

Takoma Park Approved Tree Species List, May 2023

There are many lenses through which to assess what species should be considered native to a given place. There are also many reasons to value native species. Nativeness of a species can be considered through the lens of a selected geographic boundary (East of the Mississippi, Mid-Atlantic Region, Maryland, Montgomery County, Takoma Park) and temporal boundaries or historical milestones (PreEuropean settlement, post-glacial retreat). Native plants are valuable to the extent that they are coevolved with the other wildlife of the area and to the extent that they support a diverse and resilient ecology. It is worth keeping in mind that just because a plant is native to somewhere in Maryland, say, at the top of a mountain near Cumberland, it does not necessarily mean that it will thrive in or serve the local ecology of Takoma Park. Also, note that historical records of species distributions prior to European impacts on the landscape are spotty at best. Ultimately, whether or not a species is ecologically appropriate to the natural community is of chief interest.

Plant communities, climate conditions, and landscape conditions are not static over the course of time. Changing climates lead to migration of plant species and communities. The most recent glacial period ended only about 12,000 years ago and the plant communities present in what is now Takoma Park have been changing by the century ever since. These migrations happen slowly and usually with species moving from adjacent regions, not jumping half way around the world.

With all of this in mind, a flexible regional definition of what is native has been applied to this list. The majority of species selected are documented by the U.S. Forest Service to have natural ranges that include the state of Maryland. Some species with ranges a few hundred miles to the south or west of Maryland where similar growing conditions and ecological communities occur and that are well-adapted to the climate and growing conditions in urbanized Takoma Park have also been included. This approach serves to maximize the biodiversity of our urban forest, to account for how the regional mosaic of species distributions naturally shift over time, and to allow for species from nearby regions that are especially adapted to urban growing conditions, while avoiding concerns of introducing exotic species that carry a heightened risk of becoming invasive and/or damaging local ecological balance.

Data on species natural ranges were drawn from maps published by the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Agriculture.