



Native Plants of the Tennessee Valley



The native plants in this guide were selected based on numerous field surveys and plant inventories of various regions and habitats within the seven-state Tennessee Valley region. They were chosen for their suitability in restoring, stabilizing and enhancing streambanks and shorelines, as well as improving aquatic, wetland, and terrestrial wildlife habitat. The species listed commonly occur in waterfront, wetland, or aquatic areas and provide aesthetic, wildlife, or stabilization value. Keep in mind there are many other native plants not included in this list that are appropriate for streambank and shoreline restoration.

The Tennessee Valley was divided into three regions having similar climates, geography, soils, and vegetation. The West (W) region

extends from Guntersville Dam west; the Middle (M) region extends from Guntersville Dam to Watts Bar Dam; and the East (E) region extends from Watts Bar Dam east.

Collecting plants from the wild should be avoided. In many cases, they will not survive the damage and stress of transplanting. This practice also threatens native populations and can be illegal without landowner permission.

Native plants are becoming more popular and can usually be obtained from nurseries and specialty growers. Try to obtain healthy plants from reputable nurseries located as close to your site as possible.

		Region	Site Conditions	Light Preference	Wildlife Value	pH	Height		
		W = West M = Middle E = East	DU = Dry Upland MU = Moist Upland WE = Water's Edge W&SW = Wetlands & Standing Water	○ = Full Sun ◐ = Partial Sun ● = Full Shade	B = Birds SM = Small Mammals LM = Large Mammals	A = Acidic (pH<6) N = Neutral (pH 6-8) B = Basic (pH>8)	LT = Large Tree (>50') ST = Small Tree (20'-50') LS = Large Shrub (8'-20') SS = Small Shrub (<8')		
Common Name	Scientific Name	Region	Site Conditions	Light	Wildlife Value	pH	Height	Bloom Time	Comments
Trees	Red Maple	WME	DU, MU, WE	●●●	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	red flowers in early spring; beautiful fall color
	Sugar Maple	WME	DU, MU	●●●	B, SM	A-N-B	LT	spring	yellow and orange fall color
	Serviceberry	WME	DU, MU	●●	B	A-N	ST	spring	early bloomer; beautiful fall foliage; edible fruits attract birds
	River Birch	WME	MU, WE	○	B, SM, LM	A-N	ST	spring	prefers acid soil; bronze exfoliating bark
	Pecan	WME	DU, MU, WE	○	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	tasty, edible nuts—could be grown as a crop
	Sugarberry	WME	MU, WE	●●	B	A-N	LT	spring	yellow fall color; sweet-tasting fruits birds relish
	Redbud	WME	DU, MU	●	B	N-B	ST	spring	pink flowers; hummingbirds feed on the nectar
	Fringetree	WME	DU, MU	●●	B, SM	A-N	ST	late spring	very showy white flowers
	Flowering Dogwood	WME	DU, MU	●●	B, SM	A-N	ST	spring	very popular; good understory plant
	Persimmon	WME	DU, MU, WE	○●	B, SM, LM	A-N	ST	spring	edible fruits; attracts many birds and mammals
	American Beech	WME	MU	●●	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	golden bronze fall color; very shallow root system
	Green Ash	WME	MU, WE	○●	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	yellow fall leaf color
	Honeylocust	WME	MU, WE	○	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	yellow fall leaf color
	American Holly	WME	MU, WE	●●	B	A-N	ST	spring	slow-growing evergreen; need male & female plants to produce red fruits on females
	Black Walnut	WME	MU, WE	○●	SM	A-N	LT	spring	wood used for fine furniture; edible nuts popular in baked goods
	Eastern Redcedar	WME	DU, MU	○●	B, SM	A-N-B	LT	late winter	slow-growing evergreen; provides protective cover for wildlife
	Sweetgum	WME	MU, WE	○	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	beautiful fall color; gum balls produce small seeds
	Tuliptree	WME	DU, MU	○●	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	Tennessee state tree; large colorful flowers; yellow fall foliage
	Sweetbay	WME	MU, WE	○●	B, SM,	A-N	ST	spring	Semi-evergreen; leaves green on top & silvery on bottom; large lemon-scented flowers
	Water Tupelo	WM	W&SW	○	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	flood tolerant; favored honey tree
	Blackgum	WME	DU, MU, WE	○●●	B	A-N	LT	spring	red foliage in early fall; food source for wildlife
	Sourwood	WME	DU, MU	○●	B	A-N	ST	summer	red and purple color in early fall; does well in poor, dry soils
	Loblolly Pine	WME	DU, MU, WE	○	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	evergreen; fast grower
