

“Plant with a Purpose”

Public Outreach Campaign

Gabrielle Cory, James Hastings, Ivan Ivanic, Brooke Knauss,
Conrad Mellin, Kaitlyn Smith, Jack Williams, Brandy Walterhoefer

Under the supervision of Larisa Cioaca

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PALS - Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability
An initiative of the National Center for Smart Growth

Gerrit Knaap, NCSG Executive Director
Kimberly Fisher, PALS Director

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Introduction

The “Plant with a Purpose” project gave University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) students the opportunity to develop a year-long public outreach campaign for the Harford County Department of Public Works (DPW). The semester-long project was completed by eight students enrolled in INAG132: Agricultural Leadership and Teamwork under the guidance of Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS), an initiative of the National Center for Smart Growth. Combining the expertise of UMCP faculty with the energy and creativity of UMCP students, PALS aims to help Maryland communities become more environmentally sustainable.

The goal of DPW’s “Plant with a Purpose” public outreach campaign is to encourage the use of native plants in residential gardens and landscapes throughout Harford County. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a native plant is “a part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem.” Conversely, an invasive plant is “a plant that is both non-native and able to establish on many sites, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems,” while a non-native plant is “a plant introduced with human help (intentionally or accidentally) to a new place or new type of habitat where it was not previously found.”

Examples of plants native to Harford County include swamp rose, elderberry, arrowhead, Joe pye weed, black-eyed susan, and common milkweed. Examples of invasive plant species found in Harford County include multiflora rose, Phragmites, Japanese and Tartarian honeysuckle, autumn olive, gill-over-the-ground, and Asiatic tearthumb.

This report is organized in five sections: a summary of target audiences, campaign objectives, outreach strategies and tactics, timeline and budget, and evaluation. A reference list and useful appendix are also provided.

Target Audiences

Harford County is home to an estimated 253,956 residents living in 92,895 households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

The primary audience for the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign is Harford County residents who purchase plants for their indoor and outdoor gardens. The secondary audience is Harford County horticultural businesses, which have an important role to play in educating the primary audience to select native plants over introduced plants at the point of sale.

Using native plants in gardens and landscapes not only restores natural habitat, but also helps prevent the spread of non-native and invasive plants, many of which have few or no naturally occurring control measures. Because of the county’s geographical location at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay, the successful implementation of the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign is crucial.

Campaign Objectives

The “Plant with a Purpose” project team identified two primary objectives for the public outreach campaign.

The first objective is to raise awareness among Harford County residents of:

- the advantages associated with gardening with native plant species
- the disadvantages associated with gardening with non-native plant species
- the dangers posed by gardening with invasive plant species.

Awareness-raising is a process that seeks to inform people about an issue with the intention of influencing their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs toward achieving a defined goal (Sayers, 2006).

The second objective is to support Harford County horticultural businesses (nurseries, garden centers, farmers’ market vendors) in communicating to their customers the importance of gardening with native plants. Once customers are educated on the benefits of gardening with native plant species, they can be expected to increase their demand for natives while decreasing their demand for non-natives. This beneficial loop is expected to help horticultural businesses to stock a higher percentage of native plants.

Outreach Strategies and Tactics

The project team identified three strategies that support a successful implementation of the public outreach campaign.

First, it’s important to reach Harford County residents at the point of decision-making.

For example, when they are deciding which ornamentals to buy as they walk the aisles of a local garden center. Providing information at the point of sale is expected to help residents change their buying behavior and make the preferred choice to buy native plants without requiring significant changes in any underlying long-held beliefs.

Second, it’s important to launch the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign at an optimal time investment, given DPW’s many responsibilities.

According to the Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network, awareness-raising efforts can include “issuing press releases, briefings and commentaries; disseminating reports, studies and publications; making written or oral submissions to parliamentary committees and inquiries; working with the media; holding public meetings and events; convening conferences and workshops; and creating and contributing to educational materials.”(2019) Given this breadth of available awareness-raising tactics, the “Plant with a Purpose” team selected approaches that maximize the campaign’s impact while minimizing implementation time.

Third, it’s important to launch the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign at an optimal cost, given DPW’s competing budget priorities.

