

# REGIONAL NATIVE PLANT MARKETING IN VIRGINIA

Maintaining and increasing valuable native vegetative cover is a critical goal shared by the **Habitat Partners Program at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries** and the **Virginia Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program Office at the Department of Environmental Quality**. With coordination and funding through Habitat Partners, DGIF and Virginia CZM are working together to build the capacity of state-wide regional and local partners to expand the regional native plant marketing model beyond Virginia's coastal zone. This public campaign model uses proven Community-Based Social Marketing tools and techniques, and focuses on establishing a social norm for use of native plants in the rural, suburban and urban landscape. It is based on research conducted by Virginia CZM that identified **structural and psychological barriers that may prevent people planting natives**, including:

- lack of information about which plant species are native
- lack of knowledge of the interdependence between native plants and animals
- lack of availability of native plants at retail centers
- lack of, or knowledge of, publicly accessible demonstration sites showcasing native landscaping

The growing state-wide initiative will continue to address the following **goals of the campaign work** in Virginia's coastal zone:

- Increase the knowledge and use of plants native to the region, according to the Flora of Virginia.
- Help landowners learn more about their property and the benefits of a native plant landscape and conservation landscaping, and how by planting natives they can impact the ecological diversity and sustainability of natural landscapes beyond their property, neighborhood, and community.
- Engage with local garden centers in the region to promote the native plants they currently carry, and to increase the supply and variety of the native plants they carry.
- Engage with local jurisdictions on policies that could be strengthened in favor of native plant landscaping.

The regional native plant marketing model also highlights and leverages partner resources and contributions, and creates consistent messaging that promotes the use of native plants and provides a rallying point for partners.

*Coastal regional native plant marketing campaigns, including regional guide production, initiated and funded in large part by grants from NOAA to the Virginia CZM Program, a network of state agencies and coastal localities led by DEQ.*

*Coordination and funding for regional native plant marketing workshops in the Northern Piedmont, Southern Piedmont and Shenandoah regions provided by the Habitat Partners Program at DWR. (previously DGIF) Habitat Partners also contributed funds for printing of the Virginia Capital Region guide (in addition to content and editing contributions by Carol Heiser); and, reprints of regional native plant guides for Southeast Virginia and Northern Virginia.*



# VIRGINIA COASTAL CAMPAIGN MODEL: Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) to Increase Native Plant Use

## Statewide Problem/Issue:

Loss of Biodiversity - decline in native plant communities (loss and/or degradation of habitats) and associated decline of wildlife species & communities

## Goal:

Increase the use of plants native to Virginia, and adoption of conservation landscaping practices.

## How? Informed by Research:

**HOW** is dependent on **WHO** the identified audience(s) is, **WHY** they are not using native plants, **WHAT** message will get their attention, and **WHERE** they go for information. (CBSM is an audience-based and audience-driven approach.) Who, why, what and where are determined through research.

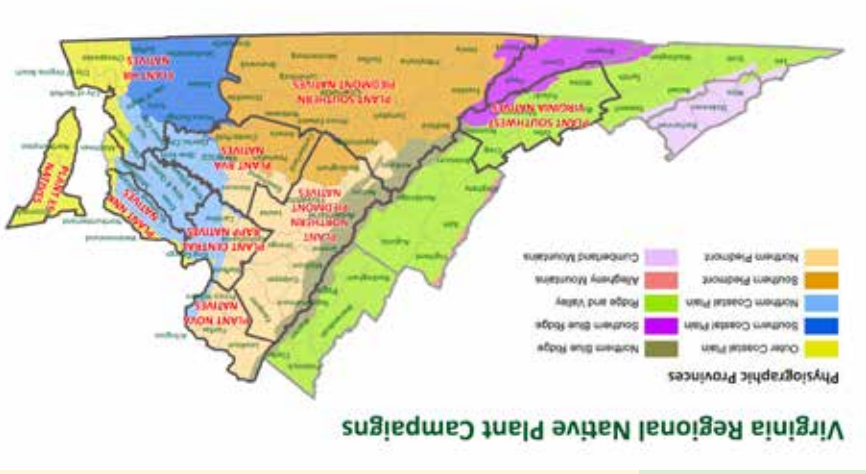
## Research also identifies:

