When you consider planting a flowering shrub, why not consider a native? Some of the most beautiful plants are ones that are indigenous to our area and that, to me, is reason enough to plant them. Many gardeners assume that if a plant is a native it is carefree and easier to grow than a non native. Some natives are very easy to grow but this, sadly, is not always the case. This perception of natives has not only frustrated many a gardener, but it has also led to the death of many a good plant.

Some natives are site-specific and may resent being transplanted. Some natives are susceptible to insects and diseases and belie the commonly held belief that they are always less finicky plants. As the saying goes, “right plant-right place.” This applies to any plant, whether it be a native or not. Many natives are very easy to grow, but they don’t always conform to traditional concepts of a landscape plant… they may not look like neatly pruned green meatballs. For the knowledgeable gardener, native plants, when sited and cared for properly, can add an element to the landscape that is pleasing and sometimes unique. Any listing of native plants is of course subjective, but a listing of a few of my favorites will give you some indication of their wide range of applications.

Native azaleas can be a stunning addition to the woodland garden. They usually have a tall rangy growth habit. But the bright orange, red or yellow flowers of the Florida flame azalea (Rhododendron austrinum) make a bold splash of color in spring that is hard to beat. Make sure to plant native azaleas in moist organic, well drained soil in filtered shade. Be careful not to let them dry out, especially for the first few years after planting. Moist does not mean sopping wet, though. That can be just as bad, if not worse, than too dry.
A plant with similar growth requirements which, in my opinion, has some of the most beautiful flowers of all natives is *Kalmia latifolia* or mountain laurel. Mountain laurel is only found in certain areas of our region and is considered a rare native. Aside from being as finicky about its watering as the native azaleas, it also has the disadvantage of being an extremely slow grower. For the patient gardener, though, this evergreen shrub has beautiful clusters of white to pink flowers. Make sure when buying this plant that it has come from a southern seed source. Many mountain laurels are grown by northern growers and they will not acclimate here. And, finally, do not under any circumstances plant mountain laurel in heavy clay soils.

Another of my favorites is rusty blackhaw (*Viburnum rufidulum*). Rusty blackhaw is considered to be a large shrub or small tree. In the spring it has showy clusters of small white flowers. In the fall it usually has excellent burgundy-red fall color. Rusty blackhaw is a much easier plant to grow than the native azaleas or the mountain laurel. It can adapt to a wide range of soil types and will usually grow in sun or shade. But it will flower best in a sunny location.

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