

Testimony: HB217, General Provisions – Commemorative Month – Maryland Native Plant Month
Committee: Government, Labor, and Elections
Hearing Date: March 17, 2026
Position: Informational

Introduction

The University of Maryland Extension (UME) submits this informational testimony in support of House Bill 217, which designates May as Maryland Native Plant Month. This commemorative designation recognizes the ecological, economic, and cultural value of native plants and encourages Marylanders to learn about, celebrate, and incorporate native plants into their landscapes throughout the month of May and beyond.

Alignment with the Maryland Native Plant Program

HB217 aligns closely with the goals and work of the Maryland Native Plant Program (MNPP), a partnership among the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Native Plant Society, and UME. The MNPP promotes the use of native plants in developed landscapes and natural areas. Key parallels between the HB217 and the MNPP include:

Shared Educational Mission: Both the commemorative month and the Native Plant Program aim to expand public knowledge about the value and availability of Maryland native plants. The month of May would serve as an annual focal point for outreach efforts, plant sales, workshops, and demonstration events that align directly with the program's objectives.

Chesapeake Bay Restoration: Native plant adoption in managed landscapes is a recognized best management practice in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay watershed. The commemorative month reinforces and extends the reach of programs and incentives already in place, inspiring voluntary action at the household and community level.

Partnership Opportunities: The month designation creates an organizing framework for state agencies, nonprofits, Extension offices, master gardener programs, and the nursery industry to collaborate on coordinated outreach—amplifying the impact of existing resources and building new partnerships.

Importance of Native Plants

Native plants form the foundation of healthy ecosystems. They provide critical habitat and food sources for native insects, birds, and mammals. Research by entomologist Doug Tallamy has demonstrated that native oaks alone support over 500 species of caterpillars—the primary food source for most nesting songbirds. Non-native ornamental plants, by contrast, support a fraction of this biodiversity. As Maryland continues to face habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss, native plants in residential, commercial, and public landscapes serve as vital ecological corridors.

Benefits to Maryland's Nursery & Green Industry

The designation of Maryland Native Plant Month is not merely symbolic—it carries tangible economic benefits for Maryland's nursery and green industry. Consumer demand for native plants has grown substantially in recent years. A dedicated commemorative month amplifies this momentum.

Conclusion

By designating May as Maryland Native Plant Month, the General Assembly would affirm the significance of native plants—sending a clear signal to citizens, communities, and the green industry that native plants are a priority for the state. Thank you for considering this testimony.

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