

Working with Wet Areas in Landscape



Wet areas in the landscape often causes the homeowner considerable concern. All too often he takes the easy way out and fills the area with all types of spoilage, which only creates another problem area in the landscape. You can also solve the problem by draining the area and planting trees, shrubs and other plants that grow in well-drained soils. However, an alternative approach to the situation is to develop the site with plants that will grow and thrive in moist or damp areas. If water is a part of the site, what could be better than the creation of a water garden? Where open water is not a part of the landscape, the wet site might be developed as a bog or swamp garden using many of the species that grow in a similar environment.

Wet spots in the landscape can be developed into areas of considerable natural beauty. However, to do so requires that you have an appreciation of plant ecology as well as knowledge of landscape design. A study of some local natural bogs or wet areas can serve as a guide in developing a water garden. Observe and make notes on plant associations and small site differences.

Trees and the larger shrubs (Table 1) will often be found growing on mineral soils along the banks or on islands within the moist areas. Herbaceous species (Table 2) and many of the smaller shrubs are to be found growing in association with an organic mat or soil which has developed over a period of many thousands of years.

Soil reaction (pH), nutrient and light requirements must also be observed and understood for the best development of plants in moist areas. Plants like blueberry, azalea and winterberry grow best on acid sites, whereas most trees, except tupelo and pin oak, will do better on the less acid to slightly alkaline soils.

The amount of water and movement of water in wet areas is important. You should make observations as to which plants can be most successfully adapted to moving water, standing water, or merely moist soil. In areas of open water, the depth must also be considered.

Another factor that should not be overlooked in the development of plant

areas in a wet spot is air drainage in relation to plant hardiness. Wet spots are generally low spots and as a result are sinks for cold air. Perennial plants known to be intolerant of cold winter temperatures should not be planted in these areas. However, wild plants taken from their natural low wetland habitats will already have successfully adapted to withstand low winter temperatures.

These plant lists provide a partial selection of plant material for consideration in the planting of wet areas. The list of herbaceous species is incomplete and can be supplemented with many native species found growing in local areas.

| Table 1: Trees and Shrubs for Wet Areas | |
|---|-------------------|
| TREES | |
| Scientific Name | Common Name |
| <i>Acer rubrum</i> | Red Maple |
| <i>A. saccharinum</i> | Silver Maple |
| * <i>Alnus sp.</i> | Alder |
| * <i>Amelanchier sp.</i> | Serviceberry |
| <i>Betula nigra</i> | River Birch |
| Table 1: Trees and Shrubs for Wet Areas | |
| TREES CONTINUED | |
| <i>B. papyrifera</i> | Paper Birch |
| <i>Celtis laevigata</i> | Sugar hackberry |
| <i>Larix laricina</i> | Tamarack |
| <i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i> | Sweet gum |
| <i>Nyssa sylvatica</i> | Sour gum (tupelo) |
| <i>Picea glauca</i> | White spruce |
| <i>Platanus acerifolia</i> | London plane tree |

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|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>P. occidentalis</i> | Sycamore |
| * <i>Populus sp.</i> | Poplar (aspen) |
| <i>Quercus bicolor</i> | Swamp white oak |
| <i>Q. macrocarpa</i> | Bur oak |
| <i>Q. palustris</i> | Pin oak |
| * <i>Salix sp.</i> | Willow |
| <i>Taxodium distichum</i> | Bald cypress |
| <i>Thuja occidentalis</i> | American aborvitae |
| <i>Viburnum prunifolium</i> | Black hew |
| SHRUBS | |
| Scientific Name | Common Name |
| <i>Alnus incana</i> | Hoary alder |
| <i>Aronia arbutifolia</i> | Chokecherry |
| <i>Calycanthus floridus</i> | Sweetshrub |
| <i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> | Button-bush |
| <i>Chionanthus virginicus</i> | Fringetree |
| <i>Clethra alnifolia</i> | Summersweet |
| <i>Cornus alba 'Sibirica'</i> | Siberian dogwood |
| <i>C. racemosa</i> | Gray dogwood |
| <i>C. stolonifera</i> | Redosier dogwood |
| <i>Crataegus crus-galli</i> | Hawthorn (cockspur) |
| * <i>Gaylussacia sp.</i> | Huckleberry |
| <i>Ilex glabra</i> | Inkberry |
| <i>I. verticillata</i> | Winterberry |

