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PHOTO BY MARY LEBLANC

Above: Mary LeBlanc combines drifts of low-maintenance plants like cherry laurel, astilbe, and perennial geranium with native Inkberry to build easy-care landscapes.

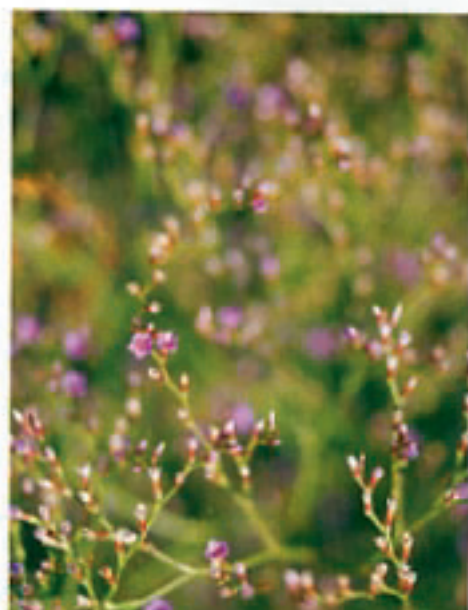
native plants

We hear it more and more these days: Stay local! From buying produce from local growers to spending your dollars in your local community, focusing on what's available locally makes you not just a better consumer but also a better citizen of the planet.

But what about in your garden? Those same principles of "localism" apply, though in a slightly different context. Certain plants are local—or native—to the Cape's landscape, and others have been introduced. Building a base of native plants in your personal landscape sets you up for gardening success. "Native plants are more likely adapted to the climate and the soil, so they're most likely to thrive," says landscape architect Mary LeBlanc of Mary LeBlanc Landscape Design. Native plantings don't require as much maintenance, as much watering, or as much fertilization—so they're less of a drain on resources.



Bearberry



Sea Lavender



Bayberry



Summersweet



Beach Plum



Sweet Fern



Eastern Red Cedar



Holly



Virginia Rose

PHOTO BY DAN CUTRONA

Landscape designer Mary LeBlanc creates beautiful borders with multiple layers, mixing trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses. Opposite: Native blue star, *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, is a favorite in LeBlanc's perennial border.



Instead of

Try

Autumn Olive

Bayberry
Winterberry
Fothergilla
Chokeberry

Japanese Barberry

Bayberry
Virginia Sweetspire
Highbush Blueberry

Burning Bush

Bayberry
Summersweet
Chokeberry

Purple Loosestrife

Bee Balm
Joe Pye Weed
Purple Coneflower
Swamp Milkweed

Norway Maple

Red Maple
Sugar Maple

Trying to re-create other landscapes you've come to love through traveling (or previous homes in other parts of the country) is ultimately a losing battle, says landscape architect Elisabeth O'Rourke, president of Jardins International. She sees it often with clients: They fall in love with something they've seen somewhere else. "It's tempting to want to impose a foreign landscape on what you have here. But when you embrace the natural beauty of the place, you will be more in sync," she says.

It doesn't have to be all or nothing. "Try to create a space that's mostly native, with some smaller patches of garden-esque spaces, where you can take some more care," says Keith LeBlanc (no relation) of Keith LeBlanc Landscape Architecture. It's especially important if you're doing new construction because so much of the land will be scarred. "Native plants will help you get the landscape going more quickly because they are more fast-growing," he says.



Hardy Plants for Sun

Sedum
Yarrow
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Goldenrod
Russian Sage
Artemisia
Spirea
Lavender
Peonies

Hardy Plants for Shade

Mountain Laurel
Epimedium
Amsonia
Foamflower
Astilbe
Daylilies
Baptisia (False Indigo)
Rhododendron
Hosta

