



PROTECTING CLEAN WATER TOGETHER

By Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association

Good Weeds + Less Mowing = Happier Gardening

March 2023

After a (fairly) easy-going winter like this one, snowdrops, winter aconite, and pussywillow may already be gladdening your eyes in the garden.

And with the longer, warmer days of March, flipping through magazines for ideas you may find a common thread in “garden trends” for 2023: climate- resilient gardens, lower-maintenance gardens, and embracing native “good weeds” like goldenrod, ironweed, and Joe Pye weed.

All of these ideas help conserve and protect water. Let’s start with those good weeds.

First, no one is suggesting you give the garden over to dandelions! But why not devote that patch of lawn that never looks really great to native plants that birds, bees, butterflies and other pollinators love.

Dozens of different goldenrods are native to Pennsylvania — enough to give you months of bloom time. And that means a whole season of pollen and nectar to support those essential pollinators. Add a few bright-yellow sneezeweed, Joe Pye weed and bee balm plants, and you’ll also have a supply of cut flowers for yourself and friends.

Lower-maintenance gardening begins with lawn care. Consider these simple changes ...

- Don’t mow to the edge of any waterway. A wide, natural buffer of native plants and grasses looks great, and protects creeks and wetlands against chemical-laden runoff. A fifty foot buffer is good — 150 feet is better.
- Keep drainage ditches clear of debris to keep stormwater runoff in its place, prevent flooding, and allow groundwater to be recharged. Let native vegetation grow there unmolested. Natives like goldenrod are nature’s natural water purifiers!
- Reduce the amount of turf grass that takes so much time and babying to look good. Where you do want lawn for games or entertaining, start mowing less often — slightly longer grass cools the roots and keeps your lawn green, instead of burnt-brown in high summer. Give yourself another break: don’t rake or bag those clippings. They’re free mulch that returns nutrients to the soil.
- Along with mowing less, cut back on fertilizing and pesticide use, too — just because a little is good, doesn’t mean that more is better! You’ll keep all those chemicals from polluting creeks and groundwater.

Backyard gardens create beauty, fruit and vegetables for you, habitat for pollinators and birds, spaces to play and spend time with friends, and places for composting and critter-friendly brush piles.

And when you put easy ideas like these to work protecting and conserving water, it all adds up to a more climate-resilient, water-friendly garden.

Find out more about native “good weeds” at <https://extension.psu.edu/pennsylvania-native-plants-for-the-perennial-garden>

Brodhead Watershed Association is dedicated to conserving and preserving pure, abundant water. Rain barrels, rain gardens, and other water-friendly ideas are on tap at <https://www.brodheadwatershed.org>



For humans, fish, and every living thing, Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member today. <https://www.brodheadwatershed.org>