



Gardening Resources & Tips from the MMGA

September 2026 Savoring Summer, Feeling the Fall



Monarch butterflies, honeybees, *Rudbeckia*, *Solidago*... You might be lucky enough to be surrounded by all that and more, perhaps after years of focused toil. These markers remind us that while summer may end in late September, it also shouts out in glorious abundance. Gardens everywhere offer up flowers and food, even while we know fall clean-up lies ahead. This issue of the Dirt celebrates the scope of the month, discussing what native perennials to plant, what farms to visit, and even how to build a water pond while the days stay warm. Out of all the months, September reminds us to "**gather ye rosebuds while ye may**". Get out there and drink deeply of this gorgeous month.



In this month's issue of The Dirt...

- Featured Garden: We share our list of native plants at Drumlin Farm.
- Featured How-To: Have you built a garden pond yet? Learn how!
- Featured Tip: Explore Massachusetts' farms by region or produce.

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2026 Massachusetts Gardening Symposium

Presented by the Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

Saturday, September 26, 2026, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

BENTLEY UNIVERSITY, WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

10 Years of Growing Together: Reimagining the Garden from the Ground Up

All gardeners are invited to explore fresh ideas shaping the future of our landscapes, large and small. Expert insight into soil science, adaptability/sustainability and elements of design promise new knowledge and inspiration for all levels.

THREE ACCLAIMED SPEAKERS:

Kirsten Kurtz



Soil Scientist

Stephen Orr



Garden Writer & Editor

Page Dickey



Ecological Garden Designer

THREE EXCITING TOPICS:

- “The Science Behind Healthy Soil” (Kurtz)
- “The Gardener’s Mindset: Lessons Learned from Four Gardens” (Orr)
- “Garden Design with an Ecological Slant” (Dickey)
- Q&A Panel featuring your curated questions for all 3 speakers

Also includes lunch, vendor marketplace, book signings, raffle and door prizes



LEARN MORE AND REGISTER

<https://www.massmastergardeners.org/educational-resources/Symposium>

Early Bird price thru July 6th--Registration closes Sept. 16, 2026

Header photo courtesy of Master Gardener Erica Bond © 2026 MMGA, all rights reserved



Featured Monthly Garden Native Plants: From Drumlin Farm to You

Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary
208 South Great Road Lincoln MA 01773

<https://www.massaudubon.org/places-to-explore/wildlife-sanctuaries/drumlin-farm>

Author Lynne Larson (PMG) is co-manager of the Drumlin Farm site. The Drumlin team also includes the project founder Pat Puma (LMG) co-manager Erica Bond (LMG), Barb Ernisse (PMG), Art Kreiger (PMG), and Alison Lawton (PMG). The team has been at Drumlin since 2021 and work together on all decisions regarding the project. We love to share what we've learned!

Update from the MMGA / Drumlin Farm Native Plant Project

This is the sixth year of a joint project between the MMGA and Massachusetts Audubon at Drumlin Farm. The project, "Increasing Biodiversity in the Ecosystem by the Use of Native Plants," began in 2021. The purpose was to use native plants to redesign 12+ garden beds in the Learning Garden at Drumlin Farm in Lincoln, MA.

Our goal was multi-faceted: We wanted to model the use of native plants in home gardens, to make visitors aware of the wide range of native plant choices, and to share information about the plants through interactive signage, all of which might encourage visitors to implement these ideas at home. Drumlin Farm is the most visited of all Massachusetts Audubon sites, and the Learning Garden is the busiest section at Drumlin Farm. So, we were excited about getting more people onboard with planting natives.



The MMGA team's belief was that public awareness and professional efforts to use native plants was increasing and so the project was timely. We saw that topic of native plants as rightly tied to the conversation on global warming, and thought homeowners and gardeners might be looking for direction and ideas. We wanted to help inform people, and to make planting natives an easy choice. While we designed each bed at Drumlin with native-only plants, we support Dr. Doug Tallamy's **Homegrown National Park** and his **70/30 ratio** for plants.

