

Johnson County Recommended Planting List

Presented as a service to our community by Bur Oak Land Trust

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This listing is meant to guide the selection of landscaping trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs in Johnson County. We hope that it provides you with a useful tool for enhancing your property while simultaneously safeguarding our local native plants and communities.

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Why a Johnson County Recommended Planting List?

Landscaping trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses can easily impact surrounding wildlands. This is especially true in Johnson County, where many homesites are interspersed with native woodlands and other natural sites. Here aggressive non-native plantings can easily invade natural communities where they eventually eliminate native trees, shrubs, grasses and forbs, along with the birds and other animals dependent on them. This listing of landscaping plants was prepared to help eliminate such unintended but destructive situations. The listing encourages the planting of native species (that is, plants that have grown in this region of the country for hundreds or thousands of years). These plants are best adapted to the local climate and soils and are well received by wildlife and birds, which use them for food and nesting sites.

They are best suited to provide important ecological services, such as enhancing soils and fostering diverse and healthy natural communities. Listed natives will not become invasive or noxious threats to surrounding lands.

When purchasing native plants or seeds, we encourage avoiding cultivars whenever possible, and purchasing local genetic (“local ecotype”) stock when available. Local ecotype prairie seed is now sold by many reputable nurseries. Local ecotype seed of other types of plants will become more available in coming years. Sometimes native plants do not thrive on today’s altered sites. Thus listings of non-native alternatives for such sites have also been included. Listed species have not shown signs of becoming invasive, at least at present. And last, listings of plants that are invasive or otherwise problematic have been included. These should never be planted.

TREES

Note: “Small tree” is typically less than 30 feet in height; “large tree” is typically taller.

Acceptable Native Trees that prefer well-drained soils

“Disease Tolerant Selections of” American elm (<i>Ulmus americana</i>)	Large tree
basswood (<i>Tilia americana</i>)	Large tree
bigtooth aspen (<i>Populus grandidentata</i>)	Large tree
black cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)	Large tree
black maple (<i>Acer nigrum</i>)	Large tree - don't plant near them
black oak (<i>Quercus velutina</i>)	
black walnut (<i>Juglans nigra</i>)	
bur oak (<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>)	
chinkapin oak (<i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>)	
Eastern redcedar (<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>)	Large tree
hackberry (<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>)	
Kentucky coffeetree (<i>Gymnocladus dioicus</i>)	
Native crabapple (<i>Malus ioensis</i>)	
native hawthorns (<i>Crataegus species</i>)	Small tree
pagoda dogwood (<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>)	Small tree 10-15'
redbud (<i>Cercis canadensis</i>)	Small tree 10-15'
red oak (<i>Quercus rubra</i>)	Large tree
serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>)	
shagbark hickory (<i>Carya ovata</i>)	
sugar maple (<i>Acer saccharum</i>)	Large tree
trembling aspen (<i>Populus tremuloides</i>)	Large tree
white oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>)	

Acceptable Trees that prefer somewhat poor to poorly drained soils

Black Willow	
northern pecan (<i>Carya illinoensis</i>)	Large tree
pin oak (<i>Quercus palustris</i>)	
river birch (<i>Betula nigra</i>)	
shellbark hickory (<i>Carya laciniosa</i>)	
silver maple (<i>Acer saccharinum</i>)	
Shingle Oak ()	Large tree
swamp white oak (<i>Quercus bicolor</i>)	
Sycamore ()	

Acceptable non-native trees that prefer well-drained soils

arborvitae (<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>)	
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Black hills spruce (<i>Picea glauca</i> Var. <i>densata</i>)	
concolor fir (<i>Abies concolor</i>)	
Ginkgo - Male Selection (<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>)	Large tree
honeylocust (<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>) “thornless varieties”	bottomland
Norway spruce (<i>Picea abies</i>)	
white pine (<i>Pinus strobus</i>)	
white spruce (<i>Picea glauca</i>)	

Acceptable non-native trees that prefer somewhat poor to poorly drained soils

baldcypress (<i>Taxodium distichum</i>)	Bottomland tree
larch (<i>Larix species</i>)	

