



Plant Northern Neck Natives Mid-Campaign Survey Results February 2016

Introduction

The *Plant NNK Natives: Go Native—Grow Native Campaign* (Campaign) seeks to inspire those who live and work in the Northern Neck to use native plants in their gardens and to protect existing native vegetation. The Northern Neck Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society (NNNPS) partners with a number of other organizations and businesses in managing the Campaign, which was initiated in 2013. Through the generous support of the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, the Campaign has undertaken a number of education and outreach projects promoting the planting of Northern Neck natives. In the fall of 2015, the Campaign published a survey to gather information on the success of the Campaign and potential actions to continue the Campaign. This document summarizes the findings of the survey and implications for future directions.

The Survey Instrument

The Campaign used Survey Monkey to develop a questionnaire, collect responses and analyze results. The full questionnaire with results is found in Appendix 1. The Campaign published advertisements inviting people to take the survey in local newspapers, on the NNNPS website and through emails to partner organizations (see Appendix 2).

The survey consisted of four parts. The first three questions were designed to capture some general information about respondents' familiarity with native plants, without even mentioning the Campaign. The Campaign was not even referenced in the title, "Northern Neck Native Plants Survey." The next 12 questions (Q4-15) focused on the Campaign and were designed to assess success. Question 16 sought feedback on potential future directions. Questions 17-21 focused on the respondents' preferences and behaviors and the final 6 questions were demographic in nature. Finally, respondents were invited to participate in a drawing to win one of three \$50 gift certificates by entering their contact information.

Results

A total of 178 people responded. The full results are in Appendix 1. The following provides summary information and some interpretation in italics

Q1: In the past couple of years, have you noticed an increase in articles about or people discussing native plants?

86% of the respondents have noticed an increase in articles about or people discussing native plants.

We believe this means that our activities are having an impact and our message promoting native plants has been received.

Q2: How knowledgeable are you about native plants?

The majority of respondents (61%) are either knowledgeable or very knowledgeable about native plants. An additional 24% consider themselves “somewhat knowledgeable.” Only 15% responded that they are not very knowledgeable.

This high level of familiarity with native plants may result from self-selection, i.e., because they know about native plants they were interested in the survey, or from the fact that the survey was distributed to the Campaign partners. We think that those who rate themselves as “not very knowledgeable” are at least interested in native plants, so we delved into their responses in more depth. The findings are reported in the section below on further analyses.

Q3: When you select new plants, how important are each of the following plant characteristics?

Respondents select new plants based on characteristics that are consistent with the characteristics of native plants. The top three “very important” characteristics chosen are (totals more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one answer):

- Adapted to local soil and climate conditions (90%)
- Attract birds and butterflies (77%)
- Provide food and habitat for wildlife (72%)

Most often cited as “not important” was flood tolerant (63%), which may mean that respondents are focusing on garden plants rather than shoreline plantings. The most evenly distributed response related to deer resistance with 21% stating it was not important, 42% somewhat important and 36% very important. Perhaps this reflects whether respondents have deer visiting their properties or not.

Also, though being “colorful” is not the most important driver in selecting plants, 63% think it is somewhat important and 35% think it is very important, so focusing on the beauty as well as practicality of native plants is probably important. Similarly, having special seasonal characteristics like berries, fall foliage or specific bloom time or foliage is an important factor with 42% considering it somewhat important and 57% considering it very important.

Finally, being easy to care for, resistant to insects and disease, drought tolerant and needing little fertilizer all received a combined total of over 90% for somewhat and very important, as did having detailed information provided with the plant.

These findings should influence future directions, as discussed below under question 16.

Q4 Have you seen this logo for the Plant NNK Natives Campaign?

Three quarters of the respondents have seen the logo for the Plant NNK Natives Campaign.

This speaks well for our branding, however, the results may have been skewed by the distribution of the survey and subsequent composition of the respondents. To further establish our branding, we should consider using the logo on all products and promotions, including the "Plant of the Month" articles in local newspapers.

Q5 Have you heard of the Plant NNK Natives Campaign?