Table 1: Trees and Shrubs for Wet Areas**SHRUBS CONTINUED**

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| <i>Lindera benzoin</i> | Spicebush |
| <i>Magnolia virginiana</i> | Sweetbay magnolia |
| <i>Potentilla fruticosa</i> | Shrubby cinquefoil |
| <i>Rhamnus frangula</i> | Alder buckthorn |
| * <i>Salix sp.</i> | Willow |
| <i>Sambucus canadensis</i> | American elderberry |
| <i>Spiraea alba</i> | Steeplebush |
| * <i>Symphoricarpus sp.</i> | Coralberry |
| * <i>Vaccinium sp.</i> | Blueberry |
| <i>Viburnum cassinoides</i> | Witherod |
| <i>V. dentatum</i> | Arrowwood |
| <i>V. lentago</i> | Nannyberry |
| <i>V. trilobum</i> | Cranberry viburnum |
| *The abbreviation (sp.) stands for species, meaning that any plant within the listed genus would be satisfactory. | |

Table 2: A Partial List of Herbaceous Species for Wet Sites

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| * <i>Anemonella sp.</i> | Rue-anemone |
| <i>Arundo donax</i> | Giant reed |
| <i>Asclepias incarnata</i> | Swamp milkweed |
| <i>Aspidium thelypteris</i> | Wood fern |
| * <i>Aster sp.</i> | Aster |

(Table continued on following pages)

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>*Astilbe sp.</i> | Astilbe |
| <i>Caltha palustris</i> | March Marigold |
| <i>Campanula aparinoides</i> | Marsh bluebell |
| <i>*Carex sp.</i> | Sedge |
| <i>Gentiana crinita</i> | Fringed gentian |
| <i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i> | Rose mallow |
| <i>*Hydrocotyle sp.</i> | Water penny wort |
| <i>*Hypericum sp.</i> | St. Johns wort |
| <i>Impatiens biflora</i> | Touch-me-not |
| <i>*Iris sp.</i> | Iris |
| <i>Liatrix spicata</i> | Blazing-star |
| <i>Lilium canadensis</i> | Canada lily |
| <i>L. superbum</i> | Turkscap lily |
| <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i> | Cardinal flower |
| <i>Mentha pulegium</i> | Pennyroyal |
| <i>Myosotis scorpioides</i> | Forget-me-not |
| <i>*Nuphar sp.</i> | Water lily |
| <i>Onoclea sensibilis</i> | Sensitive fern |
| <i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i> | Cinnamon fern |
| <i>O. regalis</i> | Royal fern |
| <i>Pontederia cordata</i> | Pickerelweed |
| <i>Primula japonica</i> | Japanese primrose |

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|--|----------------|
| <i>*Ranunculus sp.</i> | Buttercup |
| <i>Sagittaria latifolia</i> | Arrowhead |
| <i>Saururus cernuus</i> | Swamp-lily |
| <i>*Scirpus sp.</i> | Bullrush |
| <i>*Thalictrum sp.</i> | Meadow-rue |
| <i>Tofieldia glutinosa</i> | False asphodel |
| <i>*Trollius sp.</i> | Globeflower |
| <i>Typha latifolia</i> | Cat-tail |
| <i>*Veronica sp.</i> | Ironweed |
| <i>*Viola sp.</i> | Violet |
| <i>Zigadenus glaucus</i> | White camass |
| *The abbreviation (sp.) stands for species, meaning that any plant within the listed genus would be satisfactory. | |

Would you like additional information?

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