Rather than pursuing a high-cost, paid-media approach, the project team recommends earning coverage in traditional print, online, and social media. Earned coverage can help DPW keep campaign costs down while exposing the primary target audience (Harford County residents) to the same information they would get via paid advertising. Moreover, by using the social media platforms available to Harford County Government, DPW can reach segments of the primary target audience who don't engage with traditional print and online media.

The "Plant with a Purpose" team suggests the following tactics to support these outreach strategies (for more detailed information see the Appendix).

- A news release inviting County residents to attend DPW's Spring 2020 Open House event. This tool (Appendix C) should be emailed to local media outlets (including TV, print, and online outlets) and posted on the DPW website.
- Sample social media posts that introduce a "Native Plant Monday" campaign and hashtag, inviting residents to the Open House. These tools (Appendix D) should be shared using DPW's social media accounts, as well as other Harford County Government accounts that have broader audiences.
- A tabletop display to be used during the Spring 2020 Open House. This display (Appendix E) is designed for versatility, so it can be used at future events.
- A visually appealing list of native plants that represent great alternatives to non-native plants. This tool (Appendix F) should be distributed to local horticultural businesses, posted on the DPW website, and shared via social media.
- An opinion editorial that gives Harford County residents a clear call to action. This tool (Appendix G) should be submitted to the editorial page of a prominent local newspaper, such as *The Baltimore Sun*.

Timeline and Budget

Implementation of the proposed "Plant with a Purpose" outreach campaign is scheduled to begin in February 2020 (beyond the scope of this course-based project) based on feedback from DPW. Table 1 outlines when each campaign tactic should be deployed. This timeline is subject to change based on DPW's other priorities.

Table 1. Suggested Timeline for “Plant with a Purpose” Public Outreach Campaign

Campaign Tactic	Task Description	Proposed Dates
Mini-Surveys	A mini-survey, such as the example in Appendix B, can be useful in collecting information about the primary target audience, Harford County residents. This should be done first to understand the best next steps. A survey should also be used at the end of the campaign to understand and evaluate progress.	February 2020 and February 2021
News Release	News release to highlight the DPW Open House event in Spring 2020	February 2020
Social Media Posts	Social media posts should be shared frequently throughout the project and on all social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)	February 2020 through January 2021
Tabletop Display	Tabletop display should be used at the Open House.	March 2020
List of Native Plants	This list should be shared through the website, emailed to local horticultural businesses, etc.	April 2020
Opinion Editorial	An opinion editorial explaining the importance of gardening with native plants should be shared on social media and the DPW website.	May 2020

Table 2 outlines a proposed budget for the “Plant with a Purpose” outreach campaign. It includes seven components:

1. A newspaper ad placed in *The Baltimore Sun*. It costs \$300 for 30 days, with the ad being run both online and in print. We suggest running the newspaper ad for 30 days in February 2020 to advertise the Open House event.
2. An Instagram ad is an effective tool to reach a younger demographic. The perks of an Instagram ad are its effective targeting, flexibility, and usability. We recommend paying for 50,000 views with the cost of \$335.

- Facebook ads cover a larger demographic of age and users, including people who don't currently following the campaign page, but are Facebook users. The price for a Facebook ad is a minimum of \$500 and may increase throughout the campaign depending on the success of the ad.
- Boosting at least 10 social media posts, to push them to the top of followers' feeds. This budget component reaches people who already follow the page.
- Printed flyers—5,000 to use at the Open House—as well as flyers to greenhouses and nurseries. The price for shipping and printing is \$332.19 (could be done in-house by DPW).
- Posters, at both the Open House and at various greenhouses and nurseries, could advertise the "Plant with a Purpose" campaign. We suggest printing 10, which would cost \$101.51.
- Allot an extra \$500 for Open House needs such as additional supplies, tablecloths, refreshments, paper, ink, pens, etc.

This budget is subject to change depending on available funds, the campaign's scope, and changing vendor prices.

Table 2. Suggested Budget for "Plant with a Purpose" Public Outreach Campaign

Component	Price
Newspaper Ad (<i>The Baltimore Sun</i>)	\$300 for 30 days
Instagram Ad	\$335 for 50,000 views
Facebook Post Booster	\$259 for 10 boosted posts
Facebook Ad	\$500 minimum
Flyer Printing	\$332.19 for 5,000 flyers
Poster Printing	\$101.51 for 10 posters
Other Open House Needs	\$500
Total:	\$2,327.70

Evaluation

The campaign's can be measured three ways:

- mini-survey pre- and post- campaign
- anecdotal data from county residents
- reach of campaign messages through social media and in-person.

