



Pennsylvania
**Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources**

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Conservation and Environmental Leaders Highlight Need to Protect Native Plants to Strengthen Pennsylvania's Ecosystems

Native plants are key to sustaining wildlife, supporting pollinators, and helping communities sustain their ecosystems — and Pennsylvanians can make a difference by landscaping and gardening with native plants.





Harrisburg, PA – Yesterday, environmental educators, nonprofit leaders, and students gathered at the Pennsylvania State Capitol to raise awareness about the critical role native plants play in protecting Pennsylvania’s ecosystems, supporting biodiversity, and building more resilient communities.

Hosted by the **Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)**, the event spotlighted how native plants — those naturally occurring in the region — are essential to the health of the Commonwealth’s wildlife, watersheds, forests, and even the fight against climate change.

“Native plants are essential to the state’s ecological health, wildlife, and even public well-being,” said **State Forester Seth Cassell**. “These seemingly small actions — planting natives, removing invasives — can have a big impact in maintaining our ecosystems and protecting the resources we rely on.”

Native Plants: The Foundation of Pennsylvania’s Environment

Native plants are specially adapted to Pennsylvania’s climate, soils, and seasonal patterns. Unlike non-native or invasive species, they require fewer fertilizers and pesticides, provide essential habitat for 480 species of birds and mammals, and support pollinators that drive food production.

“When native plants are lost, our ecosystems suffer,” said **Kelly Sitch, a forest biologist with DCNR**. “Wildlife loses habitat, erosion increases, pollinators decline, and our ability to manage stormwater, flooding, and climate impacts is weakened.”

DCNR and partners are working statewide to promote native planting through education, urban forestry, and habitat restoration. To date, the agency and its partners have planted thousands of acres of native trees and shrubs along rivers and streams, creating natural buffers that reduce erosion, slow stormwater, and protect water quality.

A Growing Movement to Reclaim and Restore Pennsylvania Landscapes

Speakers at the event included **Kalaia Tripeaux**, DCNR Tree Equity Specialist; **Jill Zdunczyk**, Board Member of the Pennsylvania Native Plant Society; and **Madelyn Good**, Sustainability Coordinator for the City of Harrisburg. Together, they emphasized that individuals, municipalities, and businesses all have a role to play.

“Whether you’re tending a backyard garden, teaching a classroom, or greening a balcony, native plants have a place in your life,” said **Zdunczyk**. “When we plant native, we protect pollinators, support our watersheds, and strengthen the ecosystems that sustain us all.”

Good pointed to Harrisburg’s commitment to sustainability, including using native vegetation in parks and green infrastructure projects to reduce stormwater runoff and improve public spaces.

“Cities can be leaders in sustainability, and Harrisburg is setting the example,” said **Good**.

Every Pennsylvanian Can Help

The event served as both a call to action and a celebration of the statewide movement to reclaim landscapes using native species. Attendees received resources to help identify native species, access local nurseries, and get involved in conservation efforts.

DCNR encourages Pennsylvanians to:

- Choose native plants** when landscaping or gardening
- Avoid invasive species** that harm wildlife and spread disease
- Support native nurseries** and sustainable land practices
- Get involved** with local restoration projects and environmental groups

Earlier this year, DCNR [unveiled *Forests for All: A Plan for Pennsylvania’s Forests and People*](#), a strategy to protect and connect Pennsylvanians to the state’s 17 million acres of forests – emphasizing inclusivity, biodiversity, and sustainable use.

If you missed the event, visit [DCNR Native Plant Resources](#) or [PA Native Plant Society](#), and learn more at [DCNR’s website](#).

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