



# going NATIVE

*Reversing the norm, one landscape architect replaced a manicured lawn with naturalized plantings that highlight the seasons along the Chesapeake Bay.*

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY VICTORIA COOPER

*"When you combine water ecology and garden design, you can do good for the environment and have a home setting that goes through dynamic changes."*

—Jay Graham

The image of a smooth carpet of lawn down to water's edge has its appeal, but landscape architect Jay Graham of Annapolis welcomes Chesapeake Bay-area clients willing to opt instead for naturalized plantings. In Jay's design for property beside the Potomac River, native flora gives the setting a dramatic seasonal cycle. In autumn, the sweep of fine-textured panicum grass between the house and water turns gold, especially luminous at sunrise and sunset.

The plantings also act as a filter for runoff leading into the bay. "It takes some extra effort," says Jay, "but once established, a natural buffer helps keep fertilizer and pesticide out of the water."

Downstream from historic Alexandria, Virginia, the site for this new home was a double lot of just under 1 acre. Jay worked with architect Heather Wilson Cass to ensure that the house and reshaped landscape work together. As excavation for the foundation began, they discovered a spring that had to be diverted. "Due to regulations," Jay explains, "we couldn't pipe this directly into the river, so we diverted it to one side of the house as a little stream and bog. This became part of the overall design, with limited areas of lawn to each side and along the front of the house. The naturalized stream, bog, and waterfront take over the rear."

While nearby properties have high ripraps (walls made of stones or concrete chunks randomly thrown together), Jay kept these just high enough to prevent erosion by tides and waves from passing ships. He added sand near the water and planted it with spartina grass, which thrives within the zone of tidal ebb and flow. As the ground slopes up gently, the panicum grass takes over.

Jay concedes this approach isn't for everyone. Many still prefer boxwoods and green lawn. "It does take a special commitment to get a native plant waterfront landscape going," he says. "And the aesthetic is not immediately apparent to everybody. This also takes a different kind of maintenance, more of a spring and fall cleanup to control invasive plants." But the rewards, as seen here, are worth the effort. 🍂

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Beside the Potomac, landscape architect Jay Graham replaced a raised lawn with a natural filtering zone: spartina grass just behind a low riprap wall and panicum grass above. Bald cypress, bayberry, and other trees amenable to wet feet were planted along the new stream course (above).