The great majority of respondents (85%) indicated having seen our outreach materials, in the following order (totals more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one answer):

1. "NNK Native Plants Sold Here" Banners at garden centers (62%)
2. Native Plant of the Month articles in local newspapers (58%)
3. NNK Native Plant tags on plants in a garden center (53%)
4. Exhibit on Plant NNK Natives (45%)
5. Discussion at NNNPS meetings (41%)
6. NNNPS website (25%)

Under "other" nine people listed that they heard about the Campaign from partner organizations such as garden clubs and the master gardeners and naturalists.

It appears our promotional materials are drawing attention.

Q6-Q15 These questions focused on specific educational materials developed by the Campaign, testing familiarity with the products and requesting assessment of the quality and usefulness of the guides. Here is summary information on the responses by guide:

Native Plants of the Northern Neck

79% of respondents have a copy of or have seen it (138 respondents)

130 respondents commented on the quality

77% of those commenters used words such as useful, informative, reference to describe it

21% of them remarked that it is high quality, excellent

20% commented on how attractive it is, often mentioning the photos

12% have used it to make decisions about plantings

A few (7 people) mentioned it was an incomplete listing and 4 people have given copies to friends.

Deer Resistant Native Plants

Only 30% of respondents have a copy of or have seen it (52 respondents)

35 respondents commented on the quality

74% of those commenters used words such as useful, informative, reference to describe it

17% of them have seen it but not used it

17% have used it to make decisions about plantings

5 people commented that they do not have a deer problem and did not rate the quality

Salt Tolerant Northern Neck Native Plants

Only 23% of respondents have a copy of or have seen it (40 respondents)

29 respondents commented on the quality

79% of those commenters used words such as useful, informative, reference to describe it

12% of them have seen it but not used it

12% have used it to make decisions about plantings

5 people commented that it is not applicable to them and did not rate the quality

1 person noted that it is not applicable personally but he/she has recommended it to many others

Native Plants for Northern Neck Bay-Friendly Properties

Only 18% of respondents have a copy of or have seen it (23 respondents)

23 respondents commented on the quality

70% of those commenters used words such as useful, informative, reference to describe it

23% of them have seen it but not used it

13% have used it to make decisions about plantings

Garden Plans using native plants

38% of respondents have a copy of or have seen it (66 respondents)

55 respondents commented on the quality

31% of those commenters used words such as useful, informative, beautiful to describe it

27% of them have seen it but not used it

7% have used it to make decisions about plantings

5% say it is not useful

5% note that it is hard to get plants

In general, those that have copies of our guides find they are useful. There is a drop off in awareness that is consistent with the level of outreach and length of time that the products have been available. The guide to Native Plants of the Northern Neck was available first and distributed through all our partner organizations, including local garden centers. The Garden Plans were published second and made available through local garden centers. The other three brochures were published last and have only been available through NNNPS exhibits, at meetings and on the web.

Q16 The Plant NNK Natives Campaign is considering new directions for the future. How interested would you be in the following?

171 people responded. Interest in the suggestions (combined score of “maybe interested” and “very interested”) ranked as follows:

- 99% Store display or special area of garden center devoted to native plants
- 97% Demonstration gardens featuring native plants
- 96% Learning more about native plants for butterfly/pollinator gardens
- 85% Learning about propagating native plants
- 82% Expert advice on controlling non-native invasive plants
- 81% Expert advice on native plants for landscaping needs
- 74% Expert help on identifying native plants on one’s property

All three suggestions on recognition or award programs for planting natives received little support (< 32% interested at all).

The Campaign should consider focusing future directions on the activities that most respondents ranked highly. For example, we could work with our partner retailers to improve store displays focusing on native plants and feature pollinator garden plants. Also, we could further promote the demonstration gardens on the Northern Neck. This is consistent with plans underway. Under the same grant that funded the survey, the Campaign has developed a demonstration garden trail guide and purchased improved signage for the gardens. These will be released in Spring 2016.

Q17 Where do you get your plants?

165 people responded. They were allowed to choose more than one answer. The great majority (83%) shop for plants at Plant NNK Natives partner retailers. The second largest number of respondents shop at the NNNPS native plant sale (48%). Large retailers such as Lowe’s and Walmart are visited by 43%. Market days are next in line with 37% and catalog at 32%. When asked to list other sources of plants, 22 of the 45 respondents mentioned garden centers outside of the Northern Neck (e.g., Richmond, Northern Virginia) and 7 mentioned receiving plants from friends.

