

HB0217 “Maryland Native Plant Month Act”
Government, Labor and Elections Committee
March 17, 2026
FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Delegate Melissa Wells and Members of the Committee,

I’m Alison Milligan and I ask you for a FAVORABLE vote for the “Maryland Native Plant Month Act.”

I am a USAF veteran and retired electrical engineer. For the last 13 years I have been working full-time as a volunteer Maryland Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, Watershed Steward and Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional (CBLP).

When I became a Master Gardener and Naturalist in 2013, I became aware of the importance of native plants to support wildlife (mostly birds) in my yard and community. As a Watershed Steward I learned the importance of native plants in preserving our natural resources, improving our air and water quality and providing habitat for many of the iconic animals of Maryland e.g. blue crab, rockfish, and Baltimore oriole. Over time I removed invasive and ornamental plants in my yard and transformed my property into a native landscape; immediately I started seeing more pollinators, including butterflies and birds raising their families in my yard. My neighbors noticed and started asking for help so they could do the same.

For the past 12 years I have been offering my landscape design and native plant acquisition services to hundreds of Marylanders – for free (I drive a pickup truck and pull a trailer). In the first year of COVID, I acquired approximately 100,000 native plants for people unable to leave their homes but wanting to work in their yards to create healthy, safe environments, for themselves and the life around them. Science has found that nature is a natural healer – being in nature (or seeing it in your backyard or from your home office window) reduces stress and improves your overall well-being.

I am writing to you today because I see firsthand the increasing demand for native plants. Personally, I cannot keep up with the requests for help. Landscapers and the public’s knowledge of native plants is limited, which is a hurdle that will take time, but the availability of native plants makes this a more serious problem. If they’re not on nursery shelves with educational labels how can people learn about them and plant them in their yards? **Limited availability of native plants at nurseries means people submit to purchasing plants that are not benefiting our environment and in some cases are causing harm** (e.g. *Ligustrum* spp, *Mahonia bealei*, *Hedera helix*).

Many volunteers like me spend countless hours removing invasive plants in our parks and community areas only to see friends and neighbors purchasing the same plants at local nurseries. Very disheartening. Fortunately, many of these plants were recently added to the Maryland Prohibited Invasive Plant List – we are slowly making progress. But we need to do more. I believe awareness is the key.

In 2011 Maryland became the first state to require Environmental Literacy – something we should take pride in. Our children are becoming more environmentally aware and learning about the need for native plants to support biodiversity and preserve natural resources. **They're going home and requesting parents to plant native plants only to learn that mom and dad can't find them. How can that be?**

If Maryland had a permanent Native Plant month it would raise awareness and be a boon for business. Making native plants readily available to citizens would be good for the health of our watershed and our economy.

One of the most memorable experiences sharing my yard with a neighbor was when she came for an iced tea on a hot July day about 7 years ago. My pollinator garden was flush with blooming plants and countless butterflies. Bluebirds, Carolina wren and Northern Cardinals had raised families that spring and their songs filled the air. Her comment to me? **"I want what you have."** **If people saw what they could have, they would want it. Every yard matters, every resident matters and it doesn't take a lot of time to see the impact.**

I hope I put a smile on your face, but what I really want is for you to put a smile on mine and many others. You can do this by voting FAVORABLY for the Maryland Native Plant Month Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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PS Maryland's state flower, Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and state tree, the White Oak (*Quercus alba*) are both keystone native plants. Imagine the great advertising opportunity to promote these two plants that offer disproportionately large ecological benefits! For a 'little' state, we can have a 'big' impact!