

Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor

Where America was Built™

Fact Sheet: Native Plants



The trout lily is a native riparian (streamside) plant and an early Spring bloomer.



Native plants such as purple coneflower (left) and common milkweed (right) provide food and shelter for many types of wildlife.



WHAT IS A NATIVE SPECIES?

Every species of plant, animal, insect, and other organism has a home in some part of the world, where it has existed for thousands of years as a result of natural forces and influences such as climate, storms, moisture, soils and species interactions. Species that have evolved and lived in a particular area are **native**, or **indigenous**, to that environment. They are part of an ecological web in which all member plants and animals are dependent upon each other in some manner. When the population of one organism increases or decreases, other species are affected. Likewise, when non-native (alien, exotic) species are introduced (usually by man), unnatural competition begins that often results in a decrease or loss of native species. The impact on one species affects others as well.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIVE PLANTS

Native insects, birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and other animals are dependent on native plants for food and shelter. Some animals have a varied diet and can feed on a wide number of plant species, but others are highly specialized and may be restricted to feeding on a few, or even a single plant. Caterpillars of the monarch butterfly, for example, have evolved to feed primarily on milkweed species. These plants are called **host** plants; they provide food for at least one stage of an animal's life cycle. As exotic plants replace native species, fewer hosts are available to provide the necessary nutrition - and habitat - for our native wildlife.

NATIVE PLANTS IN THE CORRIDOR

The Corridor is part of the eastern forest region known as the Appalachian Oak Forest Region. The Corridor's dominant plants are oak trees, which thrive in temperate climates, but there are hundreds of other native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants and grasses. Many of these plants live in communities based on existing environmental factors: moisture, elevation, light, soil type, etc. Arid mountain slopes in Carbon and Luzerne counties, for instance, are suitable only for hardy plants such as pitch pine and chestnut oak, which require shallow soil and little water. There are wetland areas throughout the Corridor where skunk cabbage, cattails, and sycamore and willow trees thrive. And on cool, hilly ravines rich in acidic soil, you'll find mountain laurel, rhododendron, and Eastern hemlock, the state's official tree.



DCNR



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