The mini-survey of Harford County residents' awareness will be conducted at local horticultural businesses in March 2020 and again at the end of the planting season in August 2020 (see Appendix B). The dates provide adequate time to advertise for the March 2020 Open House, and begin full campaign implementation at the start of the planting season. To ensure the two main objectives are fulfilled, the Harford County DPW will monitor and evaluate the campaign's success before, during, and after the initial implementation. Changes in awareness will be measured by comparing "before" and "after" data.

Anecdotal data will be evaluated in two pieces, primarily through Harford County residents sharing information via word of mouth about the campaign, which will be measured by dedicated volunteers asking residents about their knowledge of the campaign. The target outcome would be an increase in knowledge of native plant species and the understanding of the plants' benefits. The second piece of anecdotal data will be the sales data of native vs. non-native plants collected from local horticultural businesses. A successful result would include a decrease in sales of invasive plant species.

Exposure to campaign messages will be monitored using social media metrics. Successful results would be:

- an increase in the percentage change in the number of Facebook followers from the beginning of the campaign to the end of the campaign
- an increase in the average rate of engagement with organic campaign posts
- an increase in the average click-through rate for social media ads.

Campaign messages will also be monitored using metrics—the number of participants in the March 2020 Open House and readership rates of the media outlets publishing the news release and opinion editorial. Successful results would show increased public interest and an overall increased public desire to advance the issue.

Conclusion

This project write-up encompasses campaign objectives, outreach strategies and tactics, an associated timeline and budget, and suggested monitoring and evaluation approaches to assess attainment of campaign objectives.

We encourage DPW to implement the recommended campaign plan—not only to prevent deterioration of local ecosystems, but to also promote the health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which Harford County relies on economically, socially, and politically. A combined effort between PALS and the Harford County DPW will ensure the successful implementation and success of the "Plant with a Purpose" campaign.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Stakeholder Analysis Discussion Guide

This guide contains data collected during the field trip to DPW on February 18, 2019.

Q1. Why is the Plant with a Purpose campaign being undertaken?

Residents of Harford County are uneducated and are planting invasive plant species in the area that are causing problems for waterways and habitats.

Q2. What are your primary objectives for the Plant with a Purpose campaign (when, why, how)?

- Educate county residents about the harms of planting invasive species
- Remove pollutants/reduce pollutants going into the Chesapeake Bay
- Improve habitats and waterways
- Have less mowing and less fertilizer
- “People don’t know”
- Understand why residents are choosing those plants (easier, less maintenance, pretty)

Q3. What progress have you made with this project? Is there anything that has inhibited the progress? How has your success been measured?

- Facebook posts
- Streamside Neighbor packets
- Attend outreach events—only brochures
- Talk to people at different events
- Need new packets/brochures because they are outdated
- Plant only native plants on site of the Public Works Department to encourage others—put signs up explaining around the site
- Working with local nurseries to put signs up about the importance of planting native plants and also having a person at the nursery to speak about the issue with customers and help them choose the right plants

Q4. What are you planning to do in the future to achieve your objectives? When?

- Speak about issue at upcoming events and their open house
- No specific plans

Q5. What are you expecting from our team? What’s most important to you to best achieve your outcome?

- Did not specify
- They would like suggestions about ideas, media, and a plan to further the campaign

Q6. Have you connected with other Public Works Departments about this issue? Is there anything unique about the Harford County DPW?

- They do meet with other departments but this isn't usually a topic they discuss
- Master Gardeners?

Q7. What resources do you have access to (financial resources, social media, data on county residents and how old is this data, people, etc.)?

- Other Public Works Departments
- The community
- Facebook (shared)
- Website (owned)
- The county's Twitter and Instagram accounts
- Ideas: Articles in local newspapers (Baltimore Sun, Harford Streams); live signage; banners

Q8. Is there anything unique about homeowners in Harford County? Why do Harford county residents have the desire to buy and plant non-native species?

