

Enjoy Native Plants Through Wise Use

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“YOU cannot eat your cake and have it” is a familiar expression; however, such is not the case with our natural plant life. We can enjoy the use of our wild flowers and still have them, if we do so thoughtfully. This is what we mean by conservation. Use the plants wisely so that we can have them and they can perpetuate themselves. Some plants are not very productive and should be picked or transplanted very sparingly, if at all. Others may be used more freely.

The vegetative cover provided by native plants, or what we term “natural vegetation,” is one of the earth’s basic assets. Animal life could not exist in a world devoid of plants, and man himself is entirely dependent upon plants for his existence. The vegetation of the past ages developed the coal and oil which are so essential in our lives today. The soils of our farms owe their fertility to the vegetation of the past.

While agriculture has made great progress in developing cultivated plants which produce more luxuriantly than their native ancestors, native plants are still of great importance to us. Much of the plant materials of the manufacturing and agricultural industries still comes from native vegetation. The very common native plants are derogatorily called weeds. While weeds do trouble us in our fields and gardens at times, they are useful in many ways. Commonly, they are exacting in their soil requirements, and they quickly take possession of denuded areas or abandoned fields, thus helping to prevent gully formation and general erosion. Organic matter from their decay aids materially in developing the soil. Broom-sedge has been considered by some people as a pasture and hay field pest. In reality, it is a blessing as many areas of mis-used land have been saved from extensive erosion by broom-sedge. When broom-sedge begins to appear in a pasture, it is “hand writing on the wall,” signifying that fertilization and improved management is needed. Many of our drugs are derived from plant materials. Even the most showy of our ornamental plants have been developed from wild ancestors.

Since our native vegetation is of so much importance, it behooves us to conserve it through proper usage and protection. Plant conservation consists of

the wise use of the vegetation and of the individual species which make it up. In developing a program for plant conservation we cannot compile a definite list of plants to be used, since no one list would fit all sections of Virginia. Even if the same plants are present in two sections, the conditions under which they grow may vary so widely as to require very different methods as to their use. The following set of rules outlines good plant conservation practice, for all sections of the state:

1. Do not destroy the vegetation over an area by clearing, burning, or draining before considering the probable effect upon the soil, the surface of the area, the underground and surface water, and upon wildlife. Avoid needless destruction and too severe an upset of nature’s balance between plant and animal life.

2. Do not cut shrubs or use native plants for mass decoration. Be moderate with the use of holly and other evergreens at Christmas time. Use lights and man-made materials for mass decoration, and be conservative with the evergreens. In the space of a few seconds man severs the life stream of a tree or shrub that nature has slowly developed over a period of years.

3. Do not pull the flowers of, or in any way disturb, the native plants which are not abundant in the region; in addition, be conservative and not wasteful of plants and flowers which are abundant in your county or region. A large colony in a place does not indicate abundance in the region. Gather for a particular purpose, and protect what you have gathered so that they will not wilt or be spoiled for your use. Dogwood is often abused by wrong handling of the flower bearing branches after cutting to take home. The four white bracts (incorrectly called petals of the flower) around each cluster of small flowers wilt very quickly unless they are protected from drying air currents while carrying them home.

4. Do not pull all, or even most, of the leaves on a plant when gathering flowers. Remember that the leaves serve as the kitchen of the plant, and that they prepare a large portion of the food required by the roots and other parts of the plant. When one gathers the flowers of yellow lady’s slipper, or wild lilies, most of the leaves are taken, thus weakening the roots and remaining parts.

5. Do not pull all the flowers of a plant. After the flowers comes the seed; therefore, always leave enough flowers for a good crop of seed. Seed are important for the perpetuation of the species. Also bear in mind that seed of native plants are often nature’s provision for food for wild animal life through the winter season.

6. Do not transplant native plants thoughtlessly. Consider carefully the environment in which you find the plant thriving. Can you give it the same conditions on your home grounds? Plants which have grown in their native haunts often have spreading root systems, hence cannot be as readily transplanted as can nursery plants which usually have a more clustered root system.

7. Help others to acquire a true appreciation of native plants and set the example by following a program of conservation. Appreciation follows understanding. By encouraging plant study we can insure that school children and others will develop an interest in and a love for our native plants.

8. Preserve and protect interesting plant habitats and natural areas. Through the activity of clubs or other groups, hunt out unspoiled areas where one finds an unusual assortment of native plants. In places of the kind establish a *native plant garden*, if the area is small, or a *plant reservation* over a large area, thus preserving a typical vegetation as well as species of plants. Introduce other native plants of the surrounding region. Use such areas primarily for educational purposes in the clubs, schools and the public.

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(See other side for Table arranged by J. L. Coggin.)

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Some common Virginia flowers and the degree they may be picked in the three major geological areas in Virginia.

FLOWER	WESTERN			PIEDMONT			COASTAL PLAIN		
	Pick	Pick Sparingly	Leave to Multiply	Pick	Pick Sparingly	Leave to Multiply	Pick	Pick Sparingly	Leave to Multiply
Arbutus		X				X			X
Aster	X			X			X		
Atamasco Lily			X			X			X
Banberry		X				X			X
Bergamot		X				X			X
Birdsfoot Violet		X		X					X
Bittersweet			X			X			X
Blackeyed Susan	X			X			X		
Bloodroot		X				X			X
Blueflag		X			X				X
Blue Violet	X			X			X		
Bluet		X			X			X	
Bouncing Bet	X			X			X		
Buttercup	X			X			X		
Butterfly Weed		X			X			X	
Cardinal Flower			X			X			X
Clover	X			X			X		
Columbine		X				X			X
Daisy	X			X			X		
Dandelion	X			X			X		
Dogtooth Violet		X				X			X
Dogwood	X				X			X	
Flame Azalea			X			X			X
Foxglove		X			X			X	
Gentian			X			X			X
Goldenrod	X			X			X		
Ground Pine		X				X			X
Hawkweed	X			X			X		
Hepatica			X			X			X
Holly			X			X		X	
Jack-in-Pulpit			X			X			X
Joe Pye Weed	X			X			X		
Mayapple		X			X			X	
Milkweed (common)	X				X			X	
Moccasin Flower (Lady's Slipper)			X			X			X
Orchids			X			X			X
Partridgeberry		X				X			X
Queen Ann's Lace	X			X			X		
Running Coda		X				X			X
Turks-cap-Lily		X				X			X
All other Lilies			X			X			X
Trillium (Nodding)			X			X			X
Trillium (Painted)			X			X			X
Trillium (White or Great)		X				X			X
Wild Cranesbill				X			X		
Wild Ginger		X				X			X
Wild Rose	X			X			X		
Wood Anemone			X			X			X
Wood Sorrel	X			X			X		
Yarrow	X			X			X		