It appears that being a retail partner in the Plant NNK Natives Campaign has benefits. Noting how many people shop outside the area, it seems that if more native plants were available locally they would sell. Given the large number of people who shop at the NNNPS plant sale, the Campaign may want to consider promoting a springtime sale with our partner retailers.

Q18 and Q19 focused on who influences purchases of plants and who cares for them once they are planted. In both cases, the overwhelming response was the respondents themselves (95% and 94%, respectively). Often, someone else in the household is involved (20% and 26%, respectively). Garden center staff have some influence on purchases (8%) and, based on other sources cited, Master Gardeners, NNNPS and garden clubs also provide some influence.

It appears that our respondents are strongly inclined to the DIY mentality, (though some did comment that they have helpers). This may be because the survey distribution included emails to master gardeners and garden clubs. The Campaign may want to consider how to ascertain if non-gardeners rely more heavily on landscape firms and designers in order to determine if stronger outreach to those retailers is warranted.

Q20 What sources, if any, do you use to learn about native plants?

Asked about sources for information on native plants, the respondents predominantly turn to books (70%), the Internet (54%), the Plant NNC Natives Campaign information (53%) and neighbors, friends and relatives (50%). Fewer numbers rely on retailer displays (36%), Master Gardeners and garden clubs (34%) catalogs and gardening magazines (31%).

It is gratifying that so many respondents turn to Campaign materials for information.

Q21 If you avoid purchasing native plants, please indicate the reasons why.

Only 43 people (24%) responded to this question concerning avoiding buying native plants. Of those respondents, the reasons given for avoiding purchasing native plants were as follows (respondents could choose more than one answer).

28% Not enough information on the plants

23% Plants not available

18% They are dull or plain

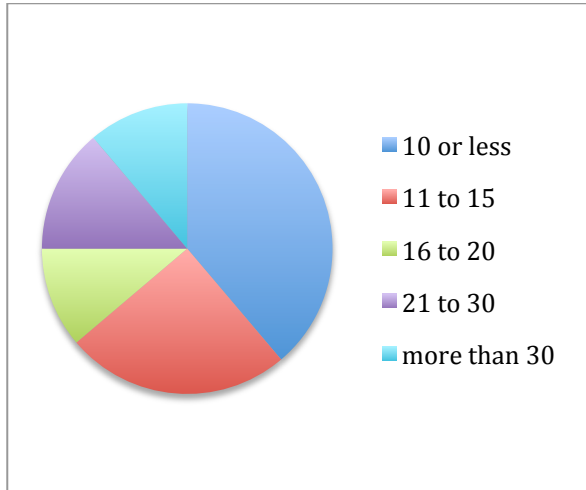
14% They are expensive

14% They are weedy

Under the comment section, 7 people specified that they do not avoid purchasing native plants. It may be that they people who did not answer the question also do not avoid purchasing natives. Unfortunately, the question did not work well.

Q22 and Q23 focused on where respondents live and for how long they have resided on the Northern Neck. The great majority of respondents live in one of the four counties of the Northern Neck (85%) with the greatest percentage in Lancaster (26%) and Northumberland (42%) counties. Most of the respondents from outside the Northern Neck live in Middlesex or Essex counties (14 of 25).

For those who live or have property on the Northern Neck, about 2/3 have been here 15 years or less.



Number of Years Respondents Lived in the Northern Neck

This confirms our suspicion that our audience is made up primarily of “come here’s.”

Demographics

Our respondents are predominantly well-educated (82% college degree or higher) white (89%) seniors (80% 60 years or older). Many respondents preferred not to report household income (40%). Of those who did, 50% have incomes between \$75,000 to \$125,000 per year and the rest fall in a bell-shaped curve on each side of that range.

The Campaign is reaching a subset of the population that probably consists of individuals who retired on the Northern Neck.

