



High Value Generalist Plants for Every Garden: Full Sun, Moist to Wet

This is primarily a list for meadows, but some shrubs are appropriate too. Here, we mean “wet” in a very general sense to mean everything from muddy soils to areas with some permanently standing water. Like the drier meadows, above, wet meadows again tend to be dominated by graminoids, but in these wetter habitats you may begin to see a shift towards dominance by sedges rather than grasses, with some rushes interspersed. If you’re planting out a wet area as a problem spot, adding the right plants can help reduce erosion, increase canopy intercept (the water stuck to leaves and stems that doesn’t hit the ground), and increase evapotranspiration (water used and evaporated from the plant itself). All of this can address a wet area and create habitat without necessitating a costly engineered solution.

Graminoids

- *Carex* spp. (Sedges) – aim for robust species in full sun areas like *Carex crinita*, *C. lurida*, *C. typhina*, *C. intumescens*, *C. squarrosa*, etc. Some amount of drying out is fine, but in standing water or permanently muddy soils is ideal.
- *Juncus effusus* (Soft Rush) – less drought tolerant than the sedges, and generally not as dominant until you get into standing water. Great for shallow ponds.
- *Coleataenia* spp. (Panic Grasses) – *C. anceps* is very drought tolerant (and occasionally a major constituent in dry meadows too) whereas *C. rigidula* is more generally confined to wet meadows. *C. anceps* spreads rapidly and produces short rhizomes.
- *Dichanthelium clandestinum* (Deertongue Grass) – the biggest and most robust of our native *Dichanthelium*s is a common site in wet meadows but also can be found in woodland edges and into dry meadows too. An excellent choice for areas that flood and then dry out whether shady or sunny.

Forbs

- *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium* (Narrow-leaf Mountain Mint) – as common as this forb is in dry meadows, it occurs commonly in wet meadows too
- *Euthamia graminifolia* (Grass-leaved Goldenrod) – this robust drought-tolerant goldenrod can be found occasionally in drier meadows but thrives in moist to wet meadows
- *Doellingeria umbellata* (Flat-topped White Aster) – a tall common, white-flowered aster of moist to wet meadows.
- *Zizia aurea* (Golden Alexander) – an early-blooming forb of riparian areas and edges of wet forests and into meadows
- *Hibiscus moschuetos* (Swamp Rose Mallow) – tall and robust with white to pink flowers. Prefers standing water in marshes, swamps, and pond edges, but can adapt to wet rain gardens or ditches too.



High Value Generalist Plants for Every Garden: Full Sun Mesic (medium moisture) to Dry

- *Eupatorium* spp. (Bonesets) – *Eupatorium rotundifolium* is a common sight in moist-mesic to wet meadows. In the wettest areas with soggy soils or standing water, the larger *Eupatorium perfoliatum* tends to be more common.
- *Asclepias incarnata* (Swamp Milkweed) – not as aggressive as common milkweed, but nonetheless just as critical to Monarch populations.
- *Rudbeckia laciniata* (Green-headed Coneflower) – far taller than our other native *Rudbeckia* spp. Can occur in dense stands and is shade-tolerant enough to grade into woodland edges.
- *Vernonia noveboracensis* (New York Ironweed) – a common constituent throughout our moist to wet meadows and grades into forest edges. Flowers are particularly attractive to skipper butterflies.
- *Eutrochium fistulosum* (Hollow-stem Joe Pye Weed) – more typical of moist to wet woodland edges but populations can certainly occur in full-sun areas. Attracts various large butterfly adults like tiger swallowtails and monarchs.

Successional Trees and Shrubs

- *Baccharis halimifolia* (High Tide Bush) – this species was likely once confined to the outer coastal plain, but has moved farther inland following patterns of disturbance. Now it's common in roadside ditches and other wet disturbed areas that accumulate salt. A great option for rain gardens where road salt is a concern.
- *Sambucus canadensis* (Elderberry) – a relative of the edible European elderberry. This shrub can grow densely in moist-mesic down to areas with temporary standing water. The berries are excellent forage for birds.
- *Cephalanthus occidentalis* (Buttonbush) – An excellent butterfly-attractor in wet areas that are either saturated or, more commonly in the wild, wet and well drained (think rocky bars in rivers).
- *Rosa palustris* (Swamp Rose) – a tall-growing rhizomatous shrub with large pink flowers.