	Virginia Pine	ME	DU, MU	○	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	evergreen; slow grower; does well in poor, dry soils
	Sycamore	WME	DU, MU, WE	○●	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	fast grower; attractive exfoliating bark
	Black Cherry	WME	DU, MU	○●	B, SM	A-N	LT	spring	white flowers; yellow to wine-red fall foliage
	White Oak	WME	DU, MU	○●	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	slow growth; bronze to red fall leaf color; medium acorn
	Overcup Oak	W	MU, WE	○	B, SM, LM	A	LT	spring	flood tolerant; yellow-brown fall foliage; small acorn
	Swamp Chestnut Oak	WME	MU, WE	○●	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	important timber tree; medium acorn
	Water Oak	WM	MU, WE	○●	B, SM, LM	A	LT	spring	fast-growing oak; small acorn
Pin Oak	W	DU, MU	○●	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	fast-growing oak; red fall foliage; small acorn	
Willow Oak	WME	MU, WE	○●	B, SM, LM	A	LT	spring	can have a russet-red fall color; small acorn	
Chestnut Oak	WE	DU, MU	○●	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	grows on poor, dry, rocky sites; medium-sized acorn	
Northern Red Oak	ME	MU	○	B, SM, LM	A-N	LT	spring	fast grower; small acorn	
Black Oak	ME	DU, MU	○	B, SM, LM	A	LT	spring	small acorn	
Black Willow	WME	WE, W&SW	○	B, SM, LM	A-N	ST	spring	shrubby-looking tree	
Sassafras	ME	DU, MU,	○●	B	A	LT	spring	small yellow flowers; yellow to purple-red fall foliage	
Baldcypress	WM	MU, WE, W&SW	○●	B	A-N	LT	spring	deciduous conifer; soft brown fall leaf color	
Eastern Hemlock	ME	MU, WE	●●	B	A	LT	spring	evergreen; small cones	
Shrubs	Red Buckeye	WME	MU, WE	●●	B, SM	A-N	LS/ST	spring	red flowers attract hummingbirds
	Hazel Alder	WME	WE	○	B	A-N	LS	spring	can develop colonies
	False Indigobush	WME	MU, WE	○	B, SM	A-N-B	SS	spring	flowers are purple-blue and orange
	Pawpaw	WME	MU, WE	○	SM, LM	A-N	LS/ST	spring	yellow fall leaf color; fruit favored by raccoons
	American Beautyberry	WME	DU, MU, WE,	○●	B, SM, LM	A-N	SS	summer	beautiful magenta berry-like fruit persists through winter
	Sweetshrub	WME	MU	○●	SM	N	SS	late spring	sweet-scented purple-brown flowers; makes excellent border shrub; adapts to many soil types; easily transplanted; toxic to cows
	Buttonbush	WME	WE, W&SW	○●	B, LM	A-N-B	SS	summer	one of few plants to grow in standing water; white flowers are clustered in a ball
	Silky Dogwood	WME	WE	○●	B, SM	A-N-B	SS	spring	attractive white flowers; blue fruits
	Strawberry bush	WME	DU, MU, WE	●●	B, SM, LM	A	SS	late spring	bright orange-red fruit is displayed after the warty, pinkish capsules open in the fall; fruits, seeds, and bark considered poisonous
	American Witch Hazel	ME	WE	●	B, SM, LM	A-N	LS/ST	fall	yellow fall leaf color; unusual yellow flowers
Wild Hydrangea	WME	MU, WE	●●	B, SM	A-N	SS	summer	light yellow fall leaf color; large clusters of white flowers	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Region	Site Conditions	Light	Wildlife Value	pH	Height	Bloom Time	Comments
Shrubs	Oakleaf Hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i>	WME MU		▶ B, SM	A-N	SS	summer		purple-red fall leaf color; large clusters of white flowers; will form colonies
	Winterberry	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	WME WE		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	SS	spring		a deciduous holly; red berries persist into January
	Virginia Sweetspire	<i>Itea virginica</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶▶ B, LM	A-N	SS			fragrant showy white flowers; reddish fall foliage
	Mountain Laurel	<i>Kalmia latifolia</i>	WME DU, MU		▶▶ B, SM, LM	A	LS	spring		acid-loving; white to pink bell-shaped flowers; evergreen
	Spicebush	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B	A-N	LS	spring		yellow fall leaf color; yellow flowers, bright red fruit
	Common Ninebark	<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>	E DU, MU		○ LM	A-N	LS	spring		peeling bark on older stems
	Chickasaw Plum	<i>Prunus angustifolia</i>	WME DU, MU		○ B, SM, LM	A-N	LS	early spring		fruit eaten by small mammals; important cover for songbirds such as mockingbird; develops colonies; grows best in sandy soils; use only in areas where spread is not restricted
	Piedmont Azalea	<i>Rhododendron canescens</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶▶ B, LM	A	SS	spring		develops colonies; pink flowers
	Catawba Rosebay	<i>Rhododendron catawbiense</i>	ME MU		▶▶▶ B, LM	A	LS	late spring		large lilac-colored flowers; evergreen
