

Selecting Plants for Soggy Soil

We all have that one tricky spot in our garden where water lingers too long after a rainstorm. It can be disheartening to watch a beloved plant struggle in wet, poorly drained soil despite your best efforts. Fortunately, when we pay attention to nature's clues, we can easily transform problem areas into beautiful, thriving gardens.

The natural landscape is filled with distinct habitats, each populated by their own cadre of specialists—organisms that have evolved to thrive in their own niche, however harsh the conditions may be. By working with nature and selecting plants best suited to the conditions of an existing site (namely, the sunlight, soil, and moisture levels), gardeners can nurture landscapes that provide functional, ecological, and aesthetic value.

FUNCTIONAL VALUE

Many plants have adapted to develop robust root systems, despite growing in saturated soils. Not only do these root systems suck up water through the process of transpiration, but they simultaneously hold the soil in place, preventing or slowing erosion. Trees that are particularly well-adapted to soggy soils include American sycamore, Eastern cottonwood, silver maple, and many of the oak species.

Erosion control can be attained by adding much smaller plants as well. While the colonizing nature of some native perennials and shrubs might be a downside in certain areas of the garden, these shameless spreaders are perfect for developing a stabilizing network of roots in an area prone to erosion. Minimize erosion and stabilize soil by planting redbud, dogwood, summersweet, white meadowsweet, pickerelweed, irises, or obedient plant.

ECOLOGICAL VALUE

Not only do plants adapted for wet soils provide functional benefits, many also increase the ecological value of a landscape. When selecting new plants to add to the gardens at Jenkins, we always consider the benefits each plant will offer to the bees, butterflies, and birds who call the gardens home. Bring this practice to your own landscape by considering what a plant will offer wildlife seasonally, as well as in the different stages and phases of their lifecycles.

Butterflies benefit from host plants like oaks or Eastern cottonwood when looking for places to lay their eggs, while other plants provide rich nectar sources, such as New York ironweed or Joe Pye weed. Others, such as swamp milkweed and swamp goldenrod, are recognized as ecological all-stars, pulling double duty as both hosts and nectar sources for butterflies. To attract and nourish bees, add plants that offer both pollen and nectar, such as summersweet, purple-stemmed aster, swamp goldenrod, white meadowsweet, and pickerelweed. For our feathered friends, remember to incorporate plants that provide different types of food in different seasons, such as winterberry holly (fruits), river birch (seeds), common elderberry (fruits), oaks (insects), or inkberry (fruits).

AESTHETIC VALUE

At Jenkins, we practice environmental horticulture, which means we pursue the art and science of growing plants for the mutual benefit of humans, wildlife, and ecosystems. Our aim is to create spaces that are functionally valuable, ecologically beneficial, and beautiful in all four seasons. Many of the plants recommended for waterlogged locations can provide the texture, fragrance, and color that come together to create an attractive space. Plants like summersweet and sweetbay magnolia offer enchanting fragrance in spring, while swamp rose mallow, Joe Pye weed, great blue lobelia, and swamp goldenrod provide bold pops of color later in summer. Come autumn, river birch, Eastern larch, red maple, baldcypress, red chokeberry, and Virginia sweetspire are ablaze with red, orange, and yellow foliage.

By working in harmony with nature to select plants that are well-adapted to wet conditions, you can transform a trouble spot in the landscape into a thriving garden that boasts high ecological value and multiple seasons of interest.





TREES

1. American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)
2. Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*)
3. Eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)
4. Eastern larch (*Larix laricina*)
5. Red maple (*Acer rubrum*)
6. River birch (*Betula nigra*)
7. Silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*)
8. Swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*)
9. Swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*)
10. Sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*)

SHRUBS

11. Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
12. Common elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)
13. Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*)
14. Pussy willow (*Salix discolor*)
15. Red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*)
16. Redtwig dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)
17. Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*)
18. Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)
19. White meadowsweet (*Spiraea alba*)
20. Winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*)



PERENNIALS

21. Great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*)
22. Irises (*Iris fulva* [pictured], *Iris versicolor*, *Iris virginiana*)
23. Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium dubium*, *Eutrochium maculatum*)
24. New York ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*)
25. Obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*)
26. Pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*)
27. Purple-stemmed aster (*Symphotrichum puniceum*)
28. Swamp goldenrod (*Solidago patula*)
29. Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
30. Swamp rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*)