



March 13, 2026

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
FAVORABLE

Re: HB217 General Provisions - Commemorative Month  
Maryland Native Plant Month

Dear Members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

We of Wild Ones Greater Baltimore, together with other Wild Ones chapters across Maryland, write in strong support of reintroducing and passing HB217. HB217 would require the Governor to proclaim each May as Maryland Native Plant Month and urge organizations and businesses to observe it appropriately.<sup>1</sup> This is a no-cost, high-impact way to recognize the work many Marylanders are already doing to restore habitat, protect the Chesapeake Bay, and strengthen climate resilience.

Beyond the obvious environmental benefits that native plants provide, these species make important contributions to people and economies. Studies consistently link access to nearby green space and tree canopy with reduced stress, improved mental health, lower heat-related illness, and higher neighborhood satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> Attractive landscaping with trees and well-designed plantings can also increase property values, strengthen local tax bases, and make our streets more pleasant places.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Native plants specifically are adapted to local conditions, meaning they often require less irrigation and chemical input once established, saving residents money and reducing pollution. Finally, the shade from native trees and shrubs cools neighborhoods and mitigates dangerous heat.<sup>6</sup>

Maryland's natural ecosystems are powerful drivers of the state's economy, and native plants ensure those ecosystems function properly. At a basic level, many native species have deeper roots than introduced species.<sup>7,8,9</sup> Those deep root systems hold soil in place, which reduces erosion and filters out polluted runoff before it reaches streams and the Bay.<sup>10</sup> In turn, Blue Crab and Rockfish habitats are improved, safeguarding the way of life for Marylanders who rely on our waterways.

Native species also store carbon in their roots and surrounding soil. Native grasslands and meadow-style plantings can store carbon as efficiently as non-native trees.<sup>11,12</sup> Those same native species soak up heavy rains, leading to

reduced flooding more effectively than introduced ornamentals and turf grass. This, of course, reduces funds spent on repairing infrastructure and lost productivity.

A formal Native Plant Month also directly supports Maryland's farms. Agriculture is the State's largest commercial industry, employs some 350,000 people, and contributes over \$8 billion annually to our economy.<sup>13</sup> Agriculture is also the State's single largest land use: around 2 million acres, or roughly 32% of total land area.<sup>13</sup> However, at least one-third of food crops depend on pollinators.<sup>14,15</sup> Many North American bees have suffered declines of more than 90 percent due to habitat loss.<sup>16</sup> Restoring that habitat is the most effective tool we have to reverse the loss of pollinators, support crop success, and protect the agricultural economy.

Native plants are equally critical for birds and other wildlife that are enjoyed by Marylanders and ecotourists. Most terrestrial birds feed insects to their young, but the decrease in native plants has resulted in fewer insects. Ultimately, this means fewer birds. The decline in insects has contributed to the loss of nearly three billion breeding birds since 1970 in North America alone.<sup>17,18</sup> Popular non-native trees can support only a handful of insect species, while native species like common oaks and cherries can support hundreds.<sup>19</sup> Maryland's own state insect, the Baltimore Checkerspot, depends on specific native host plants that are threatened.<sup>20,21</sup> Making May Native Plant Month will focus public attention on these connections and encourage residents to turn lawns and vacant spaces into habitat.

Maryland is already involved in the native plant movement through the the Native Plants Program, which promotes native species and certifies nurseries that maintain significant native inventory.<sup>22,23,24</sup> At least 47 states and the District of Columbia have recognized a Native Plant Month, and several have made it permanent by statute.<sup>25,26</sup> Codifying May as Native Plant Month would boost the efforts this legislature has already worked towards, align our state with a national movement, provide an annual focus for education and volunteer events, and support nurseries, landscapers, farmers, schools, and communities. Importantly, these benefits are possible without imposing new mandates or significant costs.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to give a favorable report to HB217, to co-sponsor and champion its passage, and to model participation by celebrating Native Plant Month in your own districts.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

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