



# Maryland Native Plant Society

APPRECIATION CONSERVATION EDUCATION

## **HB368 General Provisions- Commemorative Month- Maryland Native Plant Month Health and Government Operations Committee Hearing on March 13, 2025 FAVORABLE**

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and honorable members of the Committee,

The Maryland Native Plant Society supports HB368, which asks the Governor to annually proclaim May as Maryland Native Plant Month. This declaration will help new and existing native plant nurseries to better market to their customers and thereby support small local businesses throughout our state. It also gives many stakeholders who encourage the use of native plants an opportunity to highlight these crucial beneficial plant species.

Interest in native plants has been rapidly growing over the last several years, and an increasing number of gardeners are prioritizing native plants, converting lawn areas to native plant habitat and seeking out plants that benefit pollinators like native bees, birds and butterflies. The National Wildlife Federation's 2022 Consumer Gardening Report found 34% of U.S. adults purchased plants to benefit pollinators and native wildlife, and this trend has been growing over the past several years.<sup>1</sup>

The many benefits of native plants include providing food, shelter and nesting sites to pollinators and wildlife, increasing biodiversity, improving soil health, absorbing and filtering rainwater, and eliminating the need for inputs like fertilizers and supplemental water. Further, as we continue to lose habitat and combat the effects of climate change, native plants are needed as an alternative to the non-native invasive plants that are causing so much damage to our environment.

Invasive species are defined in Maryland law as species that did not evolve in our state and cause economic harm, ecological harm, environmental harm, or harm to human health. One study estimated that in 2000, the harm from invasive plants due to losses of ecosystem services and agricultural productivity cost Americans \$34 billion annually (approximately \$188 billion in 2025 dollars).<sup>2</sup> By 2023, invasive plant costs globally had grown into the hundreds of billions of dollars each year.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most pervasive invasive plants in our state, English ivy (*Hedera helix*), aggressively colonizes the ground level and the tree canopy. English ivy in the tops of trees blocks sunlight and impedes photosynthesis, weakening and then killing trees. During our increasingly windy weather, the additional weight can topple trees, creating a hazard to people and property. *Hedera helix* has also been shown to be a reservoir for bacterial leaf scorch (*Xylella fastidiosa*), which threatens oak, elm, maple and other tree species.<sup>4</sup> Thick mats of ivy on the ground support rats, mosquitoes and ticks, which can be harmful to human health.<sup>5</sup> Finally, though English ivy is often used to stabilize slopes, its shallow roots actually make it a poor choice for erosion control. There are many wonderful native alternatives to English ivy that a Maryland Native Plant Month could help to promote. The native vine, Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), is an excellent alternative, as are native ground covers like Wild

ginger (*Asarum canadense*), American alumroot (*Heuchera americana*), Golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*), and Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*).

Another invasive plant which has aggressively spread from residential and commercial yards and invaded forested areas is the shrub Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*). Japanese barberry is highly adaptable and is found growing in everything from closed canopy forests to open fields. It crowds out native plants with its dense thickets and changes the pH of the soil, making areas it has colonized even less hospitable to most native species. Its dense growth creates a humid microclimate that supports black-legged ticks, the carriers of the Lyme disease pathogen.<sup>6</sup> Many excellent native shrubs can serve as replacements for invasive Japanese barberry such as Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) and American strawberry bush (*Euonymus americanus*).

In 2023, the General Assembly passed a bill creating the Maryland Native Plants Program. A Maryland Native Plant Month declaration is an excellent companion to this Program. Together they can make a difference by spreading the word about the benefits of Maryland native plants and help grow the local businesses that sell these important plants.

The Maryland Native Plant Society asks for a FAVORABLE report on SB368.

Respectfully,

**Kirsten Hoffman**

**Treasurer, Maryland Native Plant Society**

*The Maryland Native Plant Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Our mission is to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Maryland's native plants and their habitats. Healthy natural communities help maintain biodiversity and limit climate change. We pursue our mission through education, research, advocacy, and service activities.*

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> Fallon, C. Consumer Gardening Report Finds One in Three People Turning to Native Plants, Gardening for Wildlife. (2022). <https://www.nwf.org/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2022/5-02-22-Consumer-Gardening-Report>

<sup>2</sup> Pimentel, D., L. Lach, R. Zuniga, D. Morrison. Environmental and Economic Costs of Nonindigenous Species in the United States, *BioScience*, Volume 50, Issue 1, January 2000, 53–65. [https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/Hodges/als4161/Secure/PDF%20Files/Articles/Environmental\\_and\\_Economic.pdf](https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/Hodges/als4161/Secure/PDF%20Files/Articles/Environmental_and_Economic.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Roy, H., A. Pauchard, P. Stoett, T. Renard Truong, S. Backer, et.al. 2023. IPBES Invasive Alien Species Assessment: Summary for Policymakers. Zenodo.

<sup>4</sup> North American Invasive Species Network, English Ivy. *Hedera helix* L. (Accessed 2025). <https://www.naisn.org/species/Hedera-helix/>

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Department of Forestry, Field Notes: January's Least Wanted: English Ivy. (January 19, 2021). <https://dof.virginia.gov/field-notes-januarys-least-wanted-english-ivy/>

<sup>6</sup> Swearingen, J. and J. Fulton. 2022. Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, Field Guide. Passiflora Press. <https://www.invasive.org/midatlantic/fieldguide/>