Avoiding Invasive Species

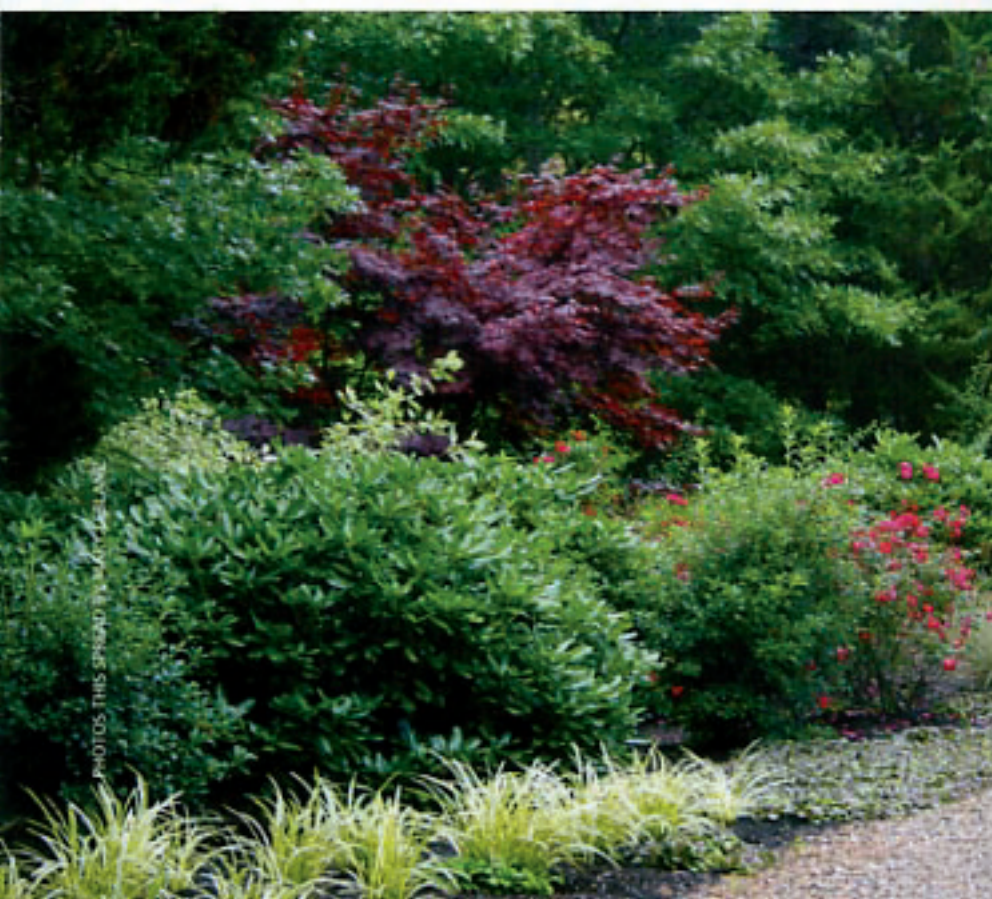
Invasive species can wreak havoc with the landscape. They take over, causing environmental damage—as well as taking an economic toll. The Cape Cod Extension Service offers the following alternatives for invasive species.



Mary LeBlanc suggests the native *Fothergilla* for the garden.



Drought tolerant, native trumpet vine is attractive to butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds but needs regular pruning to keep it in bounds. Below: Mary LeBlanc incorporates a mixed buffer of native plants into this border.



PHOTOS THIS SPRING BY MARY LEBLANC

Here are some native favorites our experts recommend.

American Beach Grass

This is a perfect plant for the ocean's front door, O'Rourke says. It's great for erosion (the roots can travel 20 feet), grows in sand, and is low-maintenance. "It moves nicely in the wind, and it's a great plant for embracing the look of the island," she says.

Beach Plum

Another plant ideal for sand dunes, beach plum helps preserve coastal areas. On the beach, it grows 4 to 7 feet, but inland, it can reach 16 to 18 feet, according to its USDA fact sheet. It flowers white in the spring and then produces a nice edible fruit.

Bayberry

A highly versatile plant (good for beachfront, wetlands, or street-side), bayberry is one of the most low-maintenance plants around, says Paul Miskovsky of Miskovsky Landscaping, Inc. "It fixes its own nitrogen, so it creates its own food," he says. Bayberries grow quickly, easily developing into clumps. "When you plant a bayberry, expect that it will become a much larger plant," he says. It's a perfect protective border at the beachfront, because it can shelter more delicate plantings from some of the harsh winds.