Additional Analyses

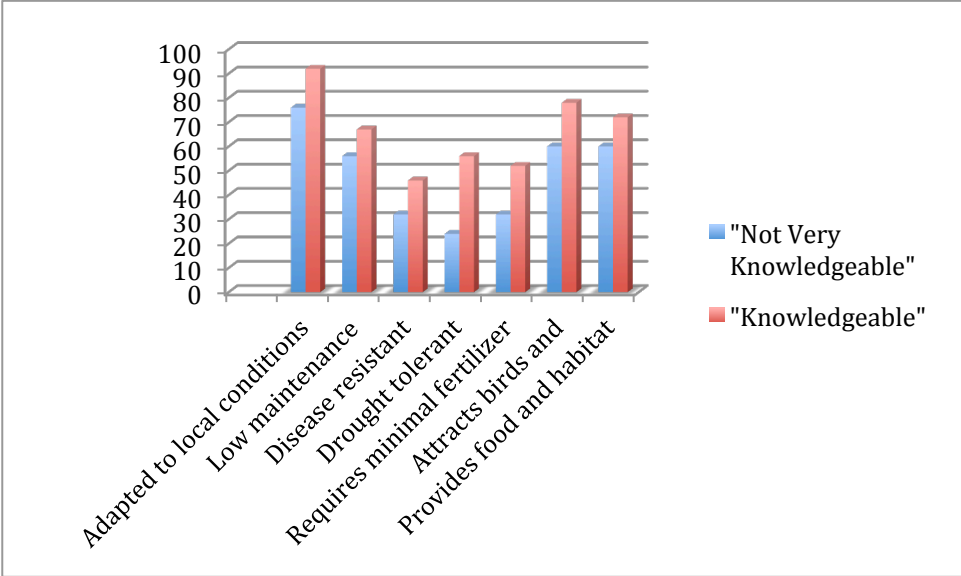
We ran a few comparisons to learn more about the preferences of certain kinds of respondents and to answer the following questions:

- Do those who consider themselves “not very knowledgeable” about native plants have different preferences than those who consider themselves “knowledgeable?”
- What about those who consider themselves “somewhat knowledgeable?”
- Do those who shop at the NNNPS plant sale differ from the full group of respondents in any significant way?
- Do those who rely on the Plant NNK Native Campaign materials differ from the full group of respondents in any significant way?

“Not Very Knowledgeable”

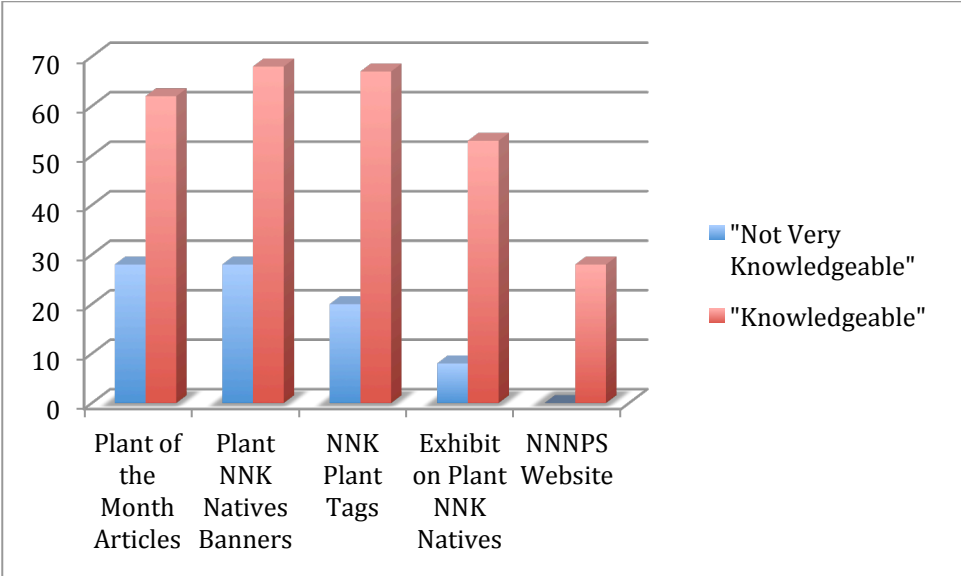
Those who consider themselves “not very knowledgeable” about native plants are not as interested in the characteristics that make native plants beneficial: adapted to local soil and

climate, low maintenance, drought tolerant, require minimal fertilizer, provides wildlife food and habitat. They are slightly more interested in colorful plants.