	Pinxterbloom Azalea	<i>Rhododendron periclymenoides</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶▶ B, LM	A	SS	spring		fragrant white to pink flowers; forms colonies
	Fragrant Sumac	<i>Rhus aromatica</i>	WME DU		○ B, SM, LM	A-N	LS	spring		red fall foliage and berries; excellent for controlling erosion on slopes with poor dry soils
	Winged Sumac	<i>Rhus copallinum</i>	WME DU		○ B, LM	A-N	LS	summer		beautiful fall color; dry, rocky sites; develops colonies
	Elderberry	<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM, LM	A-N	SS	summer		develops colonies; fruit is good for jelly, pies, and wine; white flowers in large clusters
	Maple-leaf Viburnum	<i>Viburnum acerifolium</i>	E DU, MU		▶▶ B, SM, LM	A-N	LS	late spring		develops colonies; shade tolerant; reddish-purple fall leaf color; creamy white flowers
	Withe-rod Viburnum	<i>Viburnum cassinoides</i>	E MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM, LM	A-N	LS	summer		dark-red fall foliage; creamy white flowers and attractive fruits that progress from green to black before ripening
Arrowwood	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	E MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM, LM	A-N	LS	late spring		reddish fall leaf color; small white flowers; Native Americans used the shoots for arrow shafts	
Possumhaw Viburnum	<i>Viburnum nudum</i>	WM MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM, LM	A-N	LS	late spring		reddish fall leaf color; lots of small white flowers; waxy green leaf in the summer	
Vines	Peppervine	<i>Ampelopsis aborea</i>	WME DU, WE, WE		▶▶▶ SM, LM	A-N	15-25'	summer		reddish-purple fall color; aggressive; high climbing
	Groundnut	<i>Apios americana</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM	N	3-30'	summer/fall		legume; attractive reddish- or purple-brown flowers; edible tubers & fruits
	Supplejack	<i>Berberia scandens</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶▶ B, SM, LM	A-N-B	20-30'	spring		inconspicuous flowers; aggressive
	Crossvine	<i>Bignonia capreolata</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B		30-50'	spring		reddish-green leaves in winter; dark orange trumpet-shaped flowers edged with yellow; will grow up in trees or along ground
	Trumpet Creeper	<i>Campsis radicans</i>	WME DU, MU, WE		▶▶ B, LM	A-N	30-40'	summer		large red-to-orange trumpet-shaped flowers; attracts hummingbirds; aggressive
	Virgin's Bower	<i>Clematis virginiana</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	12-20'	summer		sweet-smelling flower
	Climbing Hempvine	<i>Mikania scandens</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	8-15'	spring		aggressive
	Virginia Creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	WME MU		▶▶▶▶ B, SM	A-N	30-50'	summer		scarlet fall color; useful as groundcover for erosion control in shady areas
American Wisteria	<i>Wisteria frutescens</i>	WME MU, WE		▶ LM	A-N	20-30'	summer		clusters of fragrant purple flowers; low climbing	
Grasses, Sedges, Rushes	Big Bluestem	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	WME DU, MU		○ B, SM	A-N	6-8'	summer		good nesting and cover; nice fall and winter color
	Bushy Beardsgrass	<i>Andropogon glomeratus</i>	WME WE		○ B, SM	A-N	4-6'	summer		good nesting and cover; showy rust-colored plumes in fall
	River Cane	<i>Arundinaria gigantea</i>	WME WE		▶▶▶ B, SM	A-N	3-20'	varies		can form large colonies; good cover for wildlife
	Hop Sedge	<i>Carex lupulina</i>	WME W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	2-4'	spring		food and cover for birds
	River Oats	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	WME DU, MU, WE		▶▶▶ B, SM, LM	A-N	2-4'	summer		good food source for wildlife
	Creeping Spikerush	<i>Eleocharis palustris</i>	WME WE, W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	1-2.5'	summer		forms colonies; good cover for small fish
	Square-stem Spikerush	<i>Eleocharis quadrangulata</i>	WME WE, W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	2-4'	summer		forms extensive colonies; good cover for rails, herons, and marsh birds
	Virginia Wildrye	<i>Elymus virginicus</i>	WME MU, WE		▶ B, SM, LM	A-N	2-4'	spring		shade-tolerant; good for shady areas bordering water
	Soft Rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>	WME WE, W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	2-3'	summer		common along shallow fringe of wetlands and shorelines
	Rice Cutgrass	<i>Leersia oryzoides</i>	WME WE, W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N-B	3-5'	summer		common along margins of wetlands; foliage can scratch exposed skin
	Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	WME DU, MU, WE		○ B, SM, LM	A-N	3-6'	summer		good nesting and cover; nice fall and winter color
	Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	WME DU		○ B, SM	A-N	3-4'	summer		good nesting and cover; nice fall and winter color
	Three-square Bulrush	<i>Scirpus americanus</i>	WME WE, W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	2-4'	summer		nesting, cover, and food for waterfowl
	Green Bulrush	<i>Scirpus atrovirens</i>	WME W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	3-6'	summer		nesting, cover, and food for waterfowl
	Woolgrass	<i>Scirpus cyperinus</i>	WME WE, W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	3-5'	summer		common along shallow margins of wetlands and shorelines
Softstem Bulrush	<i>Scirpus validus</i>	WME WE, W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	4-7'	summer		nesting, cover, and food for ducks, shorebirds, and marsh birds	
Indiangrass	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	WME DU, MU		○ B, SM, LM	A-N	3-6'	summer		good nesting and cover	
Eastern Gammagrass	<i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>	WME MU, WE		○ B, SM, LM	A-N	4-6'	summer		flood-tolerant native grass	
Wetland Herbs	Water Plantain	<i>Alisma subcordatum</i>	WME W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	1-3'	spring		small white and yellow flowers; food and cover for birds and waterfowl
	Swamp Milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	4-6'	fall		attractive pink flowers; attracts butterflies
	Hollow Joe-pye-weed	<i>Eupatorium fistulosum</i>	WME MU, WE		○ B	A-N	4-8'	summer		attractive pink flowers; attracts butterflies
	Halberd-leaved Mallow	<i>Hibiscus laevis</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B	A-N	4-6'	summer		large attractive pink flowers; attracts hummingbirds
	Swamp Rose Mallow	<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B	A-N	4-7'	summer		large attractive white flowers with crimson center; attracts hummingbirds
	Spotted Touch-me-not	<i>Impatiens capensis</i>	WME MU, WE		▶▶ B	A-N	2-4'	summer		attractive flowers; attracts hummingbirds and butterflies
	Virginia Blueflag	<i>Iris virginica</i>	WME WE, W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N	2'	summer		attractive blue flower; common in wet areas and shallow water
	Waterwillow	<i>Justicia americana</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ SM	A-N	2'	late spring		colony-forming; good cover for small fish
	Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	WME MU, WE, W&SW		▶▶▶ B	A-N	3'	summer		attractive red flowers; attracts hummingbirds and butterflies
	Arrow Arum	<i>Peltandra virginica</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	3'	late spring/summer		large heart-shaped leaves; food for ducks and small mammals
	Marsh Smartweed	<i>Polygonum hydropiperoides</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	2-3'	summer		food for birds and waterfowl
	Pickernelweed	<i>Pontederia cordata</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	2-3'	late spring		forms dense colonies; beautiful blue flowers; attracts butterflies
	Swamp Dock	<i>Rumex verticillatus</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	2'	summer		cover for small fish and food for waterfowl
	Arrowhead	<i>Sagittaria latifolia</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N-B	1-2'	late spring		white flowers; produces edible tubers
	Lizard's Tail	<i>Saururus cernuus</i>	WME W&SW		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	1-2'	summer		white flowers along a 10-inch curved spike
Narrow-leaf Cattail	<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	WME W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N-B	3-6'	late spring		cover for birds and mammals; can be invasive	
Broad-leaf Cattail	<i>Typha latifolia</i>	WME W&SW		○ B, SM	A-N-B	4-8'	late spring		cover for birds and mammals; can be invasive	
Ferns	Sensitive Fern	<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i>	WME MU		▶▶▶ B, SM	A-N	1-2.5'	NA		good for wet sites; modest cover for wildlife
	Cinnamon Fern	<i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>	WME MU		▶▶▶ B	A-N	2-4'	NA		good for wet sites; modest cover for wildlife
	Royal Fern	<i>Osmunda regalis</i>	WME MU		▶▶ B, SM	A-N	2-5'	NA		good for wet sites; modest cover for wildlife
	Netted Chain Fern	<i>Woodwardia areolata</i>	WME MU		▶▶ B	A	1-2'	NA		good for wet sites; modest cover for wildlife