- **BARRIERS** to the audience using native plants (e.g., lack of knowledge, don't know where to get the plants, etc.)
- **BENEFITS** the audience would gain from use of native plants (e.g., what do they gain from gardening/landscaping - beauty, enjoy birds and butterflies - other wildlife, decrease in maintenance, etc.)
- Key words or language used by the audience(s) - **UNDERSTANDING** - and not making assumptions about which message will most resonate with the target audience(s) and **HOW** best to convey the message to this audience(s) and move them beyond awareness to action.

**Research guides/informs design of a comprehensive campaign STRATEGY using CBSM TOOLS, that when used together, have been proven effective at changing behavior. Regional campaigns in the coastal zone focus on the use of Three (3) CBSM TOOLS:**

1. Captivating Communications
2. Prompts/ Point of Sale Materials
3. Commitments/ Social Norms

Each **TOOL** has several **Components** – see next page.



Virginia Regional Native Plant Campaigns

Community-Based Social Marketing Approach	
Tools	Barriers
Commitment Norms Incentives	Lack of Motivation
Prompts	Forget to Act
Norms	Lack of Social Pressure
Communication	Lack of Knowledge
Convenience	Structural Barriers

**QUESTIONS?** For consultation on using CBSM and the coastal regional native plant marketing campaigns, contact: Virginia Witmer, Virginia CZM Program, (804) 698-4320 or Virginia.Witmer@deq.virginia.gov. VISIT [www.PlantVirginiaNatives.org](http://www.PlantVirginiaNatives.org) for more examples and resources.

# STEPS: Regional Campaign Design and Implementation

## 1. Identify the REGION

2. Identify **PARTNERS** to form a regional community-based team (these key leaders will become the Campaign Steering Committee, and coordinate with additional stakeholders). The partners **AGREE TO:**

- Share/ pool their existing **RESOURCES**, such as expertise and financial resources that may be used for campaign design and implementation;
- **REVIEW** the available data collected by the coastal campaigns and **DECIDE** whether or not to do research in your region (Virginia Witmer can provide the survey, if needed);
- Based on the research, **DECIDE** on **BRANDING** for your regional campaign, which consists of:

- the Name of the Campaign (and Tag line),
- a Logo (V. Witmer can provide assistance with design, if needed),
- overall Messaging;

• **DESIGN** a **STRATEGY** using all 3 Tools to reach your Audience(s), using Components of each Tool that will be most practical, based on your resources and constraints.

## 3. After 1-3 Years, do a mid-campaign EVALUATION

of your strategy to be certain that the overall design, and individual components of the strategy, are effectively reaching and affecting some change in your audience(s).

## 4. After 5 years, measure actual "Behavior Change;" This can be done through a SURVEY.

## TOOL: Captivating Communications



Vivid, personal, concrete.

- Know your Audience.
- Use a Credible Source.
- Frame your Message – this is how it is presented, in general, you should emphasize the losses that occur as a result of inaction
- Carefully Consider Threatening Messages - do so with caution - present concrete actions that individuals can take to reduce the threat.
- Make Your Message Easy to Remember.
- Provide Personal or Community Goals.
- Emphasize Personal Contact.
- Provide Feedback.

### Coastal Campaign Components

Regional Native Plant Guide

Radio Ads/PSAs

Public TV

Website

Newspaper and Partner Publication Articles

Social Media (the usual and NextDoor.com)

Campaign Exhibits, Events & Presentations

Scripted Campaign Presentation

Inexpensive Give-Aways, e.g. native plant seed packets, and merchandise with campaign logo

Brochures/Fact Sheets

Videos

## TOOL: Prompts - Point of Sale



Behaviors that support sustainability are susceptible to the most human of traits: forgetting.

- Make the prompt noticeable.
- Make the prompt self-explanatory.
- Present the prompt in as close proximity as is possible to where the action is to be taken.
- Use prompts to encourage people to engage in positive behaviors.