Percentage of Respondents Considering Characteristics "Very Important"

In addition, they are less familiar with Campaign materials and promotional activities. Only 36% have seen the logo versus 81% of those who consider themselves "knowledgeable." Also, only 36% have a copy of the guide to Northern Neck Native Plants versus 87% of those who consider themselves "knowledgeable." They are also less aware of the other promotional activities of the Campaign (see next figure).



Percentage of Respondents Reporting Having Seen Promotions

Their plant purchasing behavior also differs. They are less likely to shop at Campaign partner retailers (56% v 90% for those who consider themselves "knowledgeable") and the

NNNPS plant sale (13% v 49%) and they are more likely to buy plants at large retailers such as Lowe's and Walmart (70% v 39%). Of all the suggested new directions for the Campaign, they were most interested in store displays devoted to native plants.

Perhaps more education on the benefits of native plants is warranted, however it will be important to find an appropriate educational medium and venue, perhaps a store display at Walmart.

“Somewhat Knowledgeable”

Those who consider themselves “somewhat knowledgeable” about native plants seem to be interested in gardening with native plants and eager to learn more. When selecting new plants, they consider characteristics that are consistent with native plants (adapted to local conditions, beneficial to wildlife, low maintenance, etc.) to be very important. However, they also look for detailed information with the plants at a higher rate than those who are knowledgeable (54% v 36%, respectively are very interested in such information). Also, they consistently rank proposed new directions a little higher than those who consider themselves “knowledgeable.” So, they are sponges for information! They are familiar with Campaign materials and value them. Here are some of their comments on the guide to Native Plants of the Northern Neck:

- *Excellent, I have started selecting plants base(d) on the guide.*
- *Very useful...I find myself going to it many times.*
- *Keep it out and refer to it. Lovely publication.*
- *I love it and refer to it whenever I plan to add to my garden.*

NNNPS Plant Sale Goers and Campaign Materials Users

Not surprisingly, those who patronize the NNNPS Plant Sale are very familiar with the Campaign and use the educational materials we have generated. They ranked the highest in recognizing the Campaign logo (90% and 93%, respectively versus 76% for all respondents). They also ranked higher on all of the Campaign promotions and materials.

One of the respondents who both attends the NNNPS Plant Sale and turns to Campaign materials for information commented on the guide to Native Plants of the Northern Neck saying, “Extremely useful in determining what plants will work in my yard. The guide is easy to read. It's my first go-to source for determining if a plant is native.”

As did the respondents as a whole, they were most interested in these new directions for the Campaign:

1. Store display devoted to native plants.
2. Demonstration gardens featuring native plants.
3. Butterfly/pollinator gardens.

Conclusions/Implications

The Plant NNK Natives Campaign has succeeded well at reaching a limited audience (those who describe themselves as knowledgeable about native plants) and providing them with useful information. The Campaign may want to build on this success by focusing on the new activities that this audience expressed interest in:

1. Store displays devoted to native plants. These displays could include signage that describes plant characteristics that are most important to the survey respondents (Q3). It would be logical to work closely with partner retailers in developing plans for the displays.
2. Demonstration gardens featuring native plants. As mentioned above, this is consistent with plans underway. Under the same grant that funded the survey, the Campaign has developed a demonstration garden trail guide and purchased improved signage for the gardens. These will be released in Spring 2016. The Campaign may want to promote this strongly.
3. Information on plants for butterfly/pollinator gardens. This information could be provided at the store displays or featured in special activities.

The Campaign may want to expand the audience by providing educational materials at new locations, e.g. Walmart. In this way, the Campaign may be able to inspire people who are not already knowledgeable about native plants.

Given the large number of people who shop at the NNNPS plant sale (nearly half of the respondents), the Campaign may want to consider promoting springtime native plant sales with our partner retailers. Also, many respondents do shop for plants at Campaign partner garden centers (83%). However, many also shop outside of the Northern Neck. So, it seems that if more native plants were available locally they would sell. These results should be shared with the partner retailers in hopes that they will expand the availability of native plants.