- No differences specific to this county
- Residents want plants that look good and is low maintenance
- Residents don't realize what they're doing wrong
- Harford Glen Middle School, 3 nights on environmental topics, not sure how often
- Started on high school outreach
- Want to connect with younger students

Q9. Where do most homeowners in Harford County buy their outdoor plants?

- Bell's Nursery
- Home Depot
- Other local nurseries
- Local farmers' markets

Q10. Top three invasive species/exotics being planted in Harford County? Are some more popular than others?

- Bamboo
- Multiflora rose
- Japanese stiltgrass
- Kudzu

Q11. What are the dates and topics of potential outreach opportunities for our team to participate in to help your cause?

- Garden Mart - May 3
- Open House - March 12

Q12. Other.

- Intern opportunities
- Budget is not off the table → very financially stable/not a problem
- Do not want to do anything with paper besides newspapers
- Cindy Mumby, Director of Governmental & Community Relations; her approval is needed for branding (everything is green and blue) and website edits

Appendix B. Surveys

Pre-Campaign Survey

Do you live in Harford County?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Do you ever purchase plants for an indoor or outdoor garden or landscape?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Have you ever heard of the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements:

Planting native plants is beneficial.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Neutral
- d. Agree
- e. Strongly Agree

When I select plants, I choose natives over non-native plants.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Neutral
- d. Agree
- e. Strongly Agree

I would choose a non-native plant over a native plant if it was more affordable.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Neutral
- d. Agree
- e. Strongly Agree

Closing Survey

Do you live in Harford County?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Do you ever purchase plants for an indoor or outdoor garden or landscape?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Have you ever heard of the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign?

- a. Yes
- b. No

How many times did you hear about the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign?

- a. 4-5 times
- b. 2-3 times
- c. 1 time
- d. I’ve never heard about the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign

Where have you seen information regarding the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign? (select all that apply)

- a. At horticultural businesses
- b. On social media
- c. In newspaper

Do you purchase non-native plants?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Is it difficult to find desirable native plants to purchase in Harford County?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements:

Planting native plants is beneficial.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Neutral
- d. Agree

- e. Strongly Agree

When I select plants, I choose natives over non-native plants.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Neutral
- d. Agree
- e. Strongly Agree

I would choose a non-native plant over a native plant if it was more affordable.

- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Disagree
- c. Neutral
- d. Agree
- e. Strongly Agree

Natives are an Exciting Planting Option

Learn more about native plants and how to “Plant with a Purpose” at our Open House.

Bel Air, MD (date)-The Harford County Department of Public Works welcomes all residents to its Spring 2020 Open House. The department will showcase its “Plant with a Purpose” campaign, educating participants about the benefits of using native plants in local gardens. The Open House will be hosted at the McFaul Activity Center in Bel Air, MD on (date and time of event).

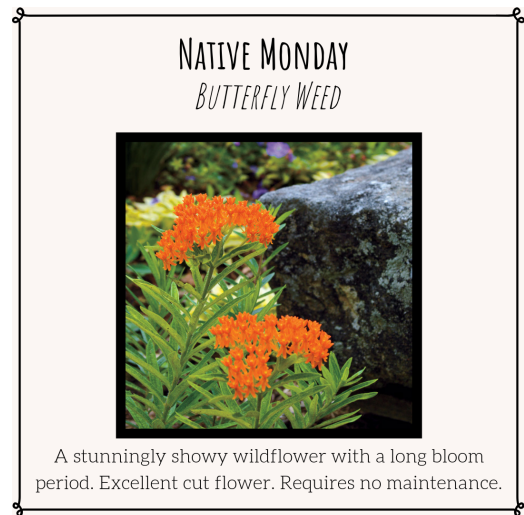
If you love gardening and environmentally beneficial plants, then this Open House is a must! See how you can make a difference in your own backyard. Our team of experts on Maryland native plants are eager to talk with you about your garden. We hope you can come and learn how to plant with a purpose.

Have any more questions about our open house? Visit our website and Facebook page for more information. Hope to see you in the garden soon!

Add contact information and website address

Appendix D. Social Media Posts

“Happy Monday! Did you know that Butterfly Weed is native to Maryland and requires no maintenance? Consider buying Butterfly Weed next time you need some beautiful cut flowers.
#PlantwithaPurpose #SayNOtoInvasive”



“Come out on (date and time) to the Harford County Department of Public Works Open House.
#PlantwithaPurpose will be there and would love to talk about native plant use in Harford County!”



