



March 11, 2025

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

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

The Green Towson Alliance writes in strong support of HB368, which requires the Governor to annually proclaim May as Maryland Native Plant Month. The observance of Maryland Native Plant Month will encourage institutions and businesses to implement programs, events, and activities that promote awareness of the vital role native plants play in our ecosystems. This bill is an essential step in educating the public on the importance of native planting while encouraging simple yet impactful actions by businesses and individuals to incorporate native species into their landscapes.

Native plants are not merely an aesthetic choice; they are a fundamental necessity for sustaining life as we know it. Without native plants, entire ecosystems unravel, leading to devastating consequences for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. About 78% to 94% of all flowering plants rely on pollinators for reproduction (Ollerton et al., 2011), and native plants provide the nectar and pollen that native bees and butterflies need to survive (<https://albany.cce.cornell.edu/gardening/native-plants-pollinators>). The loss of these plants has contributed to a 96% decline of North American bumblebee species and a 23% to 87% reduction of their geographic range (Cameron et al., 2011). These massive changes impact the reproduction of not only wild plants but also agricultural crops.

Birds, which depend on native seeds, berries, caterpillars, and insects supported by native plants, are also at risk. About 96% of North American terrestrial bird species rely on insects to feed their young, and a single clutch of chickadee hatchlings requires 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars—a food source that native trees like oaks provide in abundance, whereas non-native plants do not (Tallamy and Shriver, 2021). For example, oaks, wild cherries, and native willows support between 455 and 557 Lepidoptera species (winged insects including butterflies and moths), whose juvenile form is caterpillars. In contrast, commonly planted non-native species like Chinese privet, crape myrtle, and ginkgo support between 3 and 10 Lepidoptera species (Tallamy and Shropshire, 2009). Habitat loss due to the spread of non-native plants has contributed to a 30% decline in North American bird populations since 1970, a loss of nearly 3 billion birds (Rosenberg et al., 2019).

Beyond wildlife, native plants play a critical role in maintaining soil stability. Their deep and dense root systems reduce erosion by binding soil particles together (Dahanayake et al., 2024), which prevents sediment pollution in waterways (<https://enviroliteracy.org/how-does-soil-erosion-affect-water-quality>). Maintaining non-native plants often necessitates the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, which can lead to the contamination of underground aquifers and drinking water supplies (<https://www.epa.gov/nps/nonpoint-source-agriculture>). Pesticides contaminate over 90% of wells sampled in the United States, indicating widespread groundwater pollution (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_impact_of_pesticides).

The air we breathe is also at risk—native plants, particularly grasses which are easy to plant and maintain, filter pollutants and sequester carbon in their deep and extensive root systems, directly combating climate change (Dass et al, 2018). Native forests store more carbon in their root systems than non-native vegetation, making them a vital solution in mitigating soil health and ecosystem restoration (Longley-Wood et al., 2022).

Planting native flora and removing and replacing non-native plants with native species is not a matter of preference; it is a matter of survival. The continued use of non-native species at the expense of native plants threatens biodiversity, food security, and ecological stability. Furthering public education through the declaration of May as Maryland Native Plant Month is a much needed step in encouraging the restoration of our native flora.

We ask for a favorable report on HB368.

Respectfully,
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The Green Towson Alliance unites Towson area environmentalists to create a greener, healthier and more beautiful community through collaboration and activism.

References

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