
SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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Know Your Natives


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Showy Native Perennials of Southern Indiana

When picking ornamentals, if you're like me, you're looking for color and design, so I went on a hunt especially to find natives I wasn't familiar with.

- **Nodding Pink Onion** (*Allium cernuum*) is especially versatile - lives a long time, likes full sun but will adapt to deep shade, provides late-summer color, thrives in rocky hillsides as well as damp clay. It produces clusters of pinkish purple "droplets" on 2-foot stems. Available from *Vermont Wild Flower Farm*. 


- **Queen of the Prairie** (*Filipendula rubra*) is more shrub-like, reminding me of spirea. It grows 3-5 ft. high with big "lobey" leaves and large, feathery clusters of fragrant, pink flowers. Available from *Vermont Wild Flower Farm*.


- **Penstemon** (*P. digitalis*) is more common in the West but has one variety that does well in areas like ours with moist winters and humid summers. Commonly called fox-glove beardtongue or smooth penstemon, this native is found in prairies, woodland edges and along railroad tracks in much of the eastern half of the country. One cultivar to look for is 'Husker Red'--also called Cornhuskers (from its "alma mater," the University of Nebraska) in honor of the school's color because of the maroon foliage. It was the Perennial Plant Association Plant of the Year in 1996. Because of that, you'll find it in many large nursery catalogs such as Breck's. It is a biennial rather than a perennial, but sometimes is successful in self-seeding. 

All photos: North Carolina Extension



- **Bluestar Willow** (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*) Bluestar Willow's fine, dense foliage makes it a good choice as a backdrop. It combines well with Siberian iris, butterfly weed, daylilies, dark heucheras, hardy mums and tall sedums, according to the University of Wisconsin Horticulture Extension Division. One online source of plants is <https://www.usperennials.com/>.

- **Swamp Rose Mallow** (*Hibiscus moscheutos*) A happy surprise on this list of Indiana perennials was that my beloved Mallow is a native. With frequent watering, my year-old specimen bloomed profusely at least four different times during the summer, far beyond the one-month window that some sources cite. You can find packets of 50 seeds of the Premium Swamp Rose Mallow at Etsy for just \$3. It may be an exaggeration to say they are dinner-plate blooms...but surely we can say at least saucer-sized. Breathtaking! One source is <https://www.directnativeplants.com/>, which will also provide a number of other native possibilities. 

- **Aromatic Aster** (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*) This is one to particularly target as it's listed as rare and even threatened, according to a USDA Fact Sheet. Aromatic Asters like well-drained moist to dry soils and full sun to partial shade. Their name comes from the balsamic aroma they emit. Seeds are available from American Meadows. 

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To locate these nurseries, type the name into your web search bar. Most of those featured here offer prices from \$2.95 to \$4.95 per packet. Plants are, of course, higher.

A full brochure on “Landscaping with Plants Native to Indiana” is available from the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society at <https://www.in.gov/dnr/nature-preserves/files/np-LandscapingNativePlantsBrochure.pdf>. There you’ll find additional categories such as winter interest,

erosion control, bird habitat, ground covers, rain garden, butterfly food, autumn color. There are also sections by location: grasslands (sun), water’s edge (sun), wood’s edge (part shade), and woodland (shade).

The cold months are a perfect time to plan your spring plantings and order your seeds before supplies of the most popular ones disappear. Happy hunting!