Tree Species Not Recommended

amur maple (<i>Acer tataricum subsp. ginnala</i>)	invasive
ash (ash species)	Abundant disease and insect problems
black locust	
catalpa (<i>Catalpa speciosa</i>)	invasive
chinese Elm	
cottonwood (<i>Populus deltoides</i>)	
elm hybrids	invasive
freeman maple selections (i.e. Autumn Blaze, Autumn Fantasy, Celebration, Marmo)	Potentially invasive
hybrid Poplar	
norway maple selections (<i>Acer platanoides</i>)	invasive
siberian Elm	
tree of Heaven	

APPROVED JOHNSON COUNTY NATIVE SHRUB SPECIES

RECOMMENDED NATIVE SHRUBS

To ensure the best landscaping results, be sure to match shrub selections to your soil drainage, sunlight, and other site conditions that affect growth. NOTE: During selection process please research plants to be sure this is the best choice for your situation/site. A few of these species are native to Eastern Iowa, but out of range in Johnson County.

- American black currant (*Ribes americanum*)
- American bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*)
- American elder (*Sambucus canadensis*)
- American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)
- American plum (*Prunus americana*)
- atlantic leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*)
- Canada yew (*Taxus canadensis*)
- Carolina rose (*Rosa carolina*)

- *common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
- common juniper (*Juniperus communis*)
- common ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)
- cranberrybush viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*)
- early wild rose (*Rosa blanda*)
- fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)
- gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*)
- *indigobush (*Amorpha fruticosa*)
- leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*)
- Missouri gooseberry (*Ribes missouriense*)
- *meadowsweet spirea (*Spiraea alba*)
- nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*)
- New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*)
- potentilla (*Potentilla fruticosa*)
- prairie rose (*Rosa setigera*)
- prairie willow (*Salix humilus*)
- *pussy willow (*Salix discolor*)
- *redosier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*)
- rough-leafed dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*)
- shrubby St. Johnswort (*Hypericum prolificum*)
- silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)
- smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*)
- staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*)
- wafer ash (*Ptelea trifoliata*)
- wahoo (*Euonymus atropurpurea*)
- winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)
- witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

*shrubs that prefer wet soils

ACCEPTABLE NON-NATIVE SHRUB SPECIES

(These species have not shown signs of becoming invasive to date.)

- arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- bottlebrush buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*)
- boxwood species (*Buxus* spp.)
- flowering almond (*Prunus triloba*)
- forsythia (*Forsythia* spp.)
- hibiscus species (*Hibiscus* spp.)
- hydrangea species (*Hydrangea* spp.)
- lilac species (*Syringa* spp.)
- mock orange (*Philadelphus pubescens*)
- nanking cherry (*Prunus tomentosa*)
- northern bayberry (*Myrica pennsylvanica*)
- rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*)
- spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
- spirea species (*Spiraea* spp.)
- summersweet clethra (*Clethra alnifolia*)
- Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)
- weigelia (*Weigelia florida*)

INVASIVE SHRUBS AND VINES THAT SHOULD NEVER BE PLANTED

The following species have proven themselves to be invasive, sometimes highly invasive. They should never be planted in or near natural areas, parklands, or other non-landscaped rural or semi-urban sites. Because birds carry their seeds long distances, we also caution against planting these species in urban areas.

- Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)
- Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)
- Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*)
- Buckthorn (all *Rhamnus* species)
- Honeysuckle (non-native; *Lonicera* species including *japonica*, *tatarica*; *mackii*; etc.)
- Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*)
- Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)
- Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculata*)
- Privet
- European Highbush Cranberry/Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*)

DECORATIVE GRASSES

Wherever possible, we encourage gardening with native Iowa grasses and forbs. Prairie and savanna species grow well in Iowa, produce beautiful gardens, and are widely available. Many Iowa nurseries now specialize in native seeds and plants. A listing of such nurseries is available through Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District (www.jcswcd.org). “Prairie mixes” available through large commercial chains often contain non-native and invasive species; always avoid these mixes. The following species have proven to be highly invasive and pose serious threats to native communities. These should never be planted:

- birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)
- crown vetch (*Coronilla varia*)
- dame’s rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*)
- eulalia, Chinese or Japanese silvergrass, maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*)
- eulalia grass, also known as pampas and plume grass (*Miscanthus sacchariflorus*)
- leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*)
- purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*)
- sericea lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*)
- spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*)
- teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*, *D. sylvestris*)
- yellow and white sweet clover (*Melilotus officinalis*, *M. alba*)