



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For information contact: Michael Cowan, GNPS Advocacy Committee chair, michael.cowan@gnps.org or 404-790-0616.

Media Note: Photos to accompany this article and a MS Word version of this press release are [available for download here](#).

GEORGIA'S STATE FLOWER UPDATE RECEIVES BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

The Georgia Native Plant Society encourages the House to support SB240 to designate the native Sweetbay Magnolia as Georgia's state flower and to declare April as Georgia Native Plant Month.

(Atlanta, GA) March 10, 2026 – With the state Senate's unanimous support last week, the effort to change Georgia's state flower now shifts focus to influencing Representatives in the State House. The Georgia Native Plant Society encourages the House to support SB240 that will both change the state flower to the native Sweetbay Magnolia from the non-native invasive Cherokee Rose as well as permanently designate April as Native Plant Month in Georgia. The bill highlights the ecological and economical importance of Georgia's hardworking native plants. GNPS encourages all Georgians to contact their State House Representative to encourage their support for SB 240.

The debate in the Senate was highlighted by an eloquent floor speech by Sen. Matt Brass (R-Newnan), who, as Chairman of the influential Rules Committee, actually opposed the effort last year. "At first I did not agree" but was persuaded after hearing from leaders of the Georgia Native Plant Society and Native American representatives on the importance that native plants hold for our ecosystem and the corresponding harm that non-native invasive, plants like the Cherokee rose, can cause. Echoing the sentiments of Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle, Brass said it is the legislature's duty to "recognize when a symbol has lost its meaning" and that "the time for the Cherokee Rose is past." This vote "while a small statutory correction, reflects sound ecological policy and cultural accuracy" and reinforces positive "stewardship of our natural resources."

The bill is sponsored by Sen. Rick Williams (R-Milledgeville) and carried by Rep. Deborah Silcox (R-Sandy Springs) in the House. Silcox has worked tirelessly over the past two years to get the bill passed and says her reasoning for supporting the change is simple: "The Cherokee Rose was adopted as the state flower in 1916 under the incorrect assumption that it was native to the state and also a legacy of the Cherokee people—it is neither. Georgia is one of the most bio-diverse regions in the world with so many beautiful native flowers. We deserve a state flower from Georgia!" Silcox also points out the enthusiastic support from the American Society of

Landscape Architects and the Urban Ag Council because “the Sweetbay Magnolia is a beautiful plant that can be added to landscapes across Georgia, grown by Georgia nurseries and sold by Georgia retailers.”

House co-sponsors include Speaker Pro-Tempore Jan Jones (R-Milton), Rep. Scott Hilton (R-Peachtree Corners), Rep. Stacey Evans (D-Atlanta), Rep. Sandy Donatucci (R-Buford) and Rep. Houston Gaines (R-Athens). The bill awaits a hearing before the House Special Rules Committee (which unanimously voted to support an identical House bill that didn’t reach the full House by crossover day).

“Native plants are the foundation of all healthy ecosystems—sustaining pollinators, birds and other wildlife. Georgia’s unique bio-diversity is home to nearly 3,600 beautiful and hard-working native plants that actively contribute to making Georgia an economic and agricultural powerhouse as well as a destination for tourists” according to Michael Cowan, board chair of the Georgia Native Plant Society.

The current state flower is the Cherokee Rose—which was introduced from China in the early 1800’s and has since been designated as an invasive pest by the Georgia Invasive Species Council. While the Cherokee Rose is not sold or encouraged as a landscaping plant because of its invasive tendencies, the Sweetbay Magnolia is widely available and can be planted in all regions of the state as a small, evergreen understory tree with a wonderfully fragrant and beautiful white flower. It is native to Georgia and can be found growing wild in much of the state. It is a host plant for our state butterfly, the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, and its flower supports many other pollinators in addition to adding evergreen beauty to cultivated landscapes. The Sweetbay Magnolia should not be confused with the large Southern Magnolia tree that is actually only native to the coastal plain of Georgia.

The Cherokee and other native Americans relied on Georgia’s native plants to survive just as the early European colonists did. The myth that the Cherokee Rose was special to the Cherokee people was popularized many years after the tribe was forced to leave the state during the infamous Trail of Tears and has no basis in fact. The Georgia Cherokee Community Alliance supports a native plant, that their people would have actually known, as a state flower. The Georgia Council for American Indian Concerns, representing multiple native American tribes throughout the state, is supporting the change as well.

April has previously been designated as Native Plant Month by gubernatorial proclamation; SB 240 will make the designation permanent and forego the need for an annual proclamation. Governor Kemp’s 2023 proclamation declared “it is important to encourage public awareness about the benefits of Georgia’s native plants to pollinators and other wildlife, to the economy, and to the health and sustainability of Georgia’s fragile ecosystems.”

Other organizations supporting this measure include: the Georgia Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Birds Georgia, the Georgia Conservancy, the Urban Ag Council, Trees Atlanta, the Georgia Invasive Species Council, the Georgia Cherokee Community Alliance and the Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns.

For more information, visit the Georgia Native Plant Society's website at gnps.org/advocacy.

About the Georgia Native Plant Society: Georgia Native Plant Society champions the stewardship and conservation of Georgia's native plants and their habitats. Founded in 1994, the organization conducts education and conservation programs through its state office and 9 local chapters across the state. Learn more at gnps.org.

###