

# RESTORE THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF YOUR LAND

In order to choose the best plants for creating great wildlife habitat on your property, you should find out what types of native plant communities occurred there before land uses like intensive farming, forestry, and suburban development changed the landscape. There are four basic things you should know about your property that will lead to a much greater understanding of its natural ecology and its natural history, they are: geography (where your land is in SC), topography (is your land hilly, flat, low-lying, etc.), soils (what soil types have been mapped on your land), and persisting native plants (what is still naturally growing there).

- **Geography/Geology:** Find out what SC Geological/Ecological Region your land is in. For example, in the Midlands it could be the Sandhills, Piedmont or Upper Coastal Plain. Due to differences in the geologic history of South Carolina, each region tends to have its own uniquely adapted native plant communities.
- **Topography:** A USGS Topographic map (available on the TerraServer website at <http://terraserver.microsoft.com>) will show you the lay of your land. The type of habitat that would naturally occur on your land has a lot to do with elevation, slope, and aspect. For example, it tends to be much dryer at the top of a ridge or on a south-facing side slope than it does near the bottom of a ridge or on a north-facing side slope. You can also tell from a topo map what general direction rainwater runoff flows in your area and how much of it your property receives.
- **Soils:** Find the Soil Survey for your county (at the public library or the Soil Data Mart website at <http://soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov>). These surveys were published by the USDA Soil Conservation Service and they map and describe the soil types for each SC County. Knowing the soil types will tell you a lot about your land's fertility, drainage (how wet/dry it is), soil texture (sand, clay, loam, etc.), acidity, even how your soil formed.
- **Persisting Plants:** Identifying the native species currently growing on your property can tell you much about the type of plant community that would occur there naturally. For example, longleaf pines might indicate a sandhill type habitat, whereas willow oak or beech might indicate a moist hardwood habitat.

Knowing these characteristics of your property is the first step in discovering what type of you should try to restore, and thus, what plants (native or exotic) you should use. Though they can be hard to find in garden centers, there are all kinds of native plants that are perfect for your landscape. We have inspiring botanical diversity in South Carolina, and establishing the right species on your property is fundamental to creating excellent habitat.

## TAKE THE HABITAT QUIZ

### FILL IN THE BLANK.

1. My property is located in the \_\_\_\_\_ Geologic province of South Carolina.

Choices are: Lower Coastal Plain, Upper Coastal Plain, Sandhills, Piedmont, or Blue Ridge.

2. The topography of my property can best be described as \_\_\_\_\_.

Choices include: flat bottomland, gently rolling land, sloping hillsides, the top of a ridge, or a steep ravine.

3. The typical elevation above sea level of my property ranges from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ feet.

(See a USGS Topographic map)

4. According to the soil survey for my county, my property is mapped as having \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ soil. (See a USDA Soil Survey)

5. After a long rain or heavy storm, standing water generally remains on my property for  
\_\_\_\_\_. Choices include: less than an hour, several hours,  
up to 24 hours, more than 24 hours.

6. Some of the native trees, shrubs, or herbs that still naturally occur on my property include  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Now that you understand your property a little better, you can compare the information you have found to the types of habitats that occur in South Carolina. Two of the best descriptions of South Carolina's plant communities are *The Natural Communities of South Carolina* by John B. Nelson (available through the SC Department of Natural Resources, Heritage Trust Program), and Richard Porcher's *Guide to the Wildflowers of South Carolina*.