



# Stormwater Solutions Garden Tour

## Property 2017-2 Conservation Landscaping

Conservation landscaping is defined as dense plantings of deep-rooted, mostly native plant species that improve water quality, survive periods of heavy rain and drought, and capture and absorb storm water runoff. It involves preparing the planting bed with rich, porous composted soil – like the natural forest understory. The absorbent plantings and soil help prevent the flooding and erosion that occurs with heavy stormwater runoff, and also filter pollutants which make their way into the storm sewer and eventually the Chesapeake Bay. In suburban areas, runoff can contain herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, and petrochemicals.

Sixteen years ago, this shady front yard was primarily struggling lawn. Now, it is a conservation landscape with many native plant species. Dry hard clay has been turned into rich topsoil over many seasons of growth and dieback, and from mulching oak leaves back into the soil.

The front yard bioswale – the landscaped drainage ditch --has been successful in slowing down and spreading out heavy storm runoff. There is also a rocky bioswale on the side yard that is bordered by plantings of Northern Oat Grass (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), Golden Groundsel (*Senecio aurea*), and Cherokee sedge (*Carex cherokeensis*).

It is important to use plants that naturally occur in the region and are appropriate for site conditions. Many native plant species are deeply rooted, more resistant to insects, plant disease, and drought. By replacing traditional grass lawns with native plants, you can reduce the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and water. Once removed, gardens may need to be monitored for invasive (non-native) plants.

Some of the beautiful native workhorses in this shade garden include:

**White Wood Aster (*Eurybia divaricata*)** A great ground cover for the shade. Its lovely delicate white blooms are a treat in October when everything else is dying back.

**Autumn Fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora* ‘Brilliance’)** A large, bushy evergreen fern that has beautiful red foliage in spring.

**Bluestar (*Amsonia* species)** There are three species, from 12” to 3’ high. Very drought tolerant, they have deep blue flowers that will bloom with a few hours of daily sun.

**Hydrangea ‘Annabelle’** For those of us with deep shade, it is hard to grow flowers. This lovely hydrangea with its white round flower heads blooms at the front edge of my yard. It is an attractive work horse, although the deer will eat it.

**Sedges (*Carex* species)** Throughout the yard are 12 species, all different: small chartreuse grasses; tall dark green with spikey seed heads; fine-textured silvery-blue grasses; white striped leaves; bright green “seer sucker” grass, and tall, fine palm textured grasses. Sedges are happy in shade, in both dry and wet soils.

**Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*)** This plant is growing below the stone path, and resembles traditional turf grass, but is much happier in shade and has deep roots that can absorb more water.

**Northern Oak Grass (*Chasmanthum latifolium*)** This tall grass with brown seed heads will grow densely in dry shade, even beneath trees, yet is also good in wet areas.

**White Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra* ‘Tiny Tortuga’)** These are pink-blooming perennials that have flowers like a snap dragon. There is also a native white species.

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