



## ALL-AMERICAN BEAUTIES

Native plants are tough, colorful, easy to grow, and they fill a garden with bloom, birds, bees, and butterflies.

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### *Atamasco lily*

(*Zephyranthes atamasco*)

**Native to:** Southeastern states; hardy in Zones 7–10.

**Where it sparkles:** Southern gardeners sometimes see the cheerful, pure white blooms of Atamasco lily in shallow ditches along roadsides, bobbing on flower stems 10–12 inches tall. Grow it in damp spots, on the edges of rock gardens, in meadows, or in pots.

**Plant it with:** Ferns, hostas, or little grasses.

**After the flowers fade:** The grassy foliage is often evergreen, so you'll know just where to look for flowers after a rain. With a winter mulch, bulbs should be hardy to Zone 6.

**Denise Greene says:** "They really want a damp spot. Most bulbs you put in a damp, mucky soil and they rot. These are the ones you have to use there. They like it."



Denise Greene and Cedar, her furry assistant, get to work on planting.

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ake room for native wildflowers in your garden and you capture the richness of nature in a perfectly civilized flowerbed. The wild charms of dancing columbines, sundrops, and sizzling black-eyed Susans are somehow magnified when you can enjoy them in your own backyard. Wildflowers that flourish along mountain streams, in the dappled light on the edge of a woodland, and in the baking sun of the prairies adapt gracefully to conditions in a garden, and, once established, flourish without pampering. Birds and butterflies accustomed to these blooms in nature will soon make themselves at home in your garden.

Garden designer Denise Greene grows and sells hundreds of native perennial wildflowers at her home, Sassafras Farm, in Virginia's beautiful Tidewater country. Spring-blooming native wildflowers are great nectar sources for early butterflies, she says, and they entice her out into her garden early in the year, too.

Denise's garden is a colorful and exciting place, full of treasures and surprises. In summer, hummingbirds dive from the sassafras trees to native yellow honeysuckle, then zip across to a trumpet vine. Denise loves to be in the midst of it all.

"Everybody has different tastes in gardening, but what I'm trying to do is help nature happen around me," she says. "I don't want to control it, I want to help it."

Here is a closer look at 10 of Denise's favorite spring-blooming native plants.



## Heart-leaf alexanders

(*Zizia aptera*)

**Native to:** New York to Georgia, and west to Colorado; hardy in Zones 4–9.

**Where it sparkles:** Give this little groundcover room to spread around the base of trees or in the cracks between stepping-stones. It is rugged, adaptable, and thrives in sun to light shade. Bright yellow flowers appear on stalks up to 2 feet tall in late spring.

**Plant it with:** *Sedum*, *Ajuga*, *Lamium*

**After the flowers fade:** Don't worry if caterpillars eat the foliage—you're providing food for beautiful black swallowtail butterfly larvae.

**Denise says:** "Having something that blooms so early is nice. Caterpillars will chew it down, go away and become butterflies, and the plant comes back."



## Foamflower

(*Tiarella cordifolia*)

**Native to:** Woodlands from Nova Scotia to Michigan, south through the Appalachians, west to Kentucky; hardy in Zones 3–8.

**Where it sparkles:** White flowers on wands up to 12 inches tall light up shady spots and last for weeks in spring. The striking foliage forms beautiful clumps and is a natural companion for coralbells (*Heuchera*).

**Plant it with:** *Phlox*, *Dicentra*, *Brunnera*, other spring-blooming plants with soft pastel colors.

**After the flowers fade:** Cut the bloom-stems back and enjoy the lush foliage all summer.

**Great cultivars:** New cultivars with beautiful variegated foliage and long-lasting flowers are being introduced. Try 'Jeepers Creepers' or 'Iron Butterfly'.

**Denise says:** "As long as you have good drainage, they'll be happy. I really want to play around more with the new varieties; they're great."

## Fern-leaf bleeding heart

(*Dicentra eximia*)

**Native to:** Appalachian woodlands from Tennessee to New Jersey; hardy in Zones 4–9.

**Where it sparkles:** Plant this little jewel at the front of a shady flower bed, where you'll come upon its soft, ferny leaves and dangling little clusters of pink flowers in early spring. Blooms stand about 12 inches tall, and the plants spread to form a patchy carpet.