Sea Lavender

"Another good beachfront option, sea lavender is nothing like traditional English lavender. It thrives in the marshes, and the delicate lavender blossom is nice, though not terribly showy," O'Rourke says.

Winterberry Holly

A deciduous holly, winterberry holly sports beautiful red berries in the winter and stays looking great long after everything else is done, Miskovsky says. The cultivars (cultivars are somewhat of a gray area for the conservation commissions) like 'Red Sprite' and 'Jim Dandy' are lovely, too: They like good soil but can tolerate wet feet.

American Holly

This medium-sized tree can grow in tough areas, such as near the seaside. In areas with better soil and some wind protection, it can grow to about 30 feet. In tougher areas, it grows shorter and tighter, Miskovsky says, but it will take wet soil.

Clethra/Summersweet

"The cultivars, like '16 Candles', bloom their heads off," Mary LeBlanc says. It has beautiful yellow fall foliage as well. But again, it can be a gray area since it's a cultivar. If you're trying to plant in an area under the conservation commission's jurisdiction, sometimes they'll say "yes" and sometimes "no."

Bearberry

Bearberry is a ground cover with a nice glossy leaf that creeps easily and helps keep weeds out," O'Rourke says. "It's good for sandy dune areas (because it helps with erosion) but is a pretty plant in its own rite. Don't confuse it with barberry, which is invasive."

Virginia Rose

"This is such an easy care rose," Mary LeBlanc says. It's a great native substitute for beach rose, which is widely used and sometimes mistaken as native because it was introduced in the 1800s.



Native Joe Pye Weed tolerates wet feet, and some shade and grows up to 6' tall, so give it plenty of room. Below: "Our native white Hydrangea 'Annabelle' has flowers so profuse they often flop open," says LeBlanc.



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Eastern Red Cedar

"You often see eastern red cedar naturally by the oceanfront; in fact, they're plentiful on the Cape. However, if you buy your cedar from a nursery, where it's grown inland and then transplant it to a beachfront situation, it won't be happy," LeBlanc says. "Ideally, you want to find a plant that has been exposed to the sea wind and salt," she says. "Start as small as possible," she advises. A warning from Miskovsky: One red cedar to avoid is 'Keteleeri.' "It looks identical, but it's not hardy and won't last," he says.

Sweet Fern

"This is a cool plant," Miskovsky says. It's fragrant, deep-rooted, and drought-tolerant. It's great in clumps (ideal for erosion control), and though it looks like a fern, it's more structurally vigorous. "An unbeatable combination for areas you don't want to give much care is sweet fern, cedar, and native grasses," he says.

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Chokeberry

If your landscape is

100 feet from a wetland/
waterway, then it falls under
the jurisdiction of your town's
conservation commission.
Plantings must be approved
in these zones, and the
commission usually mandates
natives.

For more on native plants,
see the various fact sheets on
Cape Cod Extension Service's
Web site (CapeCodExtension.
org) or call (508) 375-6690.

hardy plants for a seaside garden

"You don't have to be a slave to native, but do be sustainable in your planting practices," Mary LeBlanc says. Being sustainable means choosing hardy plantings that can withstand the Cape's harsh winds, salt air, and sandy soil.

Plenty of plant material has adapted well to the Cape. If you're smart about where you plant it, you can have great success with nonnatives. Our experts singled out a few hardy options they love—some are synonymous with the Cape, and others you may not have thought to try.

Hydrangeas

Hydrangeas are one of the most photographed garden images on the Cape—and with good reason. They do very well here, tolerating just about everything thrown at them. Hydrangeas planted in full sun (favorites include 'Annabelle,' 'Nikko Blue,' and 'Limelight') will bloom larger and more profusely, but they require more water. Hydrangeas in part-shade require less water, but you may have to sacrifice some of the bloom. Split the difference and try them in both places, Keith LeBlanc suggests. "And use large drifts of a single plant for cohesion," he says.

