

# **Johnson County Recommended Planting List**

**Presented as a service to our community by  
Johnson County Heritage 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.

### **RECOMMENDED NATIVE TREES: 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
black oak ( <i>Quercus velutina</i> )	large tree
black walnut ( <i>Juglans nigra</i> )	large tree
bur oak ( <i>Quercus macrocarpa</i> )	large tree
chinkapin oak ( <i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i> )	large tree
eastern redcedar ( <i>Juniperus virginiana</i> )	small or large tree
hackberry ( <i>Celtis occidentalis</i> )	large tree
cockspur hawthorn ( <i>Crataegus crusgalli</i> ), downy hawthorn ( <i>Crataegus mollis</i> ), and other native hawthorns	small tree
honey locust ( <i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i> ), thornless and seedless varieties only	large tree
Kentucky coffeetree ( <i>Gymnocladus dioicus</i> )	large tree
native crabapple ( <i>Malus ioensis</i> )	small tree
pagoda dogwood ( <i>Cornus alternifolia</i> )	small tree

quaking aspen ( <i>Populus tremuloides</i> )	large tree
redbud ( <i>Cercis canadensis</i> )	small tree
red oak ( <i>Quercus rubra</i> )	large tree
serviceberry ( <i>Amelanchier arborea</i> )	small tree
shagbark hickory ( <i>Carya ovata</i> )	large tree
sugar maple ( <i>Acer saccharum</i> )	large tree
white oak ( <i>Quercus alba</i> )	large tree

**RECOMMENDED NATIVE TREES:  
SOMEWHAT POORLY TO POORLY DRAINED SOILS**

black willow ( <i>Salix nigra</i> Marsh.)	large tree
cottonwood ( <i>Populus deltoides</i> )	large tree
northern pecan ( <i>Carya illinoensis</i> )	large tree
pin oak ( <i>Quercus palustris</i> )	large tree
river birch ( <i>Betula nigra</i> )	large tree
shellbark hickory ( <i>Carya laciniosa</i> )	large tree
shingle oak ( <i>Quercus imbricaria</i> )	large tree
silver maple ( <i>Acer saccharinum</i> )	large tree
swamp white oak ( <i>Quercus bicolor</i> )	large tree
sycamore ( <i>Platanus occidentalis</i> )	large tree

**ACCEPTABLE NON-NATIVE TREES: WELL-DRAINED SOILS**

arborvitae ( <i>Thuja occidentalis</i> )	small tree
Black Hills spruce ( <i>Picea glauca</i> 'densata')	large tree
concolor fir ( <i>Abies concolor</i> )	large tree
ginkgo - male selection ( <i>Ginkgo biloba</i> )	large tree
Norway spruce ( <i>Picea abies</i> )	large tree
white pine ( <i>Pinus strobus</i> )	large tree
white spruce ( <i>Picea glauca</i> )	large tree

**ACCEPTABLE NON-NATIVE TREES: SOMEWHAT POORLY TO POORLY DRAINED SOILS**

baldcypress ( <i>Taxodium distichum</i> )	large tree
larch ( <i>Larix</i> spp.)	large tree

**TREES THAT SHOULD NEVER BE PLANTED**

black locust ( <i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i> L.)	invasive
catalpa ( <i>Catalpa speciosa</i> )	invasive
Chinese elm ( <i>Ulmus parvifolia</i> )	invasive
elm hybrids ( <i>Ulmus</i> hybrids)	invasive
Russian olive ( <i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i> )	invasive
Siberian elm ( <i>Ulmus pumila</i> )	invasive
tree of heaven ( <i>Ailanthus altissima</i> )	invasive

### Additional Species of Concern -

- Norway maple selections (*Acer platanoides*) and amur maple (*Acer tataricum* subsp. *ginnala*) are showing signs of becoming invasive on Iowa's native lands. **They should never be planted in or near natural areas, parklands, or other non-landscaped rural or semi-urban sites.**
- Ash species (*Fraxinus* spp.) are native but have serious disease and insect problems.

## 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.

### RECOMMENDED NATIVE SHRUBS

- 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-leaved 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 SHRUBS

- 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*)
- buckthorn, exotic (*Rhamnus* spp.)
- burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*)
- European highbush  
cranberry/guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)
- honeysuckle (non-native; *Lonicera*  
species including *japonica*, *tatarica*,  
*mackii*, etc.)
- Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)
- multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*)
- oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculata*)
- periwinkle (*Vinca minor*)
- privet species (*Ligustrum* spp.)

### **FORBS AND 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](http://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*)