**Plant it with:** columbines, ferns, *Tiarella*, *Tricyrtis*

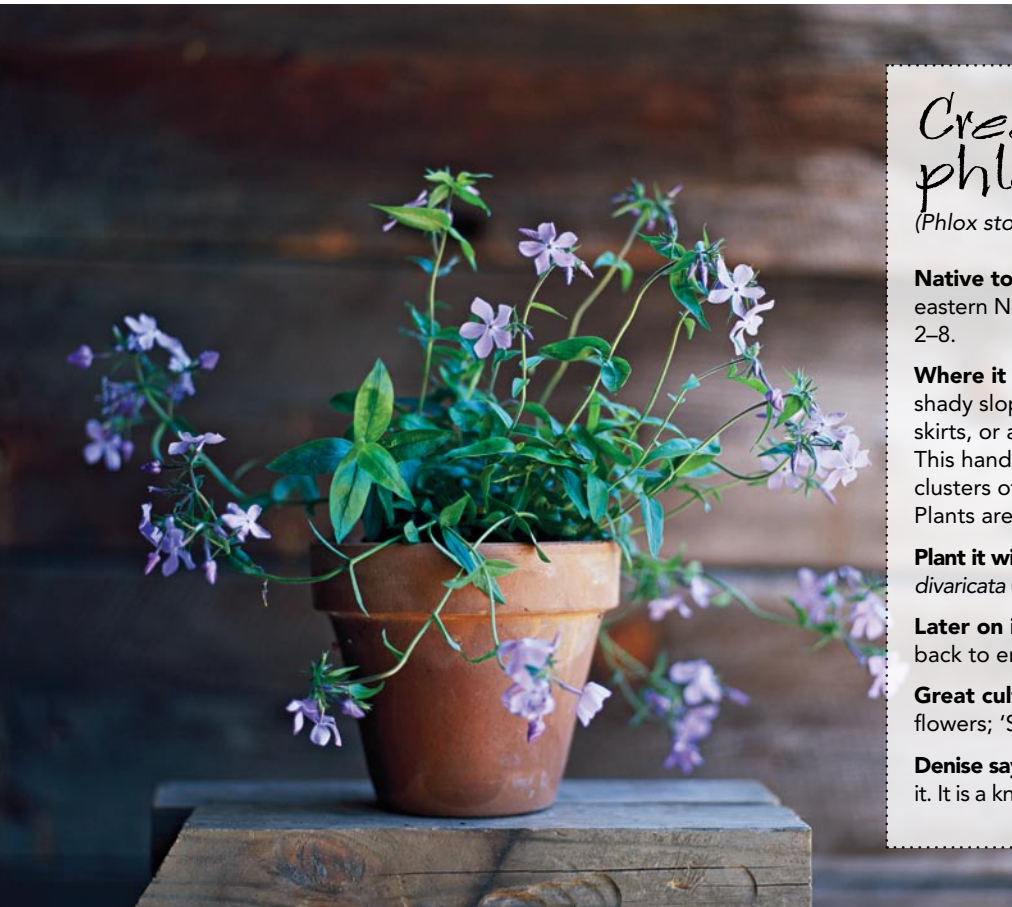
**After the flowers fade:** More blooms will come along: fern-leaf bleeding heart produces flowers from spring through frost.

**Great cultivars:** 'Alba' has white flowers; *D. formosa* is the western native.

**Denise says:** "This plant is super drought-tolerant. It likes good drainage, but it can take poor soil and dry shade. Pick out the stems as flowers fade to encourage more blooms."







## Creeping phlox

(*Phlox stolonifera*)

**Native to:** Mountains and woodlands of eastern North America; hardy in Zones 2–8.

**Where it sparkles:** On partly sunny or shady slopes, in bare spots around peony skirts, or at the edge of a garden path. This handsome groundcover produces clusters of lavender flowers in midspring. Plants are only 6–10 inches tall.