Appendix E. Tabletop Display

What's the Buzz with Native Plants?

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Gardening is a fun activity for the whole family.  
And there are so many planting options available  
at every gardening store, but what plant is best for  
you and the environment?

~~~~~

The answer is easy...

MARYLAND NATIVE PLANTS

~~~~~

What makes native plants so much better?

- Requires less water and saves money
- Provide food and shelter for native wildlife
- Invites the return of native wildlife to your community

~~~~~

Benefits of Natives

- Lower Maintenance
- Require less water

Helps local wildlife

- Provides a habitat
- Provides food and essential nutrients

Helps Ecosystem

- Require less fertilizer
- Promotes biodiversity

Natives

Jeffersonia Diphylla



Montpelier.com

Virginia Bluebells



Gumdrop.com

Natives

Blazing Star



Butterfly Weed



Natives

Onoclea Sensibilis



Asclepias Syriaca



What You Can Do

- Go to your local nursery
- Find a native plant you like







What You Can Do

- Find a native that is right for you
- Plant more natives than non-natives

For more information and resources on native plants please visit our website and facebook page.
www.harfordcountymd.gov
@HarfordCountyMD

Appendix F. List of Native Plants

Native Plants of Harford County

Name	Botanical Name	Growing Conditions	Picture
Red Maple	<i>Acer rubrum</i>	Prefers damp soil and lots of sun but will grow in dry soil if irrigated correctly	
Blue Sedge	<i>Carex glaucoidea</i>	Prefers lots of sun and well drained, damp soil	
Rose Mallow	<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>	Prefers damp soil with lots of nutrients and lots of sun	
Turk's Cap Lily	<i>Lilium superbum</i>	Prefers rich soil with little sun and good drainage	
Joe Pye Weed	<i>Eutrochium fistulosum</i>	Prefers damp areas with good sunlight	
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>	Prefers morning sun and afternoon shade and moist soil; needs plenty of organic matter	

Source: Slattery, Reshetiloff, and Zwicker (2003)

Do You Plant with a Purpose?

Plants are the foundation of any beautiful garden or landscape, but there is more to them than what meets the eye. The Harford County Department of Public Works has created the “Plant with a Purpose” campaign to encourage county residents to plant native plants in their gardens. This effort is aimed at improving awareness of the dangers and effects of planting invasive and non-native plants, and what homeowners can do to address this in their own homes. Invasive and non-native species can cause many problems, such as polluted waterways, reduced habitat for native animals, and the overgrowth of invasive species.

According to National Geographic, an invasive species is an organism that is not indigenous, or native, to a particular area. Invasive species can cause great economic and environmental harm to the new area. Some of the most popularly planted invasive species are Bamboo, Multiflora Rose, Japanese Stiltgrass, and Kudzu. These plants are extremely resilient and tend to repopulate and spread quickly. They’re not only affecting homeowners, but also the agricultural community. In agricultural fields, invasive plants and weeds outcompete crops for nutrients, water, and sunlight. The same thing can happen when non-native or invasive plants are planted around your house.

So you may be wondering why you should plant native plants? There are many advantages to planting native plants that make them easy, beautiful, and cost-effective. Native plants are a cost-effective way to create a beautiful garden or flowerbed because generally, native plants require less maintenance (i.e., less mowing and fertilizer). Native plants remove and reduce pollutants going into the Chesapeake Bay, replenishing natural habitats for animals, insects, and birds along with improving the health of local waterways.

Table 1. Planting Native Alternatives

Invasive	Native Alternative
Bamboo	Cardinal Flower
Multiflora Rose	Rose Mallow
Japanese Stiltgrass	Blue Sedge
Kudzu	Joe Pye Weed

If you’re passionate about the environment and the future of the Chesapeake Bay watershed habitat, we encourage you to visit the Harford County Department of Public Works Open House on

(date, 2020), from (time). You'll have the opportunity to learn more about how you can "Plant with a Purpose," and include native plants in your garden. There will be native plant giveaways, information about the "Plant with a Purpose" campaign, and a presentation by (person) from the Harford County Department of Public Works.