



Department of Horticulture

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service • West Lafayette, IN

Landscape Plants for Wet Areas

Michael N. Dana and B. Rosie Lerner*

This publication lists and briefly describes landscape plants that are suitable for the specific site conditions of wet soil. These lists can serve as a guide, but are not intended to be exhaustive. Many other plants may grow well in wet soil conditions besides the ones on the list.

Winter survival is fundamental to success of perennial landscape plants. Indiana is divided into hardiness zones by the United States Department of Agriculture. Southern Indiana, from the Ohio River to approximately Bedford or Seymour, is in zone 6. The rest of the state is in zone 5. Select only plants from this list with a hardiness zone number equal to or lower than the zone for the location they will be planted. For example, in Muncie (zone 5), select plants listed for zone 5, 4, 3, or lower.

Wet areas are those soils in low spots or adjacent to bodies of water that are consistently wet during the growing season. They lack surface water, but the soil is damp to wet in the top 12-18".

Special alert: Due to its invasive nature, Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is no longer recommended for Indiana gardens. Please note that it is illegal to buy, sell, or plant Purple loosestrife in Indiana. For further information, please refer to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources page on the subject: <http://www.state.in.us/dnr/entomolo/purple.htm>.

Herbaceous Perennials for Wet Areas

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Hardiness Zone	Comments
Bee Balm <i>Monarda didyma</i>	4'	4	Sun to partial shade. Summer flowers of red or pink.
Buttercups <i>Ranunculus</i> spp.	1/2-2'	4	Generally yellow flowered. Tuberos or fibrous rooted.
Cardinal Flower <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	3'	3	Mulching desirable for this short-lived perennial. Firey red flowers July-Sept. Partial shade.
Cat-tail, Common <i>Typha latifolia</i>	4-6'	3	Sword-like leaves and brown seed head. May be invasive.
Forget-me-not, True <i>Myosotis scorpioides</i>	1-11/2'	3	Blue flowers July to August. Good naturalizer. Partial shade.
Joe-Pye Weed <i>Eupatorium maculatum</i>	6-10'	3	Perennial marsh plant. Purple, tubular flowers. Full sun.
Lily, Canada <i>Lilim canadense</i>	2-5'	4	Perennial bulb. Flowers bell-shaped; range in color from yellow to red. July blooms. May be difficult to establish.
Lobelia, Big Blue <i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>	1-3'	6	Blue late summer blooms, occasionally with white flowers.
Marsh Mallow <i>Althaea officinalis</i>	3-6'	3	Pinkish flowers up to 2 inches in diameter.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Hardiness Zone	Comments
Marsh Marigold <i>Caltha palustris</i>	1'	3	Full sun. Bright yellow spring flowers.
Peppermint <i>Mentha x piperita</i>	1-2'	4	Rapidly growing perennial mint. Purple fall flowers. May become a weed if not contained. Sun or part shade.
Primrose, Japanese <i>Primula japonica</i>	2 1/2'	5	Purple-red flowers in May to July. Requires shade.
Ribbon Grass <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> 'Picta'	6-10'	4	Sun to partial shade. Variegated foliage discolors in late summer. May be invasive.
Rose Mallow, Common <i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>	3-6'	4	Large blooms August to September. Sun.
Snakeroot, Black <i>Cimicifuga racemosa</i>	6-8'	3	Tall flower stalk. White flowers June to September. Prefers slightly acid soil.
Spirea, False <i>Astilbe x arendsii</i>	2-3'	4	Full sun or partial shade. Summer blooms of lavender, purple, red, or white.
Sweet Flag <i>Acorus calamus</i>	2'	4	Greenish flowers in spring and summer.
Violet, Lance-leaved <i>Viola lanceolata</i>	6"	3	Naturalizes. Sun to partial shade.
Violet, Sweet White <i>Viola blanda</i>	2"	3	Naturalizes. Sun or partial shade.
Virginia Waterleaf <i>Hydrophyllum virginianum</i>	1-2'	3	Purple blooms. Grows in semi-shade and slightly acid soil.
Yellow Flag <i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	5'	5	Yellow-orange flowering perennials in a wide range of colors and heights.
Shrubs for Wet Areas			
Arrowwood <i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	15'	3	Sun or partial shade. Blue fruits and red fall color. Good for mass plantings.
Bayberry <i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>	9'	5	Semi-evergreen. Gray berries on female plants are fragrant when crushed. Sun.
Blueberry, Highbush <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>	6-12'	4	Edible, blue fruits attract birds. Requires acid soil. Red fall color. Sun or partial shade.
Buttonbush <i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	20'	4	Grows at waters edge. Small, white flowers bloom in late July. Will die back somewhat in winter.
Carolina Allspice (Sweet Shrub) <i>Calycanthus floridus</i>	10'	5	Aromatic, reddish brown flowers in mid-May.
Chokeberry, Red <i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	12'	6	White blooms followed by bright red berries in fall. Red fall color. Sun.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Hardiness Zone	Comments
