

Planting for Our Future

with the MA Native Plant Palette



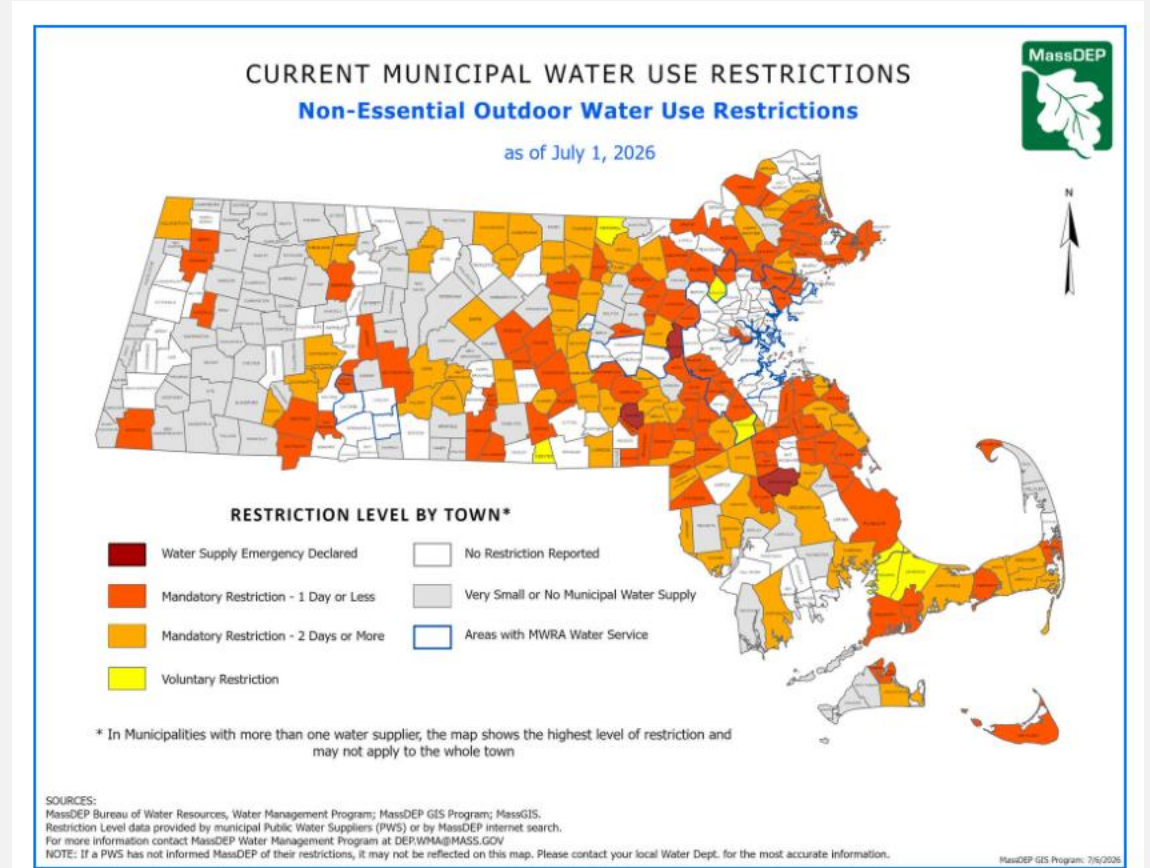
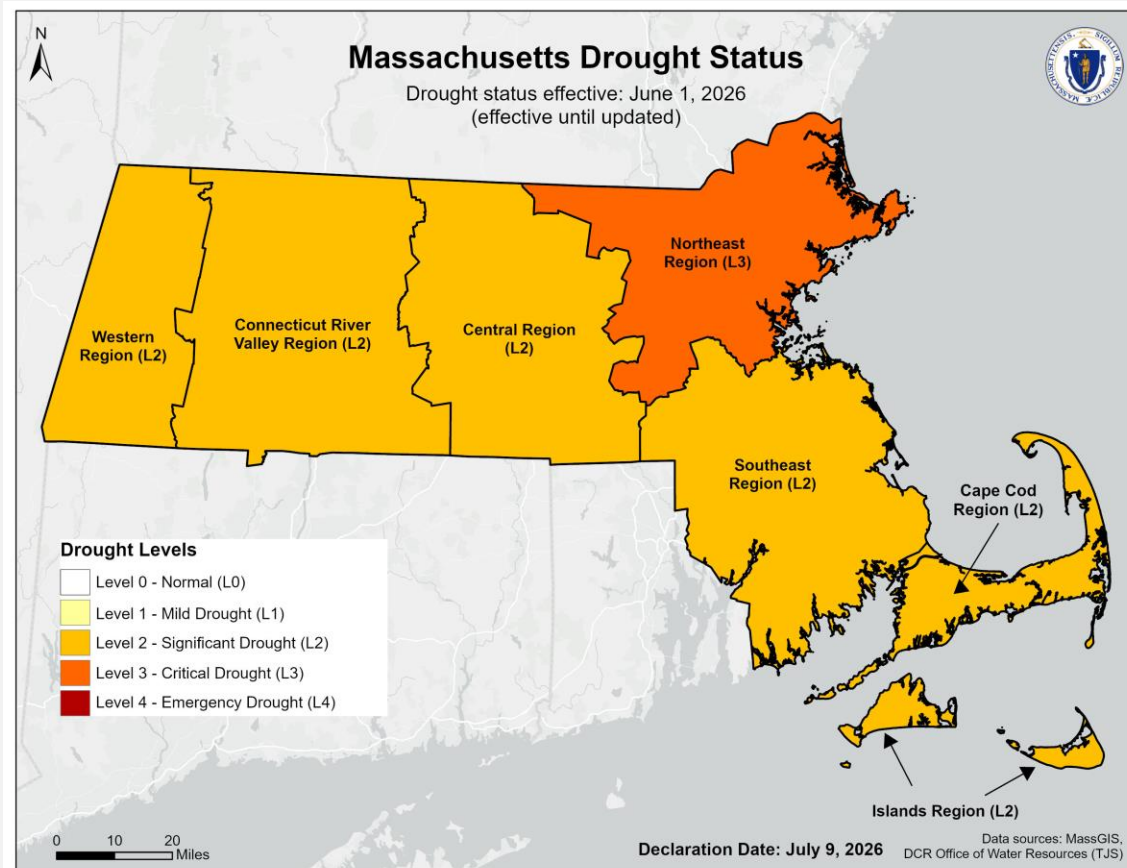
Anne Carroll and Jason Duff
MA DCR- Office of Water Resources
Water Resources Commission
October 13, 2026