A brief background of the project, from 2021-2025

In 2021, the "Drumlin Farm Armchair Team" was formed by interested Master Gardeners. We worked on identifying native plant ideas for the 13 beds at the Learning Garden at Drumlin Farm. We mapped out the garden design and created

different themes for each bed. In 2022, the project got its official kick-off via funds from a private donor and we were able to secure native plants for some of the themed beds. In 2023 and 2024, we received funds from an MMGA grant program and were able to add native plants to all but three beds at the site.



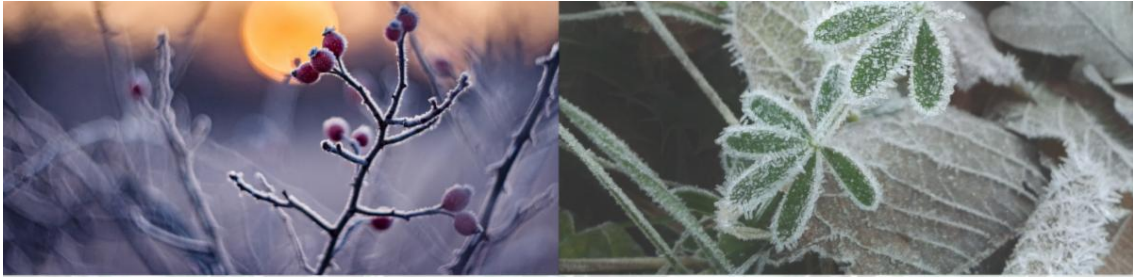
In 2025, we received additional funding to continue our efforts add native plants to the remaining beds, or to expand upon what was already there. We added native shrubs to a new bed, something we had been hoping to include, and completed the final three beds in the Learning Garden, filling out our initial design. Also, in partnership with Drumlin, we designed and incorporated interactive signage, which went into Learning Garden and near the main gift shop, the two busiest places at Drumlin. The signs include a QR code that takes the viewer to the full list of native plants in the various beds.



In 2026, we began to focus on the area near front entrance. Working with Drumlin Farm, we finalized the landscaping plans for the entrance and gift shop gardens; the approach here was to demonstrate how versatile native plants could be in terms of color, size, and overall look in a home garden. We purchased and planted the first collection of plants for this area, which is a shadier spot than the Learning Garden, which means we chose a different collection. Overall, the plan is to showcase user-friendly choices for a home garden. We will continue to expand and update our collections, and to increase signage so that visitors might leave with new ideas about what home gardens can be.

What is the take-away for our Dirt readers? September is a great month to plant perennials, which makes it a perfect time to share the full list of native plants we used! These lists name each plant by bed and contain links to reliable sites that provide in-depth information about each item. Our message to you: Please - do this at home!

MMGA / Drumlin Farm Native Plant List Gift Shop Terrace 2026
MMGA / Drumlin Farm Native Plant List Learning Garden



Massachusetts Master Gardener Association Presents

Winter Gardening Know-How

Topics Include

- **Invasives in Massachusetts**
- **Creating Pollinator Habitat Anywhere**
- **Where Our Vegetables Come From**
- **A Holistic Approach to Gardening**

Join us ONLINE

**November 4, 11, 18 & December 2
7-8:30 PM**

Registration closes November 2nd, 2026

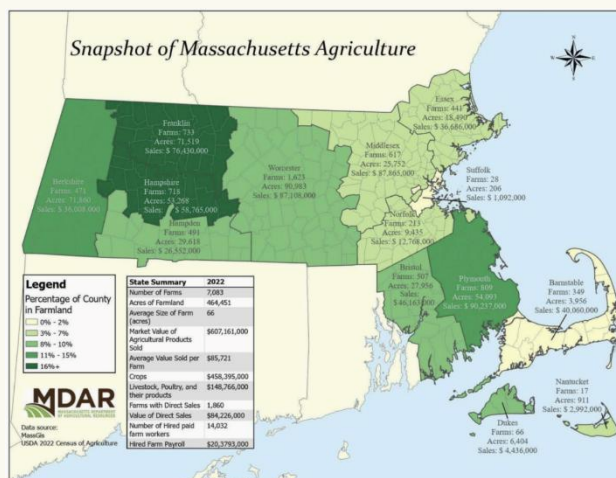
**To learn more and sign up,
click to visit our website.**

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Monthly Tip Enjoy the Harvest

In addition to perennial planting and garden cleaning, September is harvest season in Massachusetts. According to the 2022 census (released in 2024),

"Massachusetts has 7,083 farms on 464,451 acres." Farm stands across the state are full of tomatoes (while they last), corn, pumpkins, squashes, garlic, melons, and so much more. It's also apple picking season (if you wait until October they will be gone). While your own gardens are always calling, we say make the most of this beautiful month, take a weekend break, and go support some local farms. Master Gardners also have the option of volunteering at one of the **food pantry gardens** we service.



