



**West Newbury Wild and Native**  
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Dr. Justin Bartholomew, District Superintendent  
Pentucket Regional School District  
22 Main Street  
West Newbury, Massachusetts 01985

November 15, 2021

Dear Dr. Bartholomew,

We are writing concerning the list of trees, shrubs and perennial plants that have been chosen to enhance our new Pentucket Regional Middle-High School. The list consists of fifty plants of which only thirteen (26%) are native species. In the remaining 74%, fifteen are non-native and evolved outside of the United States, while twenty-two species are cultivated species or cultivars.

We are a group of local residents, recently organized under West Newbury Wild and Native (WN2), in response to concerns local residents raised over the loss of biodiversity and natural landscapes in Town. WN2 is dedicated to sharing information and resources so that residents learn the importance of native plants and how to integrate them into their gardening to support pollinators. Doug Tallamy, E.O. Wilson, and many local organizations have awakened the country to the fact we must support a new approach to conservation that starts by emphasizing native plants in our home yards, our schoolyards, and our public spaces.

We believe it is critical that only native plants are used in the plantings at the new school, in part to educate our youth about the vital role native plants have in the environment, including why only natives were chosen to augment their learning environment. Native plants are vital in supporting wildlife communities as well as all-important native pollinator species. New England native plants have evolved here for millions of years and

are best acclimated to our climate and weather. They are beautiful, hardy, and require less maintenance and watering than non-native species. By planting only native plant species at our new school, the Pentucket communities will demonstrate leadership as environmental stewards and show our students how to be change makers in their community.

Twenty-two of the plants on the landscaping list are native cultivars. While we applaud the architects for selecting some natives, native cultivars do not provide the same value to wildlife as their wild counterparts. The traits they are bred for, such as leaf color or enhanced flower bloom, make these plants unavailable to caterpillars, pollinators and birds. They are usually reproduced by cloning and lack the genetic diversity needed to adapt to a changing climate. Non-native plants like *Ginkgo biloba* and Katsura tree, both from China, certainly have interesting leaf shapes and color, but provide no food. They are essentially food deserts for native wildlife. With native pollinators declining at alarming rates, we should no longer plant species that do not reliably provide wildlife benefits or take the chance they become invasive and crowd out natives.

West Newbury, Groveland, and Merrimac are rich in open space and native biodiversity, characteristics highly valued by their residents. Pentucket Regional School District is in a unique position to make thoughtful decisions that support the foundation of biodiversity through native plantings. Local governments and businesses are also saving money, reducing pollution, and protecting waterways and wildlife habitat by landscaping with native plants. The City of Somerville, MA, has recently passed a Native Planting Ordinance that established minimum requirements for native plants and trees to be planted in City-owned parks, open spaces, and streets.

We understand that space, plant size, and growth form are important considerations in the selection of plants. Therefore, we have assembled a list of native trees, shrubs and perennials that will provide the same growth or leaf characteristics as the selected cultivar or non-native species, while offering wildlife habitat and lower maintenance costs. We have also attached a list of nurseries throughout Massachusetts as well as some in nearby states that sell natives or have annual native plant sales.

WN2 has members with expertise in native plant cultivation, plant identification, landscape design, and invasive control. We offer our time and expertise to help Pentucket Regional Middle-High School take a leading role in the growing movement committed to planting only native species and turn the Pentucket campus into a conservation corridor. It is imperative that we begin to share the land we use to support other species - for our

health and the future of all species. We welcome the opportunity to talk with you further about this critical issue for our local environment.

Sincerely,

West Newbury Wild and Native

(Steering Committee: Nancy Pau, Carol Decker, Patricia Reeser, Sue Stasiuk)

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