What does drought look like in MA?

MA has been in some level of drought since August 2024



Water Conservation Efforts

1

Regulatory

- Water Management Act
- Inter-basin Transfer Act

2

Policy

- Water Conservation Standards
- Drought Management Plan

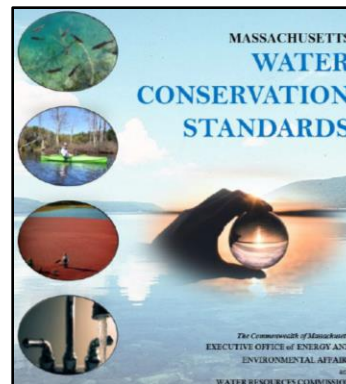
3

Education/Outreach

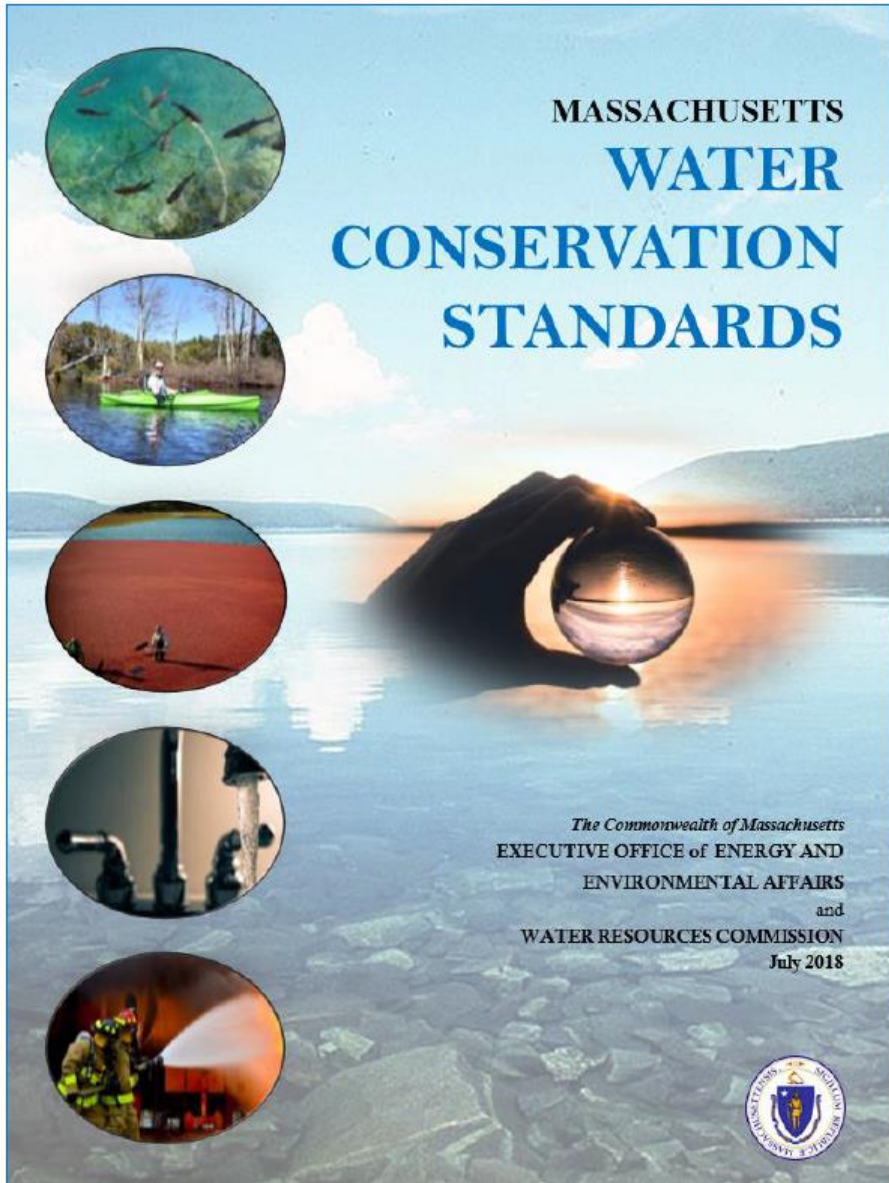
- Water conservation toolkit
- Videos, social media

