



POSITION: FAVORABLE

Maryland Native Plants Program, SB 836

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, March 2, 2023

Testimony of Nancy Lawson, The Humane Gardener, LLC

When I began growing a plant called butterflyweed from seed 23 year ago, I did it because the flowers were my favorite orange color. Only later did I realize how important that plant was to butterflies, when I found a monarch caterpillar munching away on the leaves.

When I started growing tall switch grasses from seed one spring, I did it because they looked good around my wooden swing. It was only later that I realized how important native grasses are to birds, when I saw a whole flock of white-throated sparrows devouring the seedheads in autumn.

At the time, none of my local nurseries sold native plants. I hadn't learned about them in school. There weren't many books or articles written about them. Instead, it was the pollinators and birds and other animals who taught me that for wildlife, native plants are not just a preference; they are a homeland. At our place, they are the homeland of scarlet tanagers, Baltimore orioles, wood thrushes, pickerel frogs, and Eastern box turtles. Where we once had only a single butterfly species, we now have dozens. Our garden even hosts *Bombus pensylvanicus*, a threatened species better known as the American bumblebee.

These local flora and fauna are some of the original Marylanders. They are as much a part of this place as the Chesapeake Bay and the Allegheny Mountains and all the hills and valleys and rivers in between. They have intricate, interdependent relationships that ripple throughout the food webs. Our native, hometown plants are foundational to these interactions, providing food, shelter and protections from the storms throughout our ecosystems.

Yet many people don't even know their names. I only know because I did extensive research over a period of many years. I became a Maryland master gardener, master naturalist, and certified Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional, and I've written two books on nurturing local habitat.

Most people don't have time to go to such lengths to learn about plants, even if they want to help the environment. But if we strengthen our labeling and education efforts, they won't have to. They'll be able to learn what to plant on quick trips to their favorite local nursery business or quick visits to our state agency websites. SB836 will empower consumers and motivate plant sellers to do their part to nurture and restore the real, natural Maryland in their own backyards. I hope you'll join us in supporting this important legislation. Thank you!

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