milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	4-5	2-3	M-L	Sun								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Does not transplant well.	
Orange Coneflower*	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>	2-3	2-2.5	U-M	Sun								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Deadhead spent flowers to encourage rebloom.	
American Alumroot *	<i>Heuchera americana</i>	1-2	1-1.5	M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Divide clumps every 3-4 years.	
Blue Flag	<i>Iris versicolor</i>	2-2.5	2-2.5	M-L	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Divide after bloom.	
Copper Iris	<i>Iris fulva</i>	2-3	1-2	M-L	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Divide after bloom.	
Blue Star	<i>Amsonia hubrichtii</i>	2-3	2-3	M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cut back by 6" after bloom to keep shape.	
False Blue Indigo	<i>Baptisia australis</i>	3-4	3-4	U-M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Does not transplant well.	
New England Aster*	<i>Symphoricarpos nove-angliae</i>	3-6	2-3	M	Sun								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Trim back before mid-July to control height.	
Rose Mallow*	<i>Hibiscus lasiocarpus</i>	3-7	2-3	M-L	S-PS								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Keep soil moist throughout growing season.	
Slender Mountain Mint	<i>Pycnanthemum tenuifolium</i>	2-3	2-3	U-M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cut back in June; divide in winter.	
Herbaceous																										
Gray dogwood*	<i>Cornus racemosa</i>	10-15	10-15	M-L	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Remove suckers if thicket is not desired.
Beautyberry*	<i>Callicarpa americana</i>	3-6	3-6	M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	May die back to ground, or cut back by 2 inches.
Witch hazel*	<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>	15-20	15-20	M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Prune in early spring.
Smooth Hydrangea*	<i>Hydrangea arborescens</i>	3-5	3-5	M	PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Prune close to ground in late winter.
Inkberry*	<i>Ilex glabra</i>	5-8	3-5	M-L	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Remove suckers if colony is not desired; prune to shape.
Virginia Sweetstire*	<i>Itea virginica</i>	4-6	4-6	M-L	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Remove suckers if colony is not desired.
Buttonbush*	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	5-12	4-8	M-L	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Cut back to ground to rejuvenate.
Ninebark	<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>	4-6	4-6	U-M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Prune after bloom or to the ground to rejuvenate.
Oakleaf Hydrangea*	<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i>	6-8	6-8	M	S-PS-PSh								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Mulch to retain soil moisture.

* Denotes observations from Nashville-Davidson County Study; all others observed in Knoxville area.

Herbaceous Perennials

Location	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	HEIGHT	BLOOM COLOR	BLOOM	SPACING	LIGHT
M, U	<i>Amsonia tabernaemontana</i>	Blue Star	3 ft.	Blue	March-May	3 ft.	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	Columbine	2-3 ft.	Pink/Yellow	April-May	1 ft.	Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Asclepias incarnata tuberosa</i>	Swamp Milkweed	3-4 ft	pink	May-June	3 ft	Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Aster novae anglaise</i>	New England Aster	4 ft	deep pink-purple	Aug-Sept	4 ft	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Baptisia australis</i>	Blue Wild Indigo	4 ft.	Blue-purple	May-June	3 ft	Sun
L, M	<i>Catha palustris</i>	Marsh Marigold	1-1.5 ft.	Yellow	March-May	1ft.	Sun/Part Shade
L, M	<i>Chelone glabra</i>	White Turtlehead	3 ft	White	Aug-Oct	2.5 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M	<i>Chelone lyonii</i>	Pink Turtlehead	3 ft	Pink	Aug-Oct	2.5 ft	Sun/Part Shade
U	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Purple Coneflower	3-5 ft.	Purple	July-Sept	2ft.	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Eupatorium coelestinum</i>	Mistflower	2 ft	Lavender Blue	Aug-Sept	2 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Eupatorium maculatum - atropurpureum</i>	Joe Pye Weed, Queen of Meadow	up to 6 ft	Mauve	July-Sept	4 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Eupatorium maculatum - 'Gateway'</i>	Dwarf Joe Pye Weed	4-5 ft	Mauve	July-Sept	4 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Geranium maculatum</i>	Wild Geranium	1-2 ft.	Pale Pink-Lilac	April-May	1 ft.	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M, U	<i>Helianthus angustifolius</i>	Swamp Sunflower	5-8 ft	Yellow	Sept-Oct	3 ft	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Hibiscus coccineus Americana</i>	Scarlet Rose Mallow	6 ft	Scarlet Red	July-Sept	6 ft	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>	Rose Mallow	3-8 ft	White w/ Maroon Eye	July-Sept	4 ft	Sun
M, U	<i>Iris cristata</i>	Crested Iris	6"-9"	Pale Blue	April	1 ft.	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M	<i>Iris fulva</i>	Copper Iris	2-4 ft	Reddish-Copper	May-June	1-2 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M	<i>Iris versicolor</i>	Blue Flag Iris	1-3 ft	Blue	May-June	2 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	Cardinal Flower	1-4 ft	Red	July-Sept	2 ft	Sun/Part Shade