Water Management Act Program

MassDEP's Water Management Act Program regulates the amount of water withdrawn from Massachusetts ground and surface water resources. This ensures adequate supplies for current and future needs.



MA Water Conservation Standards



Includes guidance on:

1. Comprehensive Planning and Drought Management Planning
2. Water Loss Control
3. Metering
4. Pricing
5. Residential Water Use
6. Public Sector Water Use
7. Industrial, Commercial, Institutional Water Use
8. Agricultural Water Use
9. Outdoor Water Use
10. Public Education and Outreach



www.mass.gov/conservemawater

A few examples of toolkit resources

Interactive Tools



Water Savings Quiz

Find out how much water you and your family can save?

WATER SAVING QUIZ

Take the quiz and find out!

Finding Leaks

IN THE BATHROOM

IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM



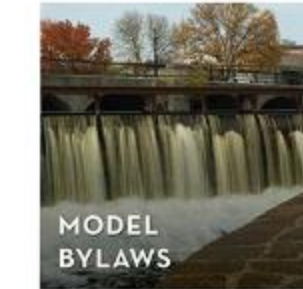
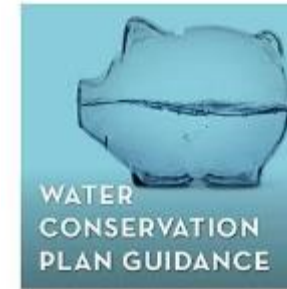
IN THE KITCHEN

IN THE YARD

PLANTING A WATER-SMART GARDEN



Technical Resources



Outreach Materials

Social media products



WATER SAVER TIP

BE GREEN, GO GOLD

When well-established lawns turn golden brown, they're not dead. They've gone dormant and will green up again when it rains. This actually deepens the roots and makes the lawn more drought tolerant.



Outreach Materials

DROUGHT IN MASSACHUSETTS Frequently Asked Questions



What is a drought?

A drought is an unusually long period (2+ months) of dry weather that reduces water availability. Droughts can lead to problems like crop damage, water shortages, increased fire risk, dry streams, and habitat loss. The severity of a drought depends on the rain deficit, time of year, and duration. Check the latest hydrologic data [here](#).



Who declares droughts in MA? How are they determined? What are the different levels of drought?

Massachusetts uses a Drought Management Plan with four drought levels across seven regions. Drought levels are based on data like rainfall, streamflow, groundwater, reservoir levels, fire danger, and evapotranspiration. The Drought Management Task Force reviews this data and makes recommendations to the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs, who declares the drought levels. For updates on current drought status, click [here](#).



What level of drought is my area in?

Massachusetts is divided into seven drought regions. Find your region's current drought level [here](#).



Where does my drinking water come from?

Drinking water may come from wells, reservoirs, or rivers. Some towns use a mix of sources, while MWRA communities get water from the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs. Contact your local public works/water department to learn more.



How does the drought impact me?

Drought can reduce water for households, fire protection, and the natural environment. Using water efficiently helps stretch supplies until conditions improve and supports your community's water sources.



Who can I go to if I need additional water or resources?

If you have a private well that is running dry, contact your local town office and board of health to report it. If your town has a public water supplier or fire department, contact them to see if you can temporarily hook up to their system. In addition, farmers may contact the MA Department of Agricultural Resources for assistance.

DID YOU KNOW?

Turning off water when brushing teeth & shaving can save **10 gallons** per person/day

Installing a high efficiency toilet can save **19 gallons** per person/day

Washing full loads of clothes can save **15-45 gallons** per load

Washing a full load of dishes can save **5-15 gallons** per load

On average, **10% of homes** have leaks that waste **90 gallons** or more per day.

