



What Native Species Should I Plant After I Remove Invasives?

In this new column, Question of the Quarter, the Forestry and Wildlife Team will answer a question we have received during our Advice from the Woods quarterly webinars.

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Japanese barberry covering forest floor (Photo credit: Jody Groshek)

With spring and summer in full swing, many of us are working hard to manage our forest properties or improve landscaping. Maybe you have plans to remove invasive species, or did so last summer, or maybe you just want to make your backyard more native friendly. So, what native species should we plant in place of non-native species? To answer that question, let's first ask

why plant native species in the first place?

Many forest landowners are aware of the detriments of having non-native invasive species in their woodlands; invasive species compete with native species for resources, can hinder forest regeneration, and provide poor habitat for wildlife among other things. But removing non-native species from your landscaping or backyard can be just as important. Birds are a major spreader of many non-native species, and they are often attracted to backyards where they eat invasive fruits and

spread the species into new areas. Native plants provide better food sources for wildlife and are better for native pollinator species as well. For more information on why to use native plants in landscaping, visit this [Extension article](#) .

If you have recently removed non-native species, or plan to do so, it is a good idea to encourage the growth of native species in their place. In a forest, this can be done by allowing natural regeneration to occur and monitor for resprouting or regrowth of the non-native species. If you feel the need to plant native species in your forest or landscaping, there are many great options for trees and shrubs. For more information on native perennial plants visit this [Extension article](#) .

Some of the most prolific non-native species are [shrub honeysuckles](#) , which encompasses several species. These are sometimes called “junk food” for wildlife and because of this they are spread very well. In Pennsylvania, we do have a few species of native honeysuckle, fly honeysuckle (*Lonicera canadensis*), trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), and bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*). **Trumpet honeysuckle** in particular is a great replacement for vining plants such as [oriental bittersweet](#) and grow in a variety of environments including disturbed areas, roadsides, fencerows, early successional woodlands, and forest edges. They attract ruby-throated hummingbirds, goldfinches, quail, butterflies, and bees.

Streambanks and riparian zones are often invaded by non-native species that are carried in water or on animals using streams as a travel corridor. [Japanese knotweed](#) , [glossy buckthorn](#) , and [multiflora rose](#) are non-native species commonly found in stream side areas. **Dogwoods** (*Corunus spp.*) and **willows** (*Salix spp.*) are great native options to plant along stream banks or in wet areas and do well as pioneer or early successional species in high light environments. The extensive root system of black willow (*Salix nigra*) makes it a good tree for stabilizing soil along stream banks and preventing erosion or flood damage. Black willow and red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) are large shrubs that can both be planted as live stakes and are relatively easy to establish. The dense thickets of dogwoods and willows provide shelter for wildlife and are good browse for deer as well.

In forested areas, you may be looking to plant or establish some small size trees that benefit wildlife and can grow in more closed canopy situations. **Spicebush** (*Lindera benzoin*), **witch hazel** (*Hamamelis virginiana*), and **redbud** (*Cercis canadensis*) are native trees that grow up to 30 feet tall and can create a midstory canopy layer in forests. Spicebush tolerates full shade while redbud and witch hazel partial shade, but all will also thrive in full sun conditions when planted as an

ornamental or backyard tree. Spicebush is one of the first plants to bloom and can produce flowers in late winter. Its high-energy fruits are eaten by birds and small mammals and many native moth, butterfly, and bee species utilize it as an early source of nectar. Redbud also blooms early, creating beautiful purple flowers that make a wonderful ornamental tree and its bean-like pods contain seeds eaten by a variety of wildlife. Witch hazel produces fragrant yellow flowers in the fall and birds will eat the fruit of the tree.

If you are looking to plant something smaller and shrub-like, there are a variety of native species that are both functional and ornamental. **Mapleleaf viburnum** (*Viburnum acerifolium*) is a low, dense shrub that can reach 6 feet tall. It gets clusters of white flowers, similar to [autumn olive](#) or [multiflora rose](#), and has maple-like leaves that turn purple-pink in autumn. **Winterberry** (*Ilex verticillata*) is an upright shrub in the holly family. Unlike other hollies, winterberry is not evergreen but has dense clusters of bright red berries that remain through the winter, giving the plant its name. The look is similar to [privet](#) or [Japanese barberry](#) but the fruits of winterberry are beneficial for birds, rabbits, squirrels, and deer.

If you are attempting to replace an invasive species (or more than one) from your forest or want to make your backyard landscape more ecologically friendly, knowing which native species to look for is an important first step. There are many Pennsylvania native options that can provide the look of a non-native species but have more benefits for wildlife and without the invasive tendencies.