

# Native Woody Plants of Montgomery County, Maryland

~ John Parrish, July 2002

## Author's Notes

This native woody flora reflects 27 years of my botanical studies in Montgomery County, Maryland. I define “native” to be a plant likely native to Montgomery County, Maryland at the time of first European settlement. Except for 13 species, I have personally verified that the plants on this list ‘naturally occur’ in Montgomery County as of 2002. ‘Naturally occur’ means that a species is established in the wild by natural seed and/or vegetative dispersal methods such as by wind, water, wild animals and so forth. The 13 species I did not verify as ‘naturally occurring’ as of 2002 include: *Salix interior*, *Comptonia peregrina*, *Carya laciniosa*, *Quercus prinoides*, *Magnolia acuminata*, *Ribes* sp., *Rubus odoratus*, *Prunus pumila*, *Ceanothus ovatus*, *Vitis rupestris*, *Hypericum densiflorum*, *Cornus alternifolia*, and *Rhododendron maximum*. Though I know that Cucumber-tree (*Magnolia acuminata*) and Rosebay Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) grow at Blockhouse Point Park, I have observed only one specimen of each and thus am not sure whether they represent a natural occurrence even though they grow in mature forest. The remaining 11 species are documented from Montgomery and/or nearby localities. Carole Bergmann (Montgomery County Forest Ecologist) knew of a northern Montgomery County site for Sweet Fern (*Comptonia peregrina*), but a housing development destroyed the site. Hopefully another occurrence will be rediscovered soon.

Historical records indicate that the native flora of DC and vicinity was/is incredibly diverse. That said, there is no doubt that we humans have drastically altered the natural ranges of many species, for better or for worse, since European settlement. Botanists may argue ‘till the cows come home’ about what is or what is not native to a given area. Though no one really knows exactly what was native to this particular County 400 years ago, my approach is to be broadly inclusive. I wish I could go back in time to witness the pre-settlement landscape. Since I am but 44 and not 400 years old, I must rely on my best judgement and the literature and err on the side of inclusiveness as to what was likely our native flora prior to European settlement.

The data in the “occurrence” column is based upon my field observations and historical records for Montgomery County. I have used my best judgement to determine frequency of occurrence. I welcome constructive feedback and invitations to the field where there may be disagreements with any of my assessments. Inevitably, new information will also shed light on the status of the County’s woody flora. Lastly, I have indicated location data in the “where found”

column only for those species listed as uncommon, rare, very rare or extirpated. Those species listed as fairly common and common are usually easy to locate.

It is my sincere wish that this woody flora will inspire others to document their local flora for education and preservation purposes.

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