LET US KNOW

about any drought-related impacts you experience through our [drought impact reporter](#).

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP DURING A DROUGHT?

Conserving water is always a good idea, but it is especially important during times of drought. We can all help reduce the impact of the drought by using less water, and if the drought becomes more severe, we can increase our conservation in response.



Look for leaks in homes and businesses. Check pipes, fixtures, and appliances. Inspect water meters for constant dial movement. Use dye tabs or food coloring to check for toilet leaks.



Avoid letting the water run, take shorter showers, and wash only full loads of dishes and laundry. **Be mindful of indoor water use and use only what is necessary.**



Use drought-resistant, native plants in your garden and employ **water-smart landscaping principles**.



Avoid outdoor watering during the growing season. If you have a vegetable patch that needs some water, use a hand-held device only. Lawns naturally go dormant when water is scarce and revive when conditions improve.



Make sure your water fixtures are **WaterSense efficient**.



See how much you can save! Use the **MA Home Water Use Calculator tool** to help evaluate your household use.



Talk to your friends and neighbors about conserving water!



MORE WATER SAVING TIPS
MASS.GOV/CONSERVEMAWATER

Drought Video Series

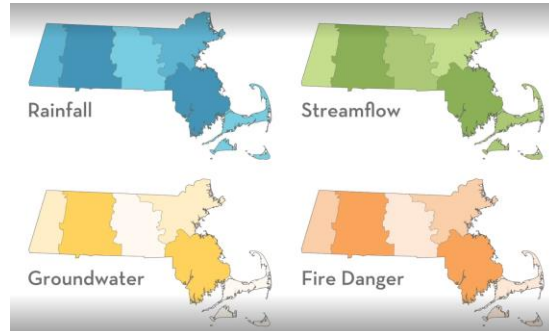


Informational videos explaining:

- What drought is
- Drought impacts in MA
- How we monitor conditions/prepare for impacts
- How people can help
- Videos available at:
 - [Drought Tips, Tools, and Resources](#)

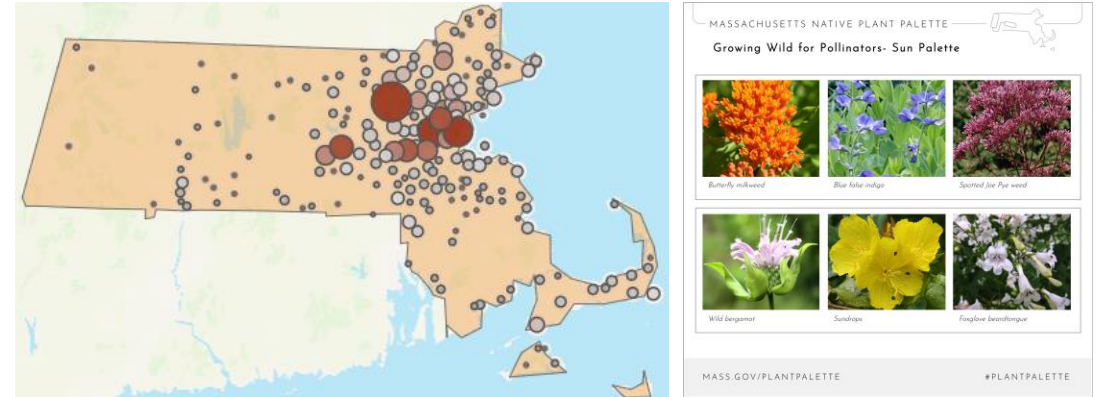


Rockport, MA - July 2022



Recent Water Conservation Achievements

- Drought Resiliency and Water Efficiency Grant Program
 - \$500,000 awarded to 13 projects in FY25, 12 projects in FY26
 - ****Now accepting apps for FY27****
- Water data projects
 - Collaborative water database project with USGS
 - Flume data and dashboard
 - WNF methodology review/possible updates
- Alliance for Water Efficiency
- Native plants/drought resilient landscapes
 - Native Plant Palette (www.mass.gov/plantpalette)