Massachusetts Agriculture

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-resources-facts-and-statistics>

Massachusetts Agritourism

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/agritourism-farms>

Local farms by Region

<https://massnrc.org/farmlocator/map.aspx?Type=Agritourism>

MMGA Food Pantry Farms

<https://www.massmastergardeners.org/community/food-pantry-gardens>

Monthly How To: Create a Wildlife Pond

Author Madeline Chamberlain (SPMG and UVM Extension Transfer '22) is the MMGA Project Manager at the Ohrenberger School native plant garden in West Roxbury and MMGA Board Member and Communication Director. Her Boston home garden features a wildlife pond (of course!), many native plants, and lots of rocks. Note: This article was modified and reprinted from 2023.

Gardening to support native wildlife has become more mainstream. Home gardeners are working with native plants and boldly leaving the leaves over the winter. While native plants are important, there are many things we can do to help

wildlife and one of the best is to build a pond. It might sound crazy and challenging and cumbersome but building a wildlife pond has been the single most important thing I have done in my garden.

Picture this: Dragon flies zooming around your garden. Neighborhood songbirds bathing in your backyard. Tadpoles scooting around your pond. While all these creatures are important on their own, they also play a crucial role in the ecosystem of a healthy garden. Creating a pond makes all this possible in your backyard and, to any gardener's delight, opens the door to a whole new subset of native plants: aquatics.

How do you start? First need to figure out where you'd like a big hole in your yard. Full to part sun is ideal. Avoid siting it under a tree as that will create a hassle come fall. The pond doesn't have to be huge; mine is about 5 feet across. Historically, our frostline in Massachusetts is around three feet, so I dug a little deeper in case any frogs want to stay safe overwinter. The shape is up to you, but I recommend something with natural curves. As you dig, be sure to carve out planting shelves; these flat shelves are where you'll place emergent pond plants. You also should leave sections that are quite shallow so bees and birds can land. Finally, be careful to make sure the top of your pond is level!



Once the pond is a shape to your liking, remove any roots and rocks that are sticking out on the bottom and sides. You can add a few inches of sand at the bottom to create a buffer between any potential rocks or roots that might emerge. Then line the pond with a soft layer; you can buy a subliner, but old blankets or carpet pads are cheaper. Finally, you'll add a plastic pond liner. Many large garden centers sell this by the foot, or you can order a precut one online. Get one a few

feet bigger than you think you need. Lay the liner in the sun so it can warm up and become more flexible and then position it in the pond. It helps to get into the pond here so you can make adjustments. It also helps to add water as you go; the weight of the water will help you smooth the folds of the liner. You might be tempted to use rain barrel water for this, but I'm hesitant to recommend that since roof water is probably not conducive to your new ecosystem.

Once your pond is full, it's time to cut the liner. Cut a healthy margin— 1.5 feet or so— and then bury the excess with fill from the hole and rocks. While you're playing with that, start lining the inside of the pond with rocks. Don't worry too much about full coverage. The black liner pretty much disappears once the pond is full. After you've filled the pond, wait a full day before the next step.



Now for the fun part: planting. A wildlife pond doesn't have a pump or filtration system; it relies on a blend of pond plants to keep the water clear and healthy. Three basic types are: submerged, emergent (these have their roots in the water, but most of their stems and leaves are outside of the water) and floating (yes, you can have pond lilies!). Your pond will need all three types.

