Native Plants for New England Rain Gardens

This plant list includes native plant species and cultivars that are adaptable, available, and have been widely successful in our northern New England region. It is a place to begin, but it is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all plants that may be used in rain gardens. Plant enthusiasts may want to consult other resources and try new plants on their own, but those who want a “Tried and True” list of plants to choose from may find all that they need right here. We use natives because rain gardens may border natural areas and we want to avoid introducing new non-native plants into the environment.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Exposure - Plants are adapted to either full sun (≥ 6 hours of direct sunlight), partial sun (3-6 hours of direct sunlight), or full shade (≤ 3 hours of direct sunlight). Consider that some areas of the garden may be sunny and some made be shady and that the exposure may change throughout the seasons.

Soil Moisture - Clay soils tend to stay wet for longer periods than sandy, well-drained soils. There is also variation in soil moisture between the rain garden planting zones. Use the soil moisture preferences to choose plants that tolerate the conditions in your rain garden and to place them in the proper zone.

Plant Spacing - Mature size is given as a range because it varies greatly depending on cultivars and environment. The height and spread (width) of each plant is listed. Space plants to allow them to grow to their full size. Consider placing taller plants in the center or back of the garden with shorter plants layered under or in front of them. Ground covers work well on the berm.

Bloom Period & Color - Consider how different colored flowers will complement each other in the garden. Select plants with early, middle, and late season blooms to provide interest and support pollinators throughout the season.

USDA Hardiness Zone - The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone is the standard used to indicate which plants can survive the winter based on the average annual minimum winter temperature for a given location. New England hardiness zones range from 3 in the northern parts of the region to 7 in the southern and coastal areas.

PLANT LIST KEY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Full Sun Exposure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half Sun</td>
<td>Partial Sun Exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud</td>
<td>Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bees</td>
<td>Attracts bees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterflies</td>
<td>Attracts butterflies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>Attracts birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hummingbirds</td>
<td>Attracts hummingbirds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Soil Moisture Preference:

- Dry
- Medium
- Moist

Developed by:
Cathy Neal, UNH Cooperative Extension
Lisa Loosigian, NHDES Soak Up the Rain NH
Jillian McCarthy, NHDES Soak Up the Rain NH

RAIN GARDEN PLANTING ZONE

The plant list identifies the ideal rain garden planting zone for each plant (characterized by soil moisture).

BASE: Periodic or frequent standing water may keep the root zone wet for several days at a time. After the initial establishment period, Base Zone plants should also be tolerant of dry periods up to two weeks during the growing season.

SLOPE: Periodically wet or saturated soils during larger storms. Plants in the Slope Zone can help to protect against erosion once established. Shallow residential rain gardens may not have a definitive slope zone.

BERM: Drier soils, infrequently subject to inundation or saturation. This zone may be a raised berm or simply the perimeter of the rain garden. Plants should be quite drought tolerant and blend into the existing landscape of the site.

References:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Rain Garden Zone</th>
<th>Soil Moisture</th>
<th>Light Exposure</th>
<th>Bloom Period &amp; Color</th>
<th>Mature Size</th>
<th>USDA Hardiness Zone</th>
<th>Attractive to:</th>
<th>Plant Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERENNIALS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aquilegia canadensis</td>
<td>Red columbine</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
<td>1-2.5'</td>
<td>1'</td>
<td>3-8</td>
<td>Reseeds freely in the garden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asclepias incarnata</td>
<td>Swamp milkweed</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
<td>3-6'</td>
<td>2'</td>
<td>3-9</td>
<td>Forms attractive pods which split and release hairy white seeds. Monarch larval host.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asclepias tuberosa</td>
<td>Butterfly milkweed</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
<td>1-3'</td>
<td>1-1.5'</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>Does not like wet feet - keep on dry berm. Monarch larval host.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caltha palustris</td>
<td>Marsh marigold</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
<td>0.5-1'</td>
<td>1-1.5'</td>
<td>3-7</td>
<td>Provides bright yellow color early in spring before anything else blooms, then goes dormant in summer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelone glabra</td>
<td>White turtlehead</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
<td>1-4'</td>
<td>1-2'</td>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>Larval host for Baltimore Checkerspot butterfly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eupatorium perfoliatum</td>
<td>Common boneset</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ●</td>
<td>● ● ●</td>
<td>2-4'</td>
<td>2'</td>
<td>2-10</td>
<td>Prefers soil with a significant amount of organic matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Rain Garden Zone</td>
<td>Soil Moisture</td>
<td>Light Exposure</td>
<td>Bloom Period &amp; Color</td>
<td>Mature Size</td>
<td>USDA Hardiness Zone</td>
<td>Attractive to:</td>
<td>Plant Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PERENNIALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Berm</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>Sept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eutrochium (formerly Eupatorium)</strong></td>
<td><em>purpureum</em> Sweet Joe Pye weed</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
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<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gentiana clausa</strong></td>
<td>Closed gentian or Meadow bottle gentian</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geranium maculatam</strong></td>
<td>Spotted crane’s bill</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Helenium autumnale</strong></td>
<td>Common sneezeweed</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iris versicolor</strong></td>
<td>Blue iris or Blue flag</td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lobelia cardinalis</strong></td>
<td>Cardinal flower</td>
<td>●</td>
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<td></td>
<td>●</td>
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<td></td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The table shows the scientific name, common name, rain garden zone, soil moisture, light exposure, bloom period and color, mature size, USDA hardiness zone, and attractive to. The plant notes provide additional information about each plant.*
## PERENNIALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific Name (Common Name)</th>
<th>Rain Garden Zone</th>
<th>Soil Moisture</th>
<th>Light Exposure</th>
<th>Bloom Period &amp; Color</th>
<th>Mature Size</th>
<th>Attractive to:</th>
<th>Plant Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobelia siphilitica (Great blue lobelia)</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May: ○, June: ○, July: ○, Aug: ○, Sept: ○, Oct: ○</td>
<td>1.5-5’, 1-1.5’, 4-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent for damp, clay soil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarda fistulosa (Beebalm or Wild bergamot)</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May: ○, June: ○, July: ○, Aug: ○, Sept: ○</td>
<td>4-5’, 3’, 3-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>There are many attractive cultivars of Monarda in a variety of colors. Powdery mildew is common, but not especially harmful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penstemon digitalis (Foxglove beardtongue)</td>
<td>• • •</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May: ○, June: ○, July: ○</td>
<td>2-4’, 1.5’, 3-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reseeds freely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudbeckia laciniata (Green-headed or Cutleaf coneflower)</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May: ○, June: ○, July: ○, Aug: ○, Sept: ○</td>
<td>3-6’, 3-4’, 3-9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spreads vigorously from underground rhizomes. Other Rudbeckias are also commonly used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphyotrichum (formerly Aster) novi-belgii (New York American-aster)</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May: ○, June: ○, July: ○, Aug: ○, Sept: ○</td>
<td>2.5-6’, 3’, 4-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Purple Dome’ is a popular, compact variety (1.5 - 2’ tall and slightly wider); purple with orange center flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Rain Garden Zone</td>
<td>Soil Moisture</td>
<td>Light Exposure</td>
<td>Bloom Period &amp; Color</td>
<td>Mature Size</td>
<td>Attractive to:</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Verbena hastata</em></td>
<td>Blue vervain or Swamp verbena</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>2-5’ 2-3’ 3-9</td>
<td>![Butterfly](</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vernonia noveboracensis</em></td>
<td>New York ironweed</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>4-6’ 2-4’ 5-8</td>
<td>![Butterfly](</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Zizia aurea</em></td>
<td>Golden alexanders</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>1-2’ 3-4’ 4-9</td>
<td>![Butterfly](</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Panicum virgatum</em></td>
<td>Switchgrass or Panic grass</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>3-6’ 2’ 2-9</td>
<td>![Butterfly](</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Schizachyrium scoparium</em></td>
<td>Little bluestem</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>2-3’ 1’ 3-8</td>
<td>![Butterfly](</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sorghastrum nutans</em></td>