Communication surrounding outdoor water use is a constant struggle

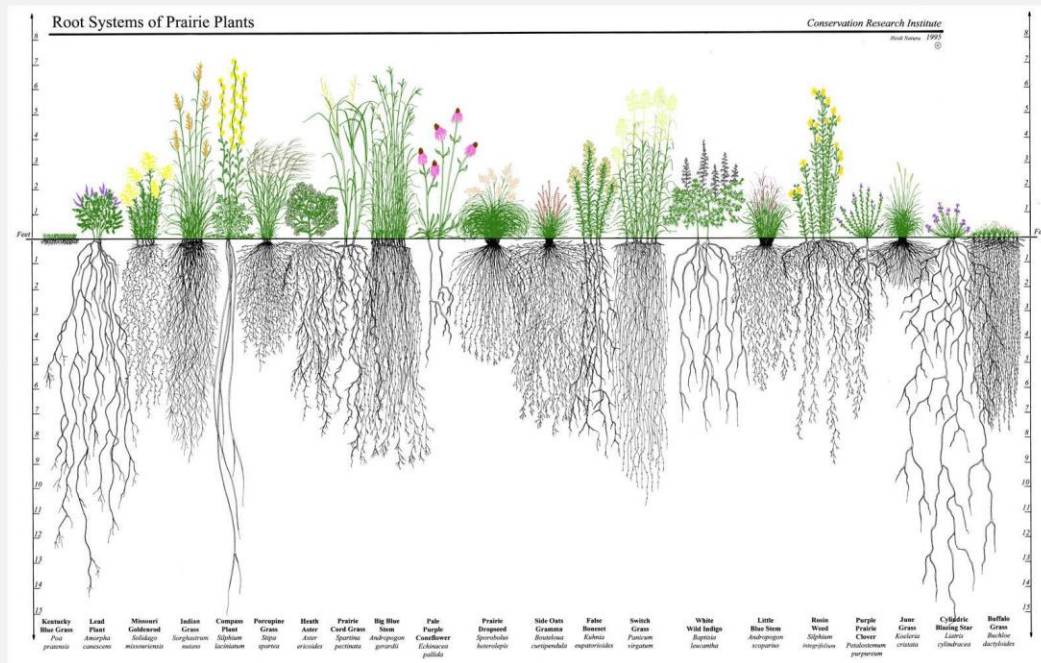
Native plants = Multiple benefits

Environmental Benefits

- ✓ Use less water
- ✓ Support pollinators
- ✓ Help wildlife
- ✓ Strengthen climate change resilience

Human Benefits

- ✓ Create beautiful landscapes
- ✓ Allow you to “paint” your yard
