

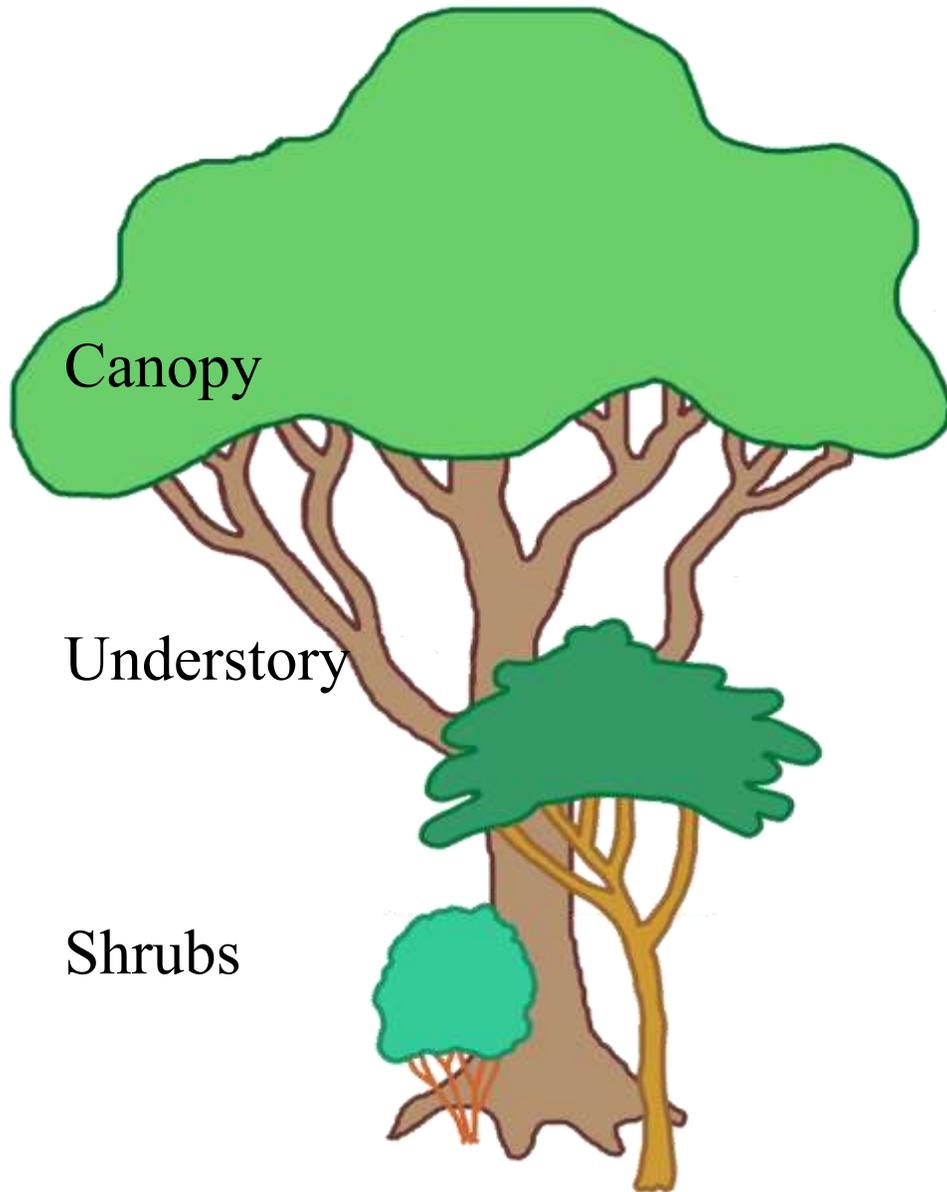
Plant Modules: A Starting Point

Doug Tallamy

Many people who have decided to rebuild native plant communities in their yards become quickly overwhelmed with the decisions that have to be made when it comes to selecting plants. For any given locality there are often dozens of possibilities; which ones are best? Which species work well together? Which are available in local nurseries? To help with these questions, I am starting to put together simple plant modules (groups, or communities of plants that grow together naturally) for the different areas of the country. These are just suggestions, and substitutions to tailor plant selections to your own circumstances are encouraged.

Let's think in terms of adding your property, or part of your property, to a local biological corridor. Start by picking a focal plant for each of the three primary layers in your corridor -- the canopy, the understory, and the shrub layer -- and then build the plant community around them. You will plant more of the focal plants than the other members of the plant community. I suggest three members of each focal species and one member of each of the other species. If I were suggesting a module for West Virginia, I would pick white oak as the canopy focal plant. I wouldn't want a monoculture of white oaks, so I would add a red oak, an American beech, a hickory, and a black cherry to the 3 white oaks in my canopy. So now I have 5 canopy tree species. For the understory of my module I will choose American hornbeam as the focal plant (3 plants) and add a witchhazel, a shadbush, a flowering dogwood, and a native crab apple. For shrubs I would pick an, buttonbush, gray dogwood, winterberry, and high-bush blueberry, with arrowwood viburnum as my focal plant.

Adding up all of these plants gives me 27 plants per module. Each module should be spaced to cover about half an acre. If your target area is bigger than that, then plant two modules, and so on. Of course, you can add any perennials and annuals that you like, once your structural woody plants are in place.



Canopy

Understory

Shrubs

White Oak

Red Oak

American Beech

Hickory

Black Cherry

American Hornbeam

Shad Bush

Flowering Dogwood

Witchhazel

Native Crab Apple

Arrowwood

High-bush Blueberry

Buttonbush

Gray Dogwood

American Winterberry