



## EARTH CARE @LEWINSVILLE

### CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION IN OUR YARDS

As stewards of God's creation, we are called to take care of the world around us and all the living things in it. We can improve the environment and benefit wildlife by what we do in our own yards, such as planting native plants. As the name implies, native plants are ones that evolved in the local environment, meaning that the plants are adapted to local conditions – soil, water, and temperature, and that local wildlife – insects, animals and birds, co-evolved with them. Because native plants are accustomed to local conditions, once established they require less maintenance than non-native plants. They are more tolerant of local conditions and require less watering and no use of fertilizer and pesticides, meaning cost savings and less runoff of toxic materials into the local watershed and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. They also provide habitat and food for native wildlife.

Non-native plants have relatively little value to wildlife as they do not recognize such plants as food. You will see far fewer insects on non-native flowers and plants than on native ones. It's not a bad thing if insects/caterpillars are eating your plants. Remember that insects are both important pollinators and a step in the food web. Without insects/caterpillars, bird populations would be severely threatened as many birds feed only caterpillars and insects to their young.

[Recent research](#) on Carolina chickadees in the DC area found that maintenance of their population depended on having at least 70% native plants in the vicinity of their nests because few caterpillars were found on non-native plants while they abounded on native ones. For more information about plants native to Northern Virginia, see their beauty and diversity and which plants are suitable for different settings (sun/shade, wet/dry), consult the websites of [Plant NOVA Natives](#) and [Audubon at Home](#) which also list local native plant sales and native plant nurseries.