- ✓ Provide health benefits
- ✓ Offer more interesting choices



Ongoing MA Programs

[Growing Wild for Pollinators](#)

[Greening the Gateway Cities](#)

Other state agencies:

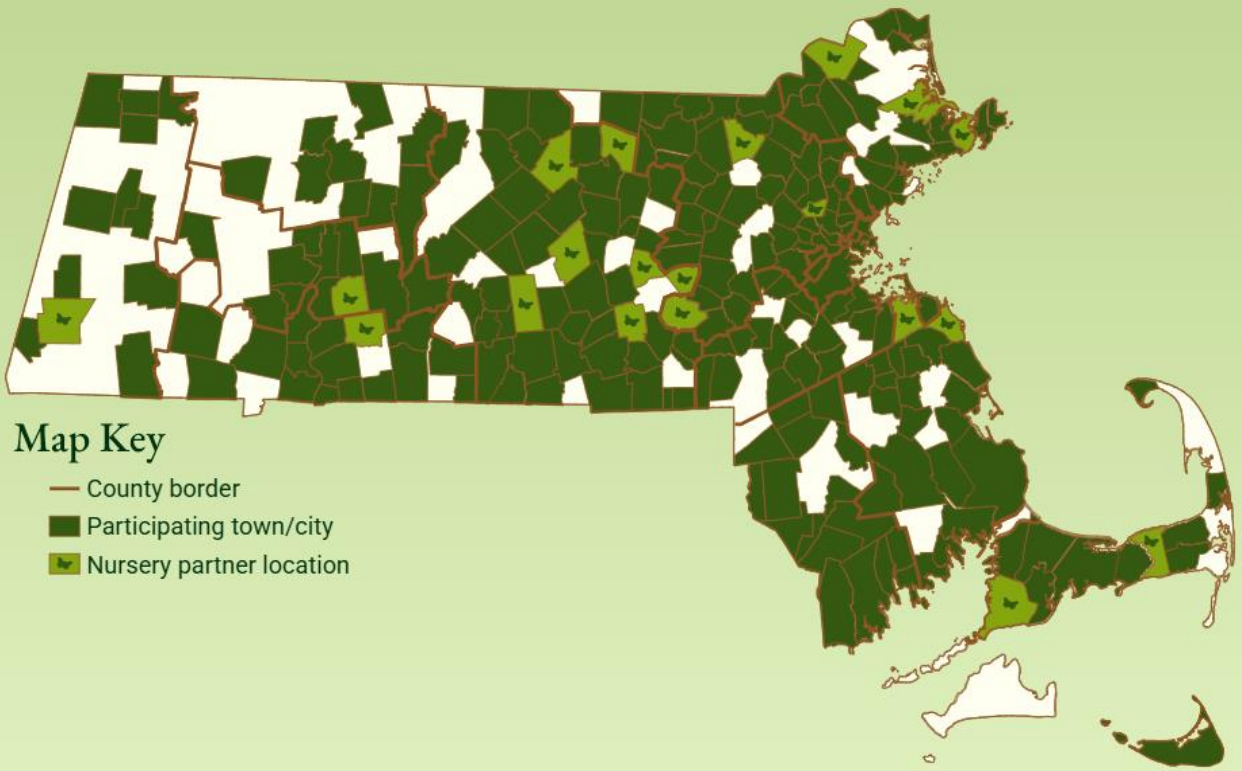
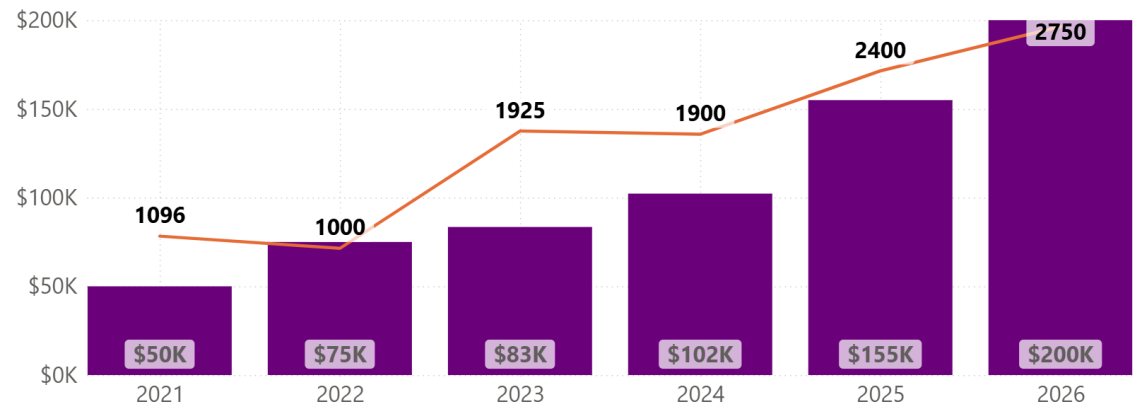
Mass Department of Agriculture- [native pollinator database](#)

