

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. This is a continuation of last week's program on gardening with nature.

To create a natural garden, take inspiration from the beauty natural to the Eastern Shore. We have shorelines, inlets and maritime forests and fields of goldenrod, black-eyed Susan, and purple cone-flower. Our native grasses, sedges, and shrubs, such as high-tide bush and spicebush provide year-round interest along the meadow's edge.

Inspired by the layers found in nature, look for existing voids in your own garden landscape. Fill them in to complete the natural vegetative layer that supports a variety of wildlife. Site conditions such as terrain, wind, sun exposure and micro-climates are also considerations for the natural garden ecosystem.

Re-imagine an expanse of flat, uniform lawn by emulating a meadow habitat made up of sun-loving native grasses and flowers. Shrub beds can also be situated in the middle of a lawn to create a habitat island. Rather than installing a single row of plants, arrange them in random groupings to appear more natural and add visual interest.

If a lawn grows right up to the edge of a body of water, create a buffer of plants as seen in nature, to filter runoff, shade the water, and keep the soil from eroding the banks. And, instead of continuing the futile attempt to grow grass under trees, look to nature to see what grows naturally on the forest floor. Herbaceous perennials, ephemerals, mosses, and ferns are good choices for the home "forest."

Create the feel of a walk in the woods by replicating woodland features. Include a shady path lined with layers of ground-covers and vines. Create curiosity by winding the path around a corner or splitting the path to offer several directions in which to walk. Resist

the temptation to edge the entire path with a single plant, instead choosing those of varied heights and forms.

Combining different leaf shapes, colors and textures is another lesson we can learn from nature. If one looks closely, a walk in the wild offers much diversity of leaf types. Mix the feathery foliage of ferns with broad, upright leaves of perennials. Or, in a sunny spot, combine the upright bronzy leaves of a native grass with a dark green shrub.

And don't forget the value of a winter landscape. One feature that can take the winter center stage is interesting tree bark and form. To be enjoyed from an inside view, consider planting a stand of white birch surrounded by berry-laden shrubbery that attracts birds. This combination is sure to delight as one peers through the window, warming by the fireside.

From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded 1.2 inches of rain last week.

For answers to Gardening questions call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office.