

2026 SPRING LANDSCAPE CONFERENCE
MONDAY, MARCH 16, 8:30 AM–1 PM
Gateway Center

Native Garden Design: Now Trending

Native plants are gaining in popularity. Even mainstream media outlets are touting the importance of these beneficial species. Find out from leading practitioners in design, plant use, evaluation, and production about the growing trend of adding ecological value to landscapes large and small. Discover ways to incorporate these sensibilities into your own gardens.

8:30–9AM: Registration/Continental breakfast

9–9:15AM: Welcome

9:15–10AM: Leslie Needham

The New Beautiful: Designing Naturalistic Spaces with Intention



Designers are becoming agents of change in the ways they create and manage landscapes. With deeper appreciation of ecological values and an evolving perspective on what makes a garden beautiful, land stewards are choosing plants and approaches that develop spaces with a heartbeat and spirit. Explore new strategies such as “cues for care” that showcase native plants in a welcoming manner.

Leslie Needham is an award-winning landscape designer and principal of Leslie Needham Design. She earned a certificate in landscape design from The New York Botanical Garden and a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Virginia. She has been featured in several media outlets, including Martha Stewart Living and The New York Times. Her home landscape has been selected for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Gardens.

10–10:45AM: Ethan Dropkin
Native Plants as Workhorses



Horticulture is a process of experimentation to find the right plants that will thrive in a specific landscape. Discover which species and assemblages to use for design challenges to solve issues such as creating native lawns, outcompeting aggressive non-natives, and revegetating difficult growing areas.

Ethan Dropkin, a landscape designer at Larry Weaner Landscape Associates, followed his childhood love of plants into related careers, particularly focusing on native plants and plant communities that thrive in difficult conditions. He earned master's degrees in landscape architecture and horticulture from Cornell University and regularly contributes to citizen science projects such as eBird and iNaturalist.

10:45–11AM: Break

Snow date: Friday, March 20.
Program subject to change.

11–11:45AM: Sam Hoadley
Knockout Natives:
Top Garden Performers



Mt. Cuba Center has been trialing species and cultivars of native plants for more than 20 years. Hear about the region's top performers and greatest hits of *Carex*, *Hydrangea*, *Monarda*, *Solidago*, *Vernonia*, and more. Find out how they performed horticulturally and ecologically, which standouts would enhance your garden, and the impact these assessments have on availability.

Sam Hoadley is Manager of Horticultural Research at Mt. Cuba Center, where he evaluates native plant species, cultivars, and hybrids. He has a bachelor's degree in sustainable landscape horticulture from the University of Vermont.

11:45AM–12:30PM: Tom Knezick
The Native Plant Pipeline: How Growers are Evolving with Demand



Pinelands Nursery has been growing native plants since 1983 and now sells more than 5 million plants a year. With demand for native species increasing beyond restoration projects and into backyards, find out how the nursery is adapting production methods, plant offerings, and business strategies to meet the changing marketplace.

Tom Knezick is President of Pinelands Nursery. He hosts the Native Plants, Healthy Planet podcast, is president of the New Jersey Nursery & Landscape Association, and was honored with a Horticultural Industry Leadership award from Nursery Management. He holds a bachelor's degree in agricultural business and management from SUNY Cobleskill.

12:30–1PM: Wrap-up, networking

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