Cinquefoil, Shrubby <i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>	4'	2	Yellow, buff, or white flowers through late summer. No serious insect or disease problems.
Cranberry Bush <i>Viburnum trilobum</i>	12'	2	Red, edible fruits remain on shrub through winter. Sun.
Dogwood, Red Osier <i>Cornus sericea</i>	10'	3	Bright red twigs attractive in winter. Spreads by stolons (creeping stems). Sun or partial shade.
Dogwood, Yellowtwig <i>Cornus sericea</i> 'Flaviramea'	10'	3	Bright yellow twigs. Sun or partial shade.
Elderberry, American <i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	8'	4	Sun to partial shade. Edible, purple fruit attractive to birds. Keep away from septic and drainage systems because of invasive roots.
Fringetree <i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	30'	5	White flowers in spring. Blue, grapelike berries on female plants. Yellow fall color. Sun or partial shade.
Hardhack <i>Spiraea tomentosa</i>	4'	5	Rose-colored blooms July to September. Desirable in naturalized areas only.
Inkberry <i>Ilex glabra</i>	9-21'	3	Black berries. Male plants hold green foliage in late fall. Sun to partial shade.
Pinkshell Azalea <i>Rhododendron vaseyi</i>	15'	5	Deciduous. Rose-colored flowers in mid-May. All rhododendrons require acid soil and sun to partial shade.
Rose, Swamp <i>Rosa palustris</i>	7'	5	Interesting red fruits follow simple 2-inch, rose-colored flowers.
Swamp Azalea <i>Rhododendron viscosum</i>	8'	4	Deciduous. Fragrant, white flowers in early July. Bronze fall color. Acid soil required .
Sweet Azalea <i>Rhododendron arborescens</i>	10'	5	Deciduous. Fragrant, white flowers in mid-June. Acid soil required.
Snowberry <i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	3'	3	Pinkish flowers followed by snow-white berries. Sun or partial shade. Other species are also suitable for wet areas.
Spicebush <i>Lindera benzoin</i>	15'	5	Fragrant, yellow flowers in early spring. Yellow fall foliage. Sun or partial shade.
Summersweet <i>Clethra alnifolia</i>	10'	5	Mid-summer fragrant flowers. Attractive fall foliage.
Willow, Goat <i>Salix caprea</i>	25'	5	Attractive early spring catkins. Can be cut to ground to encourage shrub formation. Sun or partial shade.
Willow, Purple Osier <i>Salix purpurea</i>	9'	5	Good for mass planting where summer foliage is desired. Sun or partial shade.
Willow, Pussy <i>Salix discolor</i>	20'	2	Hardier than Goat Willow.
Winterberry <i>Ilex verticillata</i>	15'	4	Deciduous shrub. Holds red berries through early winter. Prefers acid soil. Male and female plants required for fruiting. Sun or partial shade.
Withe-rod <i>Viburnum cassinoides</i>	6'	2	Red-black fruits and red fall color. Shade.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Hardiness Zone	Comments
Trees for Wet Areas			
Alder, Black <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	80'	3	Thrives in wet soils. Somewhat weak-wooded. Invasive in natural areas.
Birch, River <i>Betula nigra</i>	100'	4	Exfoliating bark. Good for naturalizing along stream banks.
Cypress, Bald <i>Taxodium distichum</i> var. <i>distichum</i>	150'	5	Soft needles drop in fall. Sun.
Larch, American <i>Larix laricina</i>	60'	2	Needle-like, deciduous leaves. Yellow fall color. Sun.
London Plane <i>Platanus x acerifolia</i>	120'	5	Withstands city conditions. Exfoliating bark. Spiny fruit.
Maple, Red <i>Acer rubrum</i>	120'	3-6	Red flowers in early spring followed by red seeds. Red fall color. Prune for wide crotch angles.
Maple, Silver <i>Acer saccharinum</i>	90-130'	3	Grows rapidly. Arching and open form. Prone to winter storm damage with age. Prune to develop strong branch angles. Roots can be invasive. Sun.
Oak, Bur <i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	80'	4	Large tree. Requires large space for growth. May be difficult to establish.
Oak, Pin <i>Quercus palustris</i>	80'	5	Graceful tree. Brilliant red color in fall. Prefers slightly acid soil.
Oak, Swamp White <i>Quercus bicolor</i>	70'	4	Broad, round-headed form. Purplish-red fall color. Grows slowly.
Poplar, White <i>Populus alba</i>	90'	4	Rapid growth rate. Tends to be weak-wooded. Short lived. Many species available which are suitable for wet areas.
Serviceberry <i>Amelanchier arborea</i>	30-50'	4	White, spring flowers, brilliant red fall color. Partial shade. Tree or shrub form.
Sour Gum <i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	100'	5-6	Outstanding fall color. May be difficult to transplant.
Sweet Bay <i>Magnolia virginiana</i>	60'	5	Fragrant, white flowers in early summer.
Sweet Gum <i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>	120'	5-6	Star-shaped leaves have outstanding orange-scarlet fall color. May be difficult to transplant. Requires slightly acid soil.
Willow, Wisconsin <i>Salix x blanda</i>	50'	4	Weeping form. Weak-wooded, grows rapidly. Roots can be invasive.

* Janie Nordstrom Griffiths assisted in the revision of this publication.

For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics, state of Indiana, Purdue University, and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating; D. C. Petritz, Director, West Lafayette, IN. Issued in furtherance of the acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914. The Cooperative Extension Service of Purdue University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.