**Plant it with:** Hostas, ferns, *Ajuga*, *Phlox divaricata* (which blooms a little earlier).

**Later on in the season:** Trim the foliage back to encourage lush new growth.

**Great cultivars:** ‘Melrose’ has large pink flowers; ‘Sherwood Purple’ has purple.

**Denise says:** “Everything comes up through it. It is a knockout with *Tiarella*.”

## Stonecrop

(*Sedum ternatum*)

**Native to:** Rocky ledges from New Jersey to Georgia and west to Arkansas; hardy in Zones 4–9.

**Where it sparkles:** In shade or part sun. Plant it along a path, around a shady terrace, or at the top of a rock wall where you can’t miss it; this little sedum is best appreciated up close. Flowers last for weeks.

**Plant it with:** Wild sweet William, ferns.

**After the flowers fade:** Break off stems to root wherever you need an easy, shade-loving groundcover.

**Great cultivars:** ‘Minus’ is tiny, only 2–3 inches tall.

**Denise says:** “Most people think of sedums as plants for full sun in hot, dry situations, but the East Coast native sedums are woodland plants.”



## Columbine

(*Aquilegia canadensis*)

**Native to:** Eastern Canada to Florida and west to Texas; hardy in Zones 3–8.

**Where it sparkles:** Grow it in woodland gardens, rock gardens, and in sunny or partly shady perennial beds. Cheerful flowers dangle gracefully from stems about 2 feet tall in early spring. It reseeds playfully but is not invasive. Plant it where you can see it: hummingbirds usually arrive when columbine comes into bloom.


**Plant it with:** Spring-blooming phlox, penstemon, Solomon’s seal.

**After the flowers fade:** The handsome blue-green foliage is nearly evergreen in mild climates. If leaf miners are a problem, cut the foliage off and it will grow back.

**Great cultivars:** ‘Corbett’ has pale yellow flowers. *A. chrysantha* is a spectacular golden-yellow species native to New Mexico and Arizona.

**Denise says:** “It’s one of the best naturalizers for shade that I know of.”





## Bluestar

(*Amsonia ciliata*)

**Native to:** Sandy soils and woodlands from North Carolina to Texas; hardy in Zones 6–10.

**Where it sparkles:** In sun at the front of a flowerbed or in the bright, dappled light of a woodland setting. This little *Amsonia* grows only to about 18 inches tall and spreads slowly to form a feathery clump. Clusters of soft blue flowers bloom in spring. Established plants tolerate drought.

**Plant it with:** *Lobelia*, *Heuchera*, *Pulmonaria*.

**After the flowers fade:** Fall foliage is bright banana-yellow.

**Denise says:** "This is a tiny, delicate plant, but it's tough as nails. I grow it for the fine texture as much as anything. It's a good nectar source for early butterflies like mourning cloaks."



## Hyssop skullcap

(*Scutellaria integrifolia*)

**Native to:** Sandy soils along the East Coast and west to Tennessee; hardy in Zones 4–9

**Where it sparkles:** Flower spikes 16–20 inches tall throw up a pink mist among early-blooming columbines. They dance in a breeze in sunny flowerbeds or meadows. Where it is happy, it self-sows.

**Plant it with:** Black-eyed Susans, coneflowers, *Liatrus*.

**After the flowers fade:** Cut plants back to encourage another round of blooms later in the season.

**Great cultivars:** *S. incana* (downy skullcap) blooms later and tolerates light shade.

**Denise says:** "It blooms mostly in spring, and holds the spot while I'm waiting for other things. This is another great plant for dry, sandy, poor soil."

## Blue false indigo

(*Baptisia australis*)

**Native to:** Woodland edges and prairies in the Northeast; hardy in Zones 3–9.

**Where it sparkles:** In well-drained soil in full sun or part shade. False indigo thrives in all but wet spots. Clouds of violet-blue flowers stand 3 feet tall in spring. Try it in perennial borders or in pots.

**Plant it with:** Siberian iris, peonies, alliums, catmint (*Nepeta*), small native grasses.

**After the flowers fade:** Robust plants with gorgeous blue-green foliage hold their own in the garden all summer; flashy seedpods persist into fall.

**Great cultivars:** *B. australis* var. *minor* is the western form.

**Denise says:** "A cool plant that gets you out in the butterfly garden in spring. The shiny black seedpods are awesome." 🍃

See Resources on page 108.