Katsura Tree

Katsura trees—whether single-stemmed, multistemmed, or weeping—do very well on the Cape. "They're spectacular forms," Miskovsky says. Pest-resistant, they will take either drought or wet feet, but they do need good soil. They can grow to 20 feet wide by 20 feet tall. "They're really unbelievable," he says.

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Japanese Maple

"These are so undervalued," Miskovsky says. "People only think of the typical cultivars like 'Ever Red', but there is a slew of weeping red leaf varieties that have spectacular fall color and winter interest. They're tough but should be in the sun, and the soil will need to be amended with compost and peat moss," he says.

Lilacs

Lilacs need sturdy, well-drained soil, but they are low maintenance otherwise, Miskovsky says. Korean and French varieties have adapted well to the Cape. "They're showy and look great with coreopsis 'Moonbeam,' some grasses, and juniper," he says.

'Knock Out' Roses

Roses in general do well on the Cape. But 'Knock Out' roses are even lower maintenance—and extremely showy. "This series is so tough," Mary LeBlanc says. "They actually do well with the salt air. In fact, it keeps the diseases down," she says.

going organic

At its most basic, organic simply means gardening without chemicals like pesticides. But more and more, the word "organic" is becoming a catchall term that encompasses an approach to gardening that's more gentle on the earth and takes into account sustainable practices that can reduce our carbon footprint. Below are some organic gardening tips tailored to our specific seaside landscape.

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Save your clippings and compost.

"You can compost in a trash can," Mary LeBlanc says. Just poke holes for air, and drop in your grass and plant clippings, kitchen scraps, coffee grounds (with filters), fireplace ash, and turn it every so often to aerate it. Your organic matter is perfect for amending the soil, or adding a top-dressing on your garden. "Any little bit you can do helps with the sandy soil situation," Keith LeBlanc says.

Use mulch, including seaweed.

Mulch helps lock moisture into the soil, so you definitely want to apply it at least once a year (or in the spring and fall). But you can make your own mulch by collecting organic matter like seaweed and salt marsh hay. "Collect it in seaside locations and sprinkle it just like mulch, an inch or two thick," Mis-kovsky says. "It really has a nutritional value for the soil and is so good for the soil structure."

Get down on the plant level and inspect.

Instead of spraying chemicals as a preventive measure or using chemical fertilizer, take the time to walk through your garden on a daily basis and notice what's going on. Get to know the pests in your garden, and see where the trouble spots are. As for weeds, there's no easy answer. Mulching will help with weed prevention; you can also lay layers of newspaper directly over your soil (around your plants) and pile mulch on top to smother out weeds.

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Investigate nontoxic pest control solutions.

From insecticidal soap to horticultural spray oil to garlic powder, there are plenty of nontoxic alternatives to many of the chemicals on the market. The Cape Cod Extension Service has a fact-sheet about pest management and recommends several organic product sites to check out, including norganics.com and planetnatural.com. For info about biocontrols (the "good bugs" that get rid of the not-so-good bugs), try green-methods.com.

Create microclimates that make sense.

"The manipulation of earth should be the first layer of your garden," O'Rourke says. Of course you need to be careful of sensitive areas, but look at how you can use the natural features of your landscape to create a more sustainable garden. Do you have a natural layer of wind protection from trees? Planting more thirsty perennials behind it will allow you to use less water (since wind can dry out plants faster). By the same token, is there a natural spot where water runs off that you could create a rain garden?

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Spring ephemeral, Virginia bluebell blooms in the shade in early spring then disappears for the summer.



Save and repurpose.

This goes for plant material and landscaping material. Always review what you can save, especially if you are doing construction, says Keith LeBlanc. "Reuse wood fencing that's not rotted, or concrete pavers in good shape," he says. If you only have a limited amount of something, like fencing panels, stretch what you have by adding in another material, such as glass. "Always look at how you can reconfigure something," he says.

Incorporate recycled materials.

Identify areas in your landscape where you can swap the expensive imported stone for a recycled material like Trex decking (made from recycled wood and plastic), advises Keith LeBlanc. Maybe you don't want it around your entire pool, but there are other spots where it will work nicely. **17**

Judi Ketteler is a freelance home and garden writer.

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