

# CREATING MODEL GARDENS & LANDSCAPING

## CHECKLIST FOR DEMONSTRATION SITES

This checklist is for anyone wishing to create or renew a native plant demonstration garden, or transform an existing garden into a demonstration site. It identifies phases, vital steps and other considerations that will contribute to the success of your effort.



A native plant demonstration site at the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island.

### PLANNING AND PREPARATION

#### Garden Goals

- \_\_\_1. Establish primary function or theme (wildlife habitat, outdoor living, etc.).
- \_\_\_2. Determine style (naturalistic, traditional, etc.).
- \_\_\_3. Assess resources for maintenance needs (financial and labor) to establish the scale of your project.

#### Site Selection and Evaluation

- \_\_\_1. Choose a location accessible to visitors and maintenance crews.
- \_\_\_2. Mark utility connections and water lines.
- \_\_\_3. Decide if you need a landscaping contractor for installation and/or maintenance. If yes: Search for contractors experienced in native plant or natural landscaping projects. Discuss your needs with the contractor. Confirm if they are willing to work with this checklist.
- \_\_\_4. Assess site conditions: hydrology; sun, wind and salt exposure; and soil type.
- \_\_\_5. Ensure water is available. If an irrigation system is added, design for differences in plant needs.

#### Site Preparation

- \_\_\_1. Remove invasive species, weeds and other unwanted plants. Repeat, if needed, before installation.
- \_\_\_2. Analyze soil and amend as necessary. Contact your county NC State Extension office for soil sample kits.
- \_\_\_3. Determine if you need to incorporate organic material, especially if moisture retention is low or soil is compacted. Talk to your county extension agent for guidance.

### DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

#### Creating the Design

- \_\_\_1. Create a design and planting plan suitable for site conditions using eastern North Carolina natives and guides available from the Coastal Landscapes Initiative and partners. Or secure services of a landscape designer with knowledge of native plants and sustainable design.
- \_\_\_2. Include at least 60% to 80% native plants in the design.
- \_\_\_3. Avoid using invasive plants.

#### Installation Preparation

- \_\_\_1. Schedule planting dates between October and early April for optimal success.
- \_\_\_2. Secure plants well in advance. Some may not be readily available or in the size you want. Start your plant search early (up to a year in advance, if possible) to ensure you have plants prior to the target planting date.
- \_\_\_3. Determine acceptable substitutes for species that can't be located.
- \_\_\_4. Contact garden centers, nurseries and growers to ask if they can provide your selections when needed. Some may be willing to grow plants on a contract basis for a reasonable cost.
- \_\_\_5. Ensure proper plant spacing that leaves room for plants to fill in, especially shrubs and trees.
- \_\_\_6. Follow minimal spacing requirements for perennials and groundcovers to shade the soil, provide wildlife shelter and minimize weeds.

## MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT

- \_\_\_1. Develop a maintenance plan and schedule for your garden team members (volunteers or contractors) who have committed to regular maintenance chores.
- \_\_\_2. Continue weeding and invasive species removal throughout the growing season.
- \_\_\_3. During the first year, ensure all plants receive adequate moisture from rainfall or supplemental watering.
  - Most plants require 1 inch of water per week.
  - A thorough soaking is more effective than frequent sprinkling.
- \_\_\_4. Inspect plants on a regular basis for diseases and pests. Replace lost plants, preferably in cool weather.
- \_\_\_5. Use durable plant labels for identification and inspect regularly to ensure they are properly located.
- \_\_\_6. Use sufficient mulch (about 2 inches) to improve moisture retention.
- \_\_\_7. To encourage reseeding of perennials, remove or thin out mulch around these plants in the autumn when seeds are ripe.
- \_\_\_8. Use nonintensive maintenance techniques to increase wildlife habitat value:
  - Tolerate some level of insect damage and don't use pesticides.
  - Leave dead stems standing until spring as shelter for pollinator species.

## RESOURCES

**Plant guides, design templates and other resources on native plants:** [go.ncsu.edu/CoastalLandscapes](http://go.ncsu.edu/CoastalLandscapes)  
**Guidance on designing and maintaining a native plant garden:**

- [projects.ncsu.edu/goingnative/howto/index.html](http://projects.ncsu.edu/goingnative/howto/index.html)
- [content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/12-native-plants/](http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/12-native-plants/)
- [go.ncsu.edu/ModelLandscapes](http://go.ncsu.edu/ModelLandscapes)

**For soil test kits and gardening advice, contact your NC State Extension County Centers:**

[ces.ncsu.edu/local-county-center/](http://ces.ncsu.edu/local-county-center/)

**Specific plant information:** [plants.ces.ncsu.edu/](http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/)

## SHARING AND EDUCATION

- \_\_\_1. Share information and photos, including with Coastal Landscapes Initiative partners.
- \_\_\_2. Encourage visitors to explore your garden.
- \_\_\_3. Provide educational information in your garden about sustainable landscaping, especially with interpretative signage or handouts.
- \_\_\_4. Schedule periodic tours and events, including hands-on activities.
- \_\_\_5. Track visitation and impact of your efforts.
- \_\_\_6. Consider obtaining certification or recognition for your site, including from one of the following programs:
  - National Wildlife Federation  
[nwf.org/garden-for-wildlife/certify](http://nwf.org/garden-for-wildlife/certify)
  - NC Native Plant Society  
[ncwildflower.org/about/certified/](http://ncwildflower.org/about/certified/)



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A native plant demonstration site at the NC State Extension office in Onslow County.



This checklist is a product of the Coastal Landscapes Initiative, or CLI, a collaborative effort to address landscaping at every stage of the process, from planning and design to installation and management. Partners come from the public and private sectors and draw on a range of North Carolina coastal landscaping expertise to foster attractive, desirable, functional, manageable and environmentally friendly coastal landscapes.



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