Mass Wildlife- [bumblebee programs](#)



Growing Wild Massachusetts **6 Year Totals**

Starter Kits Distributed		Starter Kit Events			Habitat Dist. Acreage	
11,071		128			12.71	
Seeds	Plants	DCR	Nursery	Tribal	Counties	Towns
11,071	22,142	6	31	3	10	37



A Collaboration Between:



MASSACHUSETTS NATIVE PLANT PALETTE



BACK

Plant Type

Flowers Trees Grasses Vines Shrubs Ferns

Flower Color

Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Purple Pink White Brown

204 RESULTS

Flowering Season Height Moisture Level

Benefit Region Spread

Sun Level ?

- Formatted for **social media**
- **Simplify** material to make more **accessible**
- Tap into **creativity and fun** of native plants
- **Expand the community**, regardless of skill level
- Reminder that **native plants are for everyone!**



Butterfly milkweed

Asclepias tuberosa

SEE LOCAL NURSURIES

SPEC SHEET

MORE INFO

WHY NATIVE PLANTS?

Color Summer

Flowers growth form

12-30" height 12-24" spread Semi Full sun level

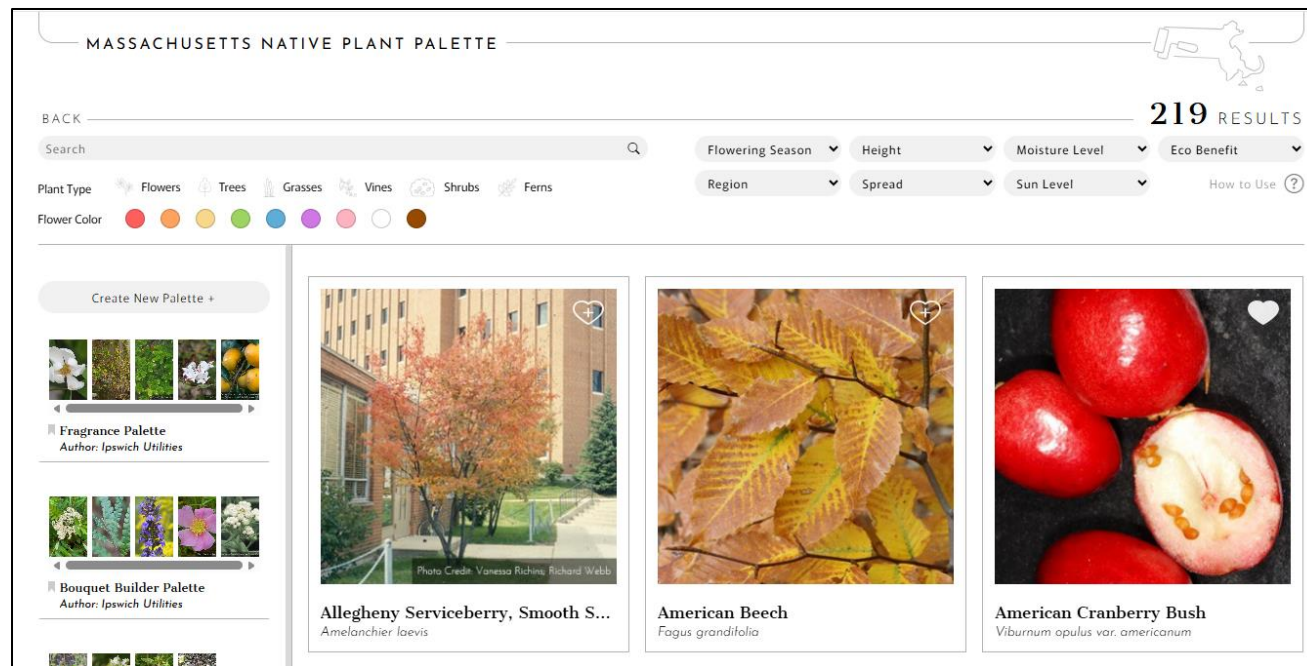
Dry Average moisture level

1. Northeastern Highlands, 2. Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens, 3. Northeastern Coastal Zone

region

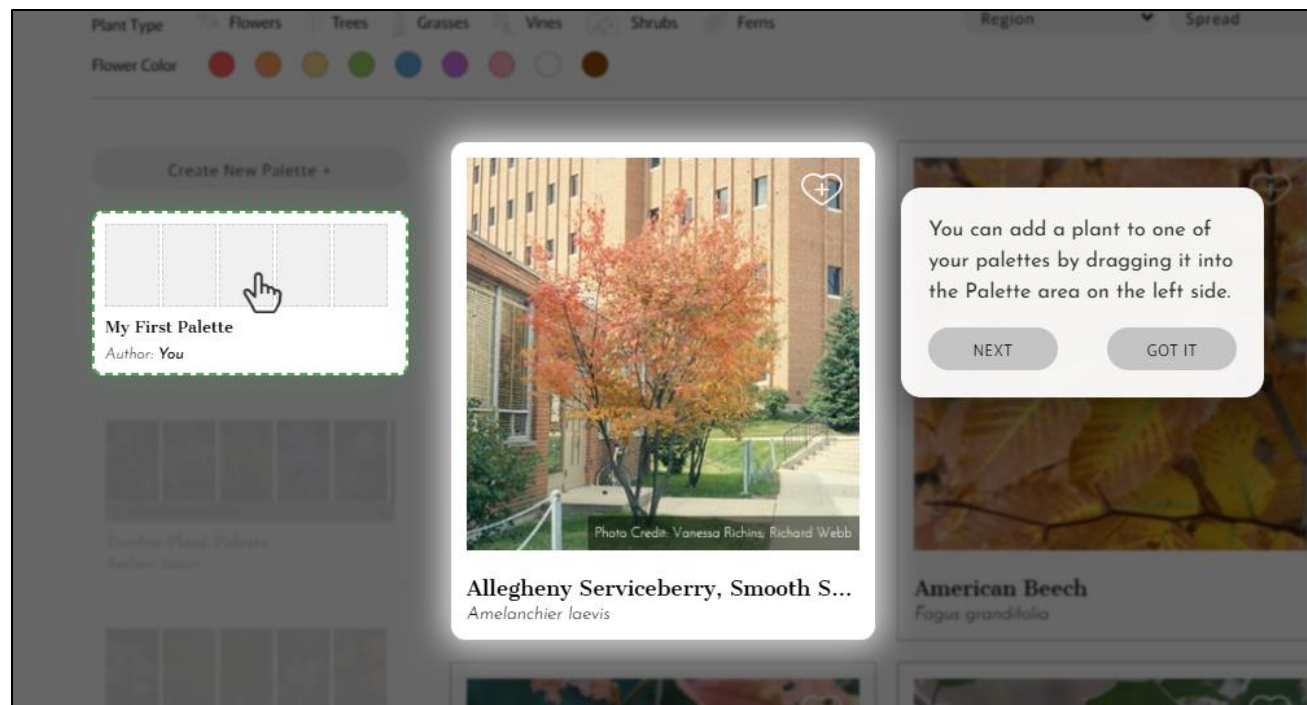
Pollinators Other Wildlife

Drought Tolerant ecological benefit



NEW Features:

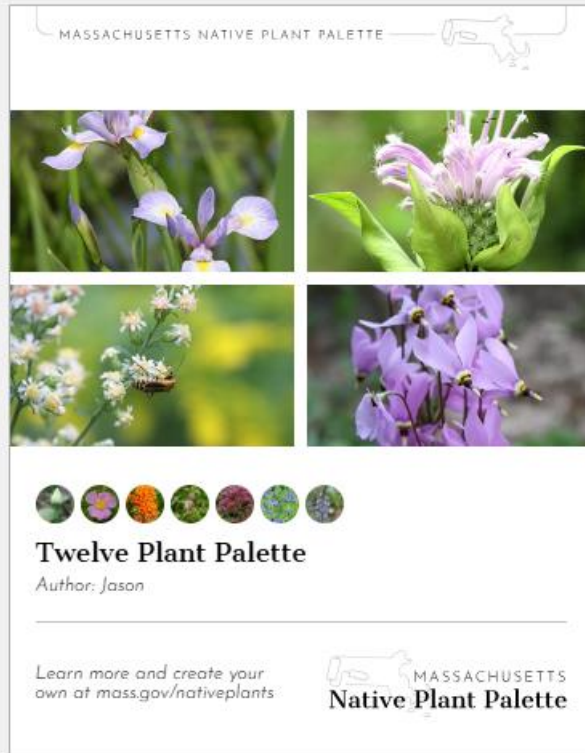
- Search bar
 - Can search by common name, Latin name, or keywords
- Streamlined palette creation/editing
 - Drag and drop
 - Easier to do editing within palettes
- New user tutorials



SHARE



Show your palette and spread the word about Massachusetts Native Plants.



SAVE IMAGE

SHARE

NEW Features:

- Palettes can have more than 8 plants
- Enhanced sharing capability
- Unique URLs for specific palettes

Plant Palette DEMO →

First “Plant Palette” Garden

- Collaboration with Ipswich Water Department
- Removed ~150 ft² of grass and amended soil
- Planted drought tolerant plants from local nursery
- Watered with rain barrel during establishment
- Hosted Climate Week event to promote

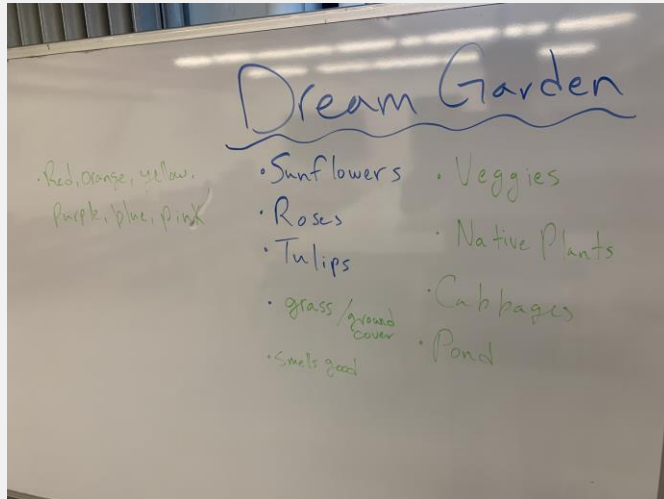


Second “Plant Palette” Garden

- Collaboration with the Town of Danvers
- Planted in raised planter boxes at the town’s Education Garden
- Hosted another educational event shortly after planting



Middle school plant palette activity



Bringing the school palette to life!

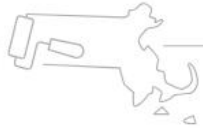


Bringing the school palette to life!



Restoration Palette by The Charles River Conservancy

MASSACHUSETTS NATIVE PLANT PALETTE



Hell's Half Acre Restoration Palette



King Solomon's seal



Fragrant Sumac



Hayscented fern



Sweet-fern



Bush honeysuckle



White wood-aster



Bowman's root



Common wrinkle-leaved goldenrod

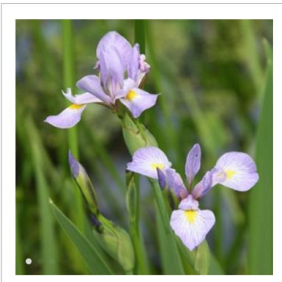




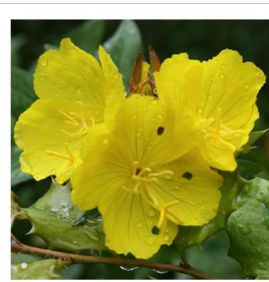
What's Next?

1. Future tool enhancements
2. Formalize Native Plant Palette “lesson plan” for replication
3. Collaborate on more palette plantings
 - DCR park gardens?
4. Continue promotion/outreach
5. Your thoughts?





Blue flag iris
Iris versicolor



Sundrops
Oenothera fruticosa



Butterfly milkweed
Asclepias tuberosa



Cardinal flower
Lobelia cardinalis



Spotted horesemint
Monarda punctata



Beach plum
Prunus maritima

Thank You!

Anne Carroll

MA DCR

Office of Water Resources

anne.carroll@mass.gov

Jason Duff

MA DCR

Office of Water Resources

jason.duff@mass.gov