



THE GARDEN CLUB of AMERICA

## THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA POSITION PAPER

*The Garden Club of America supports independent, academic, peer-reviewed scientific research as the basis for formulation of responsible public policy and legislation, as well as appropriate funding to ensure quality results.*

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### NATIVE PLANTS

*In North America, a native plant is defined as an indigenous grass, shrub, vine, tree or herbaceous flora species present in a habitat or ecosystem prior to the arrival of European settlers on the continent.*

All life depends on the plant kingdom. The Garden Club of America is committed to preserving our worldwide system of richly varied habitats and protecting native plant biodiversity, the ecosystems that support them, and our own quality of life. Native plants are an inseparable part of the natural beauty we need to preserve in the American landscape. Their extensive root systems control erosion, moderate floods, filter water to improve water quality, decrease the amount of water needed for landscape maintenance, and sequester carbon to combat climate change. Native plants also provide food and habitat for pollinators and wildlife. In addition, they supply an important genetic record for future food, agriculture, and plant-derived products.

It has been estimated that of the 20,000 known native species in North America, nearly 25 to 30 percent are at risk of extinction as a result of such factors as habitat loss, invasive species, climate change, and pesticide use.

It is vital that existing laws and regulations protecting native plant species be strengthened and administered using the best scientific knowledge available. New concepts of stewardship need to be encouraged to prevent critical loss of plant diversity in the United States and around the world. We view the 1973 Endangered Species Act as one of America's landmark pieces of conservation legislation. We encourage amendments to that act or reauthorization initiatives that both strengthen measures to protect the nation's rare, threatened, and endangered species and create workable science-based recovery programs.

Therefore, The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy that addresses the following:

- Protection of our native plants, with emphasis on those that are at risk.
- Positive incentives (including funding) that would encourage private landowners to protect native plants.
- Cooperation with state and federal agencies, as in the GCA Partners for Plants program, which works to monitor and conserve rare plants, restore native habitats and remove invasive weeds on federal, state and local public lands.
- Measures in the Voluntary Codes of Conduct for the Plant Industry, adopted from the St. Louis Declaration on Invasive Plant Species, to prevent and control ecosystem damage by exotic invasive plants.
- Seed banks to preserve the genetic record of native plants.
- Conservation practices outlined in the PlantWise initiative of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.
- Public-land planting policies that use native plants, control invasive plants, and preserve or restore healthy ecosystems.
- Increased funding for plant protection and restoration on public lands, including adequate funding for more botanists.
- Implementation of federal field research projects to ensure sustainability of wild-collected medicinal plants.
- Encouragement of domestic trade in local nursery-propagated native plants, thus reducing damaging traffic in wild-collected flora.
- Educational programs to increase awareness of the need to protect native plants and to promote their use by landscapers and in home gardens.
- Public and private support of botanical research and education for a well-trained future workforce through such vehicles as the GCA Scholarship program and the proposed 'Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration and Promotion Act.'

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*The purpose of The Garden Club of America is to stimulate the knowledge and love of gardening, to share the advantages of association by means of educational meetings, conferences, correspondence and publications, and to restore, improve and protect the quality of the environment through educational programs and action in the fields of conservation and civic improvement.*