<td>Indian grass</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀ ☀</td>
<td>5-7’ 2’ 2-9</td>
<td>![Butterfly](</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Rain Garden Zone</td>
<td>Soil/Moisture</td>
<td>Bloom Period, Color, Season of Interest</td>
<td>Mature Size</td>
<td>USDA Hardiness Zone</td>
<td>Attractive to:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SHRUBS</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aronia arbutifolia</strong></td>
<td>Red chokeberry</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>6-10'</td>
<td>3-5'</td>
<td>4-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cephalanthus occidentalis</strong></td>
<td>Buttonbush</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>3-6'</td>
<td>3-6'</td>
<td>3-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clethra alnifolia</strong></td>
<td>Summersweet or Sweet pepper bush</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>4-8'</td>
<td>4-6'</td>
<td>4-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comptonia peregrina</strong></td>
<td>Sweet fern</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>2-4'</td>
<td>4-8'</td>
<td>2-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hamamelis virginiana</strong></td>
<td>Common witch-hazel</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>20-25'</td>
<td>20-25'</td>
<td>3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ilex verticillata</strong></td>
<td>Common winterberry</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>4-12'</td>
<td>4-12'</td>
<td>3-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Rain Garden Zone</td>
<td>SoilMoisture</td>
<td>Light Exposure</td>
<td>Bloom Period, Color, Season of Interest</td>
<td>Mature Size</td>
<td>USDA Hardiness Zone</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Morella</em> (formerly <em>Myrica caroliniensis</em>)</td>
<td>Small bayberry</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Berm</td>
<td>Mar Apr May June July Aug Sep Oct Nov</td>
<td>5-10'</td>
<td>2-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Physocarpus opulifolius</em></td>
<td>Common ninebark or Eastern ninebark</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Berm</td>
<td>Mar Apr May June July Aug Sep Oct Nov</td>
<td>5-8'</td>
<td>2-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rhus aromatica</em></td>
<td>Fragrant sumac</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Berm</td>
<td>Mar Apr May June July Aug Sep Oct Nov</td>
<td>2-6'</td>
<td>3-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Swida</em> (formerly <em>Cornus amomum</em>)</td>
<td>Silky dogwood</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Berm</td>
<td>Mar Apr May June July Aug Sep Oct Nov</td>
<td>6-12'</td>
<td>4-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Swida</em> (formerly <em>Cornus racemosa</em>)</td>
<td>Gray dogwood</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Berm</td>
<td>Mar Apr May June July Aug Sep Oct Nov</td>
<td>4-15'</td>
<td>4-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Swida</em> (formerly <em>Cornus sericea</em>)</td>
<td>Redosier dogwood</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Slope</td>
<td>Berm</td>
<td>Mar Apr May June July Aug Sep Oct Nov</td>
<td>6-10'</td>
<td>3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
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<td>Soil Moisture</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinium angustifolium</td>
<td>Lowbush blueberry</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td>○○</td>
<td>○○○○○○○○</td>
<td>0.5-2’</td>
<td>2’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinium corymbosum</td>
<td>Highbush blueberry</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td>• •</td>
<td>○○</td>
<td>○○○○○○○○</td>
<td>6-12’</td>
<td>8-12’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viburnum dentatum</td>
<td>Arrowwood</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>○○</td>
<td>○○○○○○○○</td>
<td>6-9’</td>
<td>6-15’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viburnum lentago</td>
<td>Nannyberry</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>○○</td>
<td>○○○○○○○○</td>
<td>14-16’</td>
<td>6-12’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viburnum opulus</td>
<td>Cranberrybush</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>○○</td>
<td>○○○○○○○○</td>
<td>8-12’</td>
<td>10-15’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Zone</td>
<td>Soil Moisture</td>
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<td>Mature Size</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FERNS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Athyrium angustum</strong></td>
<td>Northern lady fern</td>
<td>1-2'</td>
<td>1'</td>
<td>3-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dryopteris marginalis</strong></td>
<td>Marginal wood fern</td>
<td>1-3'</td>
<td>1.5'</td>
<td>3-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Matteuccia struthiopteris</strong></td>
<td>Ostrich fern</td>
<td>3-6'</td>
<td>2.5'</td>
<td>3-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Onoclea sensibilis</strong></td>
<td>Sensitive fern</td>
<td>2-3'</td>
<td>1.5'</td>
<td>2-10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Osmunda claytoniana</strong></td>
<td>Interrupted fern</td>
<td>3-4'</td>
<td>3'</td>
<td>2-8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Osmunda regalis</strong></td>
<td>Royal fern</td>
<td>3-6'</td>
<td>1.5'</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Zone</td>
<td>Soil Moisture</td>
<td>Bloom Period, Color, Season of Interest</td>
<td>Mature Size</td>
<td>USDA Hardiness Zone</td>
<td>Attractive to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FERNS</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osmundastrum</td>
<td>Cinnamon fern</td>
<td>Zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3-5’ 3’</td>
<td>2-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RUSHES &amp; SEDGES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Carex pensylvanica</td>
<td>Pennsylvania sedge</td>
<td>Zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5-1’ 0.5’</td>
<td>4-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex stricta</td>
<td>Tussock or Upright sedge</td>
<td>Zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-3’ 1’</td>
<td>5-8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex vulpinoidea</td>
<td>Common fox or Fox sedge</td>
<td>Zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-3’ 1.5’</td>
<td>3-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juncus effusus</td>
<td>Common or Soft rush</td>
<td>Zone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.5’ 1’</td>
<td>2-9</td>
<td></td>
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