L, M	<i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>	Great Blue Lobelia	1-4 ft	Blue	Aug-Oct	2 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	BeeBalm	2-4 ft	Scarlet Red	July-Sept	2 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Wild Bergamont	2-4 ft	Pink-Violet-Purple	July-Sept	2 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Phlox maculata</i>	Meadow Phlox	2-4 ft	Reddish -Purple	June-Sept	3 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>	Brown-Eyed Susan/Orange Coneflower	3-5 ft.	Gold Yellow	July-Oct	3-4 ft	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Solidago rugosa</i>	Rough-Leaf Goldenrod	5 ft	Yellow	Aug-Oct	3-4 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Solidago rugosa, 'Fireworks'</i>	Fireworks Goldenrod	4 ft	Yellow	Aug-Oct	3-4 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>	Foam Flower	1 ft.	White	April-May	1 ft.	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M, U	<i>Vernonia gigantea</i>	Ironweed	4-7 ft	Bright Purple	Aug-Oct	3 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Actaea pachypoda</i>	White Baneberry, Misty Blue Doll's Eyes	2 ft.	White	March-May	2 ft.	Shade
M, U	<i>Liatris spicata</i>	Dense Blazing Star	2-6 ft.	Purple-Pink	July-Sept	2 ft.	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Ratibida pinnata</i>	Grey Headed Coneflower	3-4 ft.	Yellow	July-Sept	2-3 ft.	Sun
M, U	<i>Boltonia asteroides</i>	Pink Beauty, False Aster	4 ft.	Pink-white	Aug-Oct.	4 ft.	Sun

Shrubs

Location	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	HEIGHT	BLOOM	BLOOM	SPACING	LIGHT
L, M, U	<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	Red Chokeberry	6-10 ft	White	April-May	8 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>	Black Chokeberry	5-9 ft	White	April-May	5 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Callicarpa americana</i>	American Beauty Berry	5-7 ft	Pink	June-Aug	5 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M, U	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis***</i>	Buttonbush	8-12 ft	White	June-Aug	10 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Clethra alnifolia, 'Hummingbird'</i>	Summersweet, 'HB	3 ft	White	July-Aug	3 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Clethra alnifolia, 'Ruby Spice'</i>	Summersweet, 'RS'	6 ft	Pink	July-Aug	5 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Cornus stolonifera Racemose</i>	Red/Yellow Twig Dogwood	6-9 ft	White	May-June	6 ft	Sun/Part Shade

L, M, U	<i>Euonymus americanus</i>	Hearts-a-burstin	4-6ft.	White/Pink	May	5 ft.	Part Shade/ Shade
M, U	<i>Fothergilla gardenii</i>	Dwarf Fothergilla	3-5 ft	White	April-May	4-5 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Hamamelis vernalis</i>	Vernal Witchhazel	6-10 ft	Yellow-Red	Jan-March	8 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M,U	<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i>	Oakleaf Hydrangea	5-10 ft	White	June-July	6 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
M, U	<i>Ilex glabra</i>	Inkberry	6-10 ft	White	May	8 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	Common Winterberry	6-10 ft	White	May	8 ft	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Itea virginica</i>	Virginia Sweetspire	3-5 ft	White	May-June	4 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	Spicebush	6-12 ft	Yellow	April	6	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M, U	<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>	Ninebark	5-10ft.	Pinkish White	May	8 ft.	Sun/Part Shade
L, M, U	<i>Rhododendron viscosum</i>	Swamp Azalea	3-8 ft.	White	May-June	5-7 ft.	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M, U	<i>Rosa palustris</i>	Swamp Rose	6-7 ft	Dark Pink	June-July	6 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	Arrowwood Possumhaw	6 -12 ft	Creamy White	May-June	6-12 ft	Part Shade/Shade
L, M, U	<i>Viburnum nudum</i>	Smooth Witherod Viburnum	6 ft	Creamy White	May-June	7-8 ft	Part Shade/ Shade

Perennial Ferns

Location	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	HEIGHT	SPACING	LIGHT
M, U	<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	Lady Fern	2-3 ft.	1 ft.	Shade
M, U	<i>Matteucia struthiopteris</i>	Ostrich Fern	2-3 ft.	2 ft.	Shade
L, M, U	<i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>	Cinnamon Fern	4 ft.	2 ft.	Shade
L, M	<i>Osmunda regalis</i>	Royal Fern	2-5 ft.	2 ft.	Shade
M, U	<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i>	Christmas Fern	2-4 ft.	1 ft.	Shade

Perennial Grasses, Sedges, and Rushes

Location	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	HEIGHT	SPACING	LIGHT
L, M, U	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	Big Blue Stem	4-8 ft.	2 ft.	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Andropogon glomeratus</i>	Bushy Blue Stem	3-4 ft.	2 ft.	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Carex stricta</i>	Tussock Sedge	2-3 ft	1.5 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	River Oats	3 ft	2 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
L	<i>Juncus effuses</i>	Soft Rush	4 ft	1 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M, U	<i>Panicum virgatum</i> , 'heavy metal'	Metal Blue Switchgrass	3-5 ft	3 ft	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Panicum virgatum</i> , 'northwind'	Northwind Switch Grass	5 ft	3 ft	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Rhynchospora colorata</i>	White Star Sedge	2 ft	2 ft	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem	3 ft.	2.ft.	Sun
L	<i>Scirpus cyperinus</i>	Woolgrass	6 ft	1 ft	Sun/Part Shade
M, U	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Indian grass	3-6 ft	2-3 ft.	Sun/Part Shade

Location	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	HEIGHT	SPACING	LIGHT
L, M, U	<i>Carex eburnea</i>	Cedar Sedge	0.5 ft.	1 ft.	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Carex albicans</i>	Oak Sedge	3-4 ft.	2 ft.	Sun
L, M, U	<i>Carex muskingumensis</i>	Palm Sedge	2-3 ft	1.5 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M	<i>Carex vulpinoidea</i>	Fox Sedge	3 ft	2 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
L	<i>Carex aureolensis</i>	Gold Sedge	10 in	1 ft	Part Shade/ Shade
L, M, U	<i>Carex pensylvanica</i>	Pennsylvania Sedge	0.5-1 ft	0.5-1 ft	Part Shade/ Shade