Submerged plants might seem like the most boring of the mix (they're underwater!), but they're probably the most important because they add oxygen to the water. Also, they're not as hidden as you might think. In a three-foot deep pond, you can easily see some of the taller submerged plants. These can be weighted down and tossed into the pond, or they can be left to float in the pond. It's up to you. Personally, I think the native hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) is pretty so I let it float about— and it provides great cover for tadpoles.



Emergent plants are more exciting because they are probably what you envision when you think "pond plant." Native flag irises (*Iris versicolor*), pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), even cattails (*Typha latifolia*) are all options. These plants can go in aquatic planting baskets on the pond shelves, or you can experiment with weighing roots down with gravel for a more natural look. When choosing emergent

plants, be sure to select some with long straight stems such as grasses; dragonfly larvae need these to climb out of the water.

Floating plants, such as the iconic pond lily (*Nymphaea odorata*), have a variety of growing conditions; check their label for more information.

While you can certainly go crazy with tropical pond plants, native plants will best support our native wildlife— and they don't need any special winter treatment. Just leave them in the pond and they'll come back in the spring. Sometimes they take a little longer than the rest of your garden to emerge because the temperature in your pond is cooler than the soil.

You can order pond plants online, but it is best to purchase from local nurseries. That way you can be certain that whatever you pick up is not on the [Massachusetts invasive species list](#). One time I got sent what I swear was bishop's weed in lieu of what I actually ordered. Even if your pond is not near other water, it's important to be careful of invasives as seeds and even scraps of roots can be transported by birds.

Finally, planting around your pond is just as important as in the pond. It's tempting to plant shorter plants and groundcover all along the shoreline so you can see all your hard work. However, it's important to add areas of taller plants right up along the edge of the pond to provide cover for wildlife visitors.

There's a little upkeep. Spring is the time to remove the winter's dead leaves. Dip them out with a net and place them on the side of the pond for a day so that any larvae can crawl back into the pond. You also should research mosquito management. I treat my pond with wildlife-safe mosquito dunks. Finally, sometimes the water gets low in the summer but feel free to top it up with hose water.



If you build it, they will come! Before you know it, your new pond will attract dragonflies, hoverflies, birds and, yes, even frogs. It might take a little bit of time, but I promise, the wildlife will show up and become an important facet of your garden.

Here are some additional resources for building your pond:

[Gardeners World: How To Create a Wildlife Pond](#)

[Michigan State University: Types of Pond Plants](#)

[Xerxes Society: Backyard Ponds](#)

Seasonal MMGA Learning Resources

Ask us your questions in person! Trained volunteers staff Ask-a-Master-Gardener (AAMG) tables at dozens of events throughout the growing season.

- The AAMGA is coming to a community near you, so check our [AAMG Calendar](#) for dates and times.
- Belong to a local organization that would like to host an AAMG? Contact

Outreach@MassMasterGardeners.org

Why guess? Test! Get your soil pH tested - for free!

- Visit a soil testing clinic near you: [Soil Testing Calendar](#).
- To request an MMGA Soil Testing event for your organization's event, contact SoilTesting@MassMasterGardeners.org



Year-round MMGA Learning Resources

Have a plant problem? Email our volunteers your questions...and they'll get back to you. Please include your name, phone number, and as much detail as possible, including photos.

- Massachusetts Horticultural Society at MHSHelpline@MassMasterGardeners.org
- New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill Hortline@NEBG.org

Speaker's Bureau: If you're a member of a garden club or other organization, check out our lecture topics here. If you need information on how to schedule a talk for your group, contact our Speakers Bureau Manager at Speakers@MassMasterGardeners.org.

Credits

Featured Articles & Columns

Featured Garden: Lynne Larson, PMG

Featured Book Review: Madeline Chamberlain, SPMG

Pictures (in order of appearance)

Rudbeckia, by Lynne Larson, PMG

Drumlin Farm photos, by Lynne Larson, PMG

Massachusetts agricultural map, by Mass.gov

Pond photos, by Madeline Chamberlain, SPMG

Echinacea collage, by Lynne Larson, PMG

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Who We Are

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is an independent non-profit organization whose mission is to share research-based horticultural knowledge and experience with the public. We meet that goal through Master Gardener Certification, outreach, education, volunteering, and public gardening programs for the advancement of best practices in sustainable, regenerative horticulture.



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