



## How to (Gently) Fight Plants with Plants

This handout accompanies my presentation on pesticide-free methods of recruiting and nurturing native plants to help suppress or crowd out plants that are not as helpful to wildlife and the environment. It's also available on my website with the article "How to Fight Plants with Plants" ([humanegardener.com/how-to-fight-plants-with-plants/](http://humanegardener.com/how-to-fight-plants-with-plants/)). Most species included here are often resilient to mammal browsing and nibbling (meaning they're either not tasty or they bounce back quickly).

### **Low groundcovers that may volunteer in developing garden habitat:**

Canadian black snakeroot (*Sanicula canadensis*)  
Clearweed (*Pilea pumila*)  
Common blue violet (*Viola sororia*)  
Enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*)  
Fleabanes (*Erigeron annuus*, *Erigeron philadelphicus*)  
Honewort (*Cryptotaenia canadensis*)  
Nimblewill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*)  
Three-seeded mercury (*Acalypha rhomboidea*)  
White avens (*Geum canadense*)

### **Low to medium groundcovers to plant in understory or, in some cases, beneath sun-loving wildflowers:**

Canada anemone (*Anemone canadensis*)  
Elephant's foot (*Elephantopus carolinianus*)  
Golden alexander (*Zizia aurea*)  
Golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*) – evergreen  
Green-and-gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*)  
Lyreleaf sage (*Salvia lyrata*)  
Mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*): will disappear with onset of heat, so mix in white wood aster, Christmas ferns, woodland stonecrop, wild geranium and other native groundcovers  
Phloxes (*Phlox stolonifera*, *Phlox divaricata*)  
Pussytoes (*Antennaria* spp.)  
Robin's plantain (*Erigeron pulchellus*)  
Sedges (*Carex pensylvanica*, *Carex appalachica*, *Carex stricta*, *Carex blanda*, *Carex platyphylla*, and more!)  
Violets (*Viola* spp.)  
Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)  
White snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*)  
White wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*)  
Wild basil (*Clinopodium vulgare*)  
Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*)  
Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*)  
Wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)

### **Ferns that can compete with invasives and/or prevent further encroachment:**

Hayscented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*)  
Lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*)

Ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*)  
Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*)

**Medium to tall herbaceous plants that can shade or hold the ground and prevent encroachment:**

Asters (aromatic aster, smooth aster, frost aster) (*Symphyotrichum* spp.)  
Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*)  
Bee balm and wild bergamot (*Monarda didyma*)  
Blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)  
Cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*)  
False indigo (*Baptisia australis*)  
False nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*)  
Goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.)  
Jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*)  
Jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*)  
Milkweeds, especially common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)  
Mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*)  
Rudbeckias (cutleaf coneflower, brown- and black-eyed susans) (*Rudbeckia laciniata*, *Rudbeckia triloba*, *Rudbeckia fulgida*)  
Maryland senna or wild senna (*Senna marilandica* or *S. hebecarpa*)  
Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia*)  
Woodland sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*)

**“Fillers” that volunteer around other plants:**

Cinnamon willow herb (*Epilobium coloratum*)  
Frost aster (*Symphyotrichum pilosum*)  
Nodding spurge (*Euphorbia nutans*)  
White vervain (*Verbena urticifolia*)

**Grasses that can cast shade, compete, or hold the ground:**

Bluestems (*Andropogon* spp.)  
Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)  
Nimblewill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*)  
Purple lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*)  
Purpletop grass (*Tridens flavus*)  
Sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)  
Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)  
Tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) – evergreen

**Shrubs/trees and vines that help prevent encroachment by problematic shrubs/vines:**

Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)  
Black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)  
Coral honeysuckle vine (*Lonicera sempervirens*)  
Dogwood shrubs (*Cornus* spp.)  
Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)  
Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) and other *Rhus* species  
Grapevines (*Vitis* spp.)  
Roses, like pasture/Virginia rose and Carolina rose (*Rosa* spp.)  
Shrubby St. Johns wort (*Hypericum prolificum*)  
Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)

Clematis vine (*Clematis virginiana*)

Virginia creeper vine (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) – also makes a great groundcover

### **Competitions worth instigating, replacing a patch at a time and/or inserting plants directly:**

Virginia creeper vs. English ivy

Sea oats/nimblewill/jewelweed/false nettle/blue mistflower vs. stiltgrass

Golden ragwort/Canadian black snakeroot/clearweed/honewort vs. garlic mustard

Coral honeysuckle vs. nonnative honeysuckles and bittersweet (remove and replace)

Honewort/Canada anemone vs. goutweed

Native sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.) vs. burning bushes and mugwort

Mountain mint/obedient plant/common milkweed/black raspberry and/or pokeweed vs. mugwort

Silky dogwoods/gray dogwoods/sassafras/any other thicketing native shrubs mixed with native groundcovers vs. Bradford pears

Violets vs. mock strawberry

Ostrich ferns and hayscented ferns vs. many nonnative groundcovers

### **Books with insights on native competition and/or visual inspiration for plant combinations:**

*Bringing Back the Bush* by Joan Bradley

*Garden Revolution* by Larry Weaner and Thomas Christopher

*Planting in a Post-Wild World* by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West

*The Living Landscape* by Rick Darke and Doug Tallamy

*Prairie Up* by Benjamin Vogt

*The Humane Gardener* and *Wildscape* by Nancy Lawson

**Most of these books are available on my author's Bookshop.org page:**

[bookshop.org/shop/nancylawson](https://bookshop.org/shop/nancylawson).

### **Articles related to using plants to fight problematic introduced plants:**

“How to Fight Plants with Plants” – [humanegardener.com/how-to-fight-plants-with-plants](https://humanegardener.com/how-to-fight-plants-with-plants)

“The Plants are Coming Home” (part 2 to article above) - [izelplants.com/blog/the-plants-are-coming-home/](https://izelplants.com/blog/the-plants-are-coming-home/)

“Pulling Stiltgrass (+20 Native Groundcovers!) - [humanegardener.com/pulling-stiltgrass](https://humanegardener.com/pulling-stiltgrass)

“What Lies Beneath: Treasures in the Seedbank - [humanegardener.com/what-lies-beneath-treasures-in-the-seed-bank](https://humanegardener.com/what-lies-beneath-treasures-in-the-seed-bank)

“Nimblewill: The Best Native Grass You’ve Never Heard Of” - [humanegardener.com/the-best-native-grass-youve-never-heard-of](https://humanegardener.com/the-best-native-grass-youve-never-heard-of)

“Plant Native Groundcovers” – [choosenatives.org](https://choosenatives.org)

“Study provides first evidence of coevolution between invasive, native species” – <https://bit.ly/2TT3qVQ>

### **Websites helpful in identification and with interesting info about floral and faunal associations:**

- iNaturalist: [inaturalist.org](https://inaturalist.org)
- Native Plant Trust: [gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org](https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org)
- Illinois Wildflowers: [illinoiswildflowers.info](https://illinoiswildflowers.info)
- Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center: [wildflower.org/plants](https://wildflower.org/plants)
- The Biota of North America Program: [bonap.org](https://bonap.org)
- Forest Service/USDA Fire Effects Information System: [research.fs.usda.gov/feis/species-reviews](https://research.fs.usda.gov/feis/species-reviews)
- Audubon Native Plants Database: [audubon.org/native-plants](https://audubon.org/native-plants)