### Coastal Campaign Components

#### **Garden Center Banner or Flag**

Advertises that center sells native plants.

#### **Garden Center Plant Signage/Poster**

Placed next to groupings of native plants (idea - kiosk with inventory of native plants available and a laminated copy of regional native plant guide.)

#### **Plant Tags**

Featuring campaign logo, and website, to identify native plants at retailers. Also worked with garden centers to set aside a separate sections for natives or to group natives, such as organizing potted natives in sample landscaping schemes.

#### **Please Carry Cards**

If a native plant is not available, customer leaves card with the retailer.

## TOOL: Commitments/Social Norms



If we observe others acting sustainably, we are more likely to act similarly.

- Make the norm visible.
- Use personal contact to reinforce norms.
- Facilitate the adoption of new behavior through social diffusion:

1. Make commitments public and durable

a. Make the actions visible in the community – an effective way to increase the visibility of invisible behaviors is to ask for public commitments.

b. Whenever possible, these public commitments should be durable.

2. Recruit well known and well respected people, who can have an inordinate impact upon the adoption of new behaviors.

### Coastal Campaign Components

#### **Signed Pledge Banners**

Pledge signatures gathered publicly at exhibits and other events. Those signing receive a pledge decal.

#### **Pledge Decal**

**Distributed to those who pledge to visibly display and show their commitment to plant native.**

#### **Community Leader Program**

Trained and help implement all facets of the campaign strategy.

# PLANT VIRGINIA NATIVES MARKETING PARTNERSHIP

In August 2011, the Virginia CZM Program established a state-wide partnership. The Plant Virginia Natives Marketing Partnership purpose is to:

*Identify and prioritize opportunities to collaborate on Virginia native plant communication and marketing efforts and form cohesive and coordinated messaging and strategies to increase local availability and use of native plants state-wide.*

A Steering Team of member organizations (on back) – identified collaborative projects that would be more effectively and efficiently addressed through the partnership: a) support for a Virginia conservation landscaping certification; b) strategies to help increase the availability of native plants including a framework and guidelines for native plant seed collection/propagation; and, c) coordination of state-wide native plant marketing strategies.

The Partnership drafted an **Action Plan** based on these priorities, Steering Team discussions and feedback from open partner forums. The Action Plan focuses on strategies and actions to address four goals:

- 1. Increase collaboration and coordination among partners engaged in native plant education, communication and marketing;*
- 2. Increase Virginia Grown native plant stock;*
- 3. Increase the availability of native plants at local plant retailers*
- 4. Increase demand and use of Virginia native plants by landscape and land use professions, homeowners, landscaping and demonstration restoration projects on public and private lands.*

A status report highlighting the work of partners to address the actions in the plan is available.

Download the Action Plan at  
[www.PlantVirginiaNatives.org](http://www.PlantVirginiaNatives.org)

## Plant Virginia Natives Marketing Partnership Steering Team

Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (Co-Chair)  
Virginia Dept of Game and Inland Fisheries (Co-Chair)  
Albemarle County  
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council  
Flora of Virginia  
Hampton Roads Planning District Commission  
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden  
Norfolk Botanical Gardens  
Northern Neck Planning District Commission  
Northern Virginia Regional Commission  
Piedmont Environmental Council  
Virginia Dept of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs  
Virginia Dept of Conservation and Recreation, Natural Heritage Division  
Virginia Dept of Environmental Quality  
Virginia Dept of Forestry

Virginia Department of Transportation  
Virginia Institute of Marine Science  
Virginia Master Gardener Program  
Virginia Master Naturalist Program  
Virginia Native Plant Society  
Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association  
Virginia Society of Landscape Designers  
VA Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Wetlands Watch  
Williamsburg Botanical Gardens  
Virginia Grower Reps

*For more information about the Virginia Native Plants Marketing Partnership contact: Virginia Witmer, Virginia CZM Program (co-chair); 804.698.4320; Virginia.*

*(updated January 2021)*