Drought Tolerant Native Plants

We can reduce the water needs of our gardens by using drought-tolerant plants (see below). But we can also adopt the following elements of good garden planning and landscaping:

* Plant in the spring and fall, giving plants a chance to get established and expand their root systems before the hottest weather and/or drought.
* Water in the early morning or evening to avoid direct water loss via evaporation and preferably using alternative water sources, as discussed below.
* Water slowly and by hand or with a soaker hose to avoid water interception by plant surfaces (a lot of water is lost this way when a sprinkler is used). Hand watering allows for closer monitoring of plants and their needs and is a very efficient method of water delivery.
* Water deeply to encourage deep healthy root systems. When plants are watered shallowly, their roots develop near the soil surface. Since this zone dries out more quickly, these plants will require more frequent watering to maintain their health.
* Apply mulch to help keep roots cool and moist once your plant beds are damp.
* Seek better sources of water. One alternative is to store and use rainwater in rain barrels around your home. The North Carolina Botanical Garden is constructing a new Visitor Education Center and will use large cisterns to grow a garden using only water that falls on the site (this will also reduce impacts of runoff to nearby streams). Some other sources to explore are air conditioner condensation, water from the dehumidifier, water captured while waiting for the shower to warm, or water collected from hand dishwashing.

A few of these native plants may require additional sleuthing to find in the nursery trade, but please don’t be discouraged—we believe that more and more people are listening to what our native wildflowers have to tell us.

**Good Drought-Tolerant North Carolina Wildflowers**

Climbing Aster (*Ampelaster carolinianus*)—a climbing aster with lilac-colored flowers from mid-October through November
Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)—orange flowers; nectar and food plant for the monarch butterfly
Carolina Wild Indigo (*Baptisia cinerea*)—yellow flowers
*Baptisia* hybrids—various colors, from blue to white
Maryland Golden-aster (*Chrysopsis mariana*)—many cheerful yellow flowers
American-dittany (*Cunila origanoides*)—blue flowers
Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)—as the name says, purple flowers; butterflies love this long-blooming perennial
Northern Rattlesnake-master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*)—stiff foliage and white flowers in spherical, thistle-like heads
Heart's-a-bustin' (*Euonymous americanus*)—inconspicuous flowers but the unusual pink fruit capsule, resembling a strawberry, opens up in fall to reveal large orange seeds
Purple-disk Sunflower (*Helianthus atrorubens*)—yellow flower heads with purple center
Woodland Sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*)—single, terminal, yellow flower head
Stiff-leaf aster (*Ionactis linariifolius*)—small composite flowers; pale blue-purple "petals" around a yellow-orange disk
Scaly Blazing-star (*Liatris spicata*)—magenta-purple flowers clustered along a slender stem
Carolina Lily (*Lilium michauxii*)—showy orange flowers
Eastern False-aloe (*Manfreda virginica*)—succulent with pale yellow-green flowers; sometimes sold as *Agave virginica*
Southern Sundrops (*Oenothera fruticosa*)—clear yellow flowers; attractive evergreen rosette
Eastern Prickly-pear (*Opuntia humifusa*)—a native cactus with yellow flowers
Wild Quinine (*Parthenium integrifolium*)—white flowers
Downy Phlox (*Phlox pilosa*)—pink flowers
Narrowleaf Silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*)—not a grass but a member of the aster family; has a tendency to spread on well-drained soils
Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)—large yellow flower (actually a flower head) with dark-brown central disk; short lived perennial that re-seeds
Starry Rosinweed (*Silphium asteriscus* var. *laevicaule*)—tall plant with bright yellow composite flowers
Anise-scented Goldenrod (*Solidago odora*)—leaves are anise-scented when crushed; bright yellow flowers
Eastern Silvery American-aster (*Symphyotrichum concolor*) —pinkish-purple composite flowers
Large-flower American-aster (*Symphyotrichum grandiflorum*)—light to reddish-purple composite flowers with yellow to reddish yellow disk
Hairy-stem Spiderwort (*Tradescantia hirsuticaulis*)—bluish-purple flowers
Adam's Needle (*Yucca filamentosa*)—margins of the clumped, evergreen, straplike leaves sport curly "filaments"; waxy white flowers on a tall stem emerging from the center of the clump

**Good Drought-tolerant North Carolina Grasses**

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)—a grass with foliage that changes from blue-green, to green, to red, to bronze with lavender tones through the seasons
Hairgrass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*)—a clump-forming grass with flower/seed heads that turn pink to purplish-red later in the season
Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum* and its cultivars)—ornamental, clump-forming grass
Indian-grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)—light-brown flower panicles with yellow stamens rise well above the foliage in late summer; blue-green leaves turn golden yellow in fall

**Good Drought-tolerant North Carolina Shrubs**

New Jersey-tea (*Ceanothus americanus*)—small shrub with panicles of small white flowers; deep-purple fruit in fall
Shrubby St. John's-wort (*Hypericum prolificum*)—compact deciduous shrub with bright yellow flowers
Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)—fragrant clusters of creamy white flowers; late-season red foliage
Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)—tall deciduous shrub with glossy green foliage in summer and spectacular color in fall
Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*)—white, bell-like flowers and edible fruit!