



United States Department of Agriculture

Cape May Plant Materials Center Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Report of Activities

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<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/plantmaterials/pmc/northeast/njpmc/>



The New Jersey Plant Materials Center (NJPMC) provides plant solutions for natural resource conservation concerns pertaining to coastal shorelines, sand dunes, critical areas, and coastal grassland habitat serving the Mid-Atlantic region. Significant accomplishments and major activities or findings from fiscal year 2026 are covered in this report.



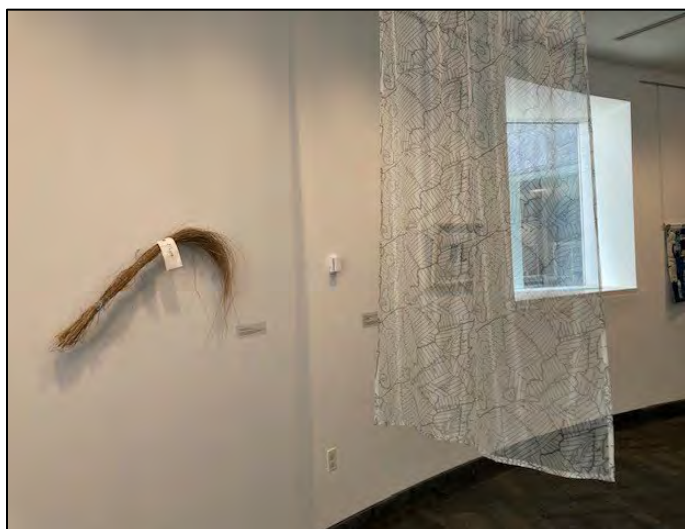
A Virginia jointvetch plant flower displayed on a greenhouse plant at the NJPMC.

NJPMC Partners With US Fish and Wildlife Service and Citizens United Maurice River for Virginia Jointvetch Restoration Project

Virginia jointvetch (*Aeschynomene virginica*) is an annual legume native to the Mid-Atlantic coastal region. It is federally listed as a threatened species and listed as state endangered in New Jersey. Its threatened/endangered status is due to a combination of contributing factors: habitat encroachment, seed dispersal restriction, saltwater intrusion, and European common reed (*Phragmites australis*) competition. The NJPMC conducted a conservation field trial in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, Inc. (CU Maurice River) to assist with the seed increase aspect of a Virginia jointvetch restoration project in South Jersey. USFWS staff conducted a seed collection from plants along the Manumuskin River in September 2025 and transferred the seed to the NJPMC. During the 2026 growing season, NJPMC staff conducted a seed increase. Over the course of the process, information on germination rate, seed production methods, and seed cleaning protocol was documented and compiled for technology transfer purposes.



Promotion graphic for American Association for the Advancement of Science exhibit: *Ditchin' The Muck & the Cut*.



Saltmarsh cordgrass bundle provided by NJPMC for American Association for the Advancement of Science exhibit: *Ditchin' The Muck & the Cut*.

Plant Materials Program Saltmarsh Cordgrass Releases Featured at American Association for the Advancement of Science Exhibit

In June 2025, NJPMC received a request for technical information and Plant Materials Program publications on saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) from Edward Landa, soil scientist and environmental historian. The purpose of the request was to build upon Landa's collaborative work with artist, Heather McMordie. The two had developed a Cultivate Projects exhibit ([DITCHIN': Hay & High Ground](#)) that merged art and science to examine the impacts of mosquito control ditches on wetland environments through a display of prints and projections.

The next chapter of the artist and scientist's work was the development of an American Association for the Advancement of Science exhibit, [DITCHIN': The Muck & the Cut](#). For this project, Landa again had a request for the NJPMC: for samples of saltmarsh cordgrass. NJPMC harvested and provided small bundles of three varieties ('[Avalon](#)', '[Flageo](#)', and '[Sharp](#)') that were prominently displayed as a part of the exhibit.

NJPMC Hosts Rutgers Extension Service Pruning Workshop

Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) of Cape May County conducted a pruning workshop for members of their Master Gardener and Environmental Stewards programs at the NJPMC. Jen Sawyer Caraballo, RCE Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Associate, led the training using the '[Ocean View](#)' beach plum shrubs at the NJPMC for demonstration and to provide a hands on training opportunity for attendees. The training explained the importance of pruning and provided guidance on how to preserve and encourage the vigor and beauty of a plant using proper pruning techniques.



Rutgers Extension Service Pruning Workshop attendees discuss pruning techniques.



Large (left) and small (right) seeded species in the seeding mix for the pollinator habitat establishment project conducted at the NJPMC..

Pollinator Habitat Establishment Trials Update

In coordination with NJ Audubon and Xerces Society, NJPMC staff initiated a conservation trial planting to examine a novel pollinator habitat establishment method in 2020. The establishment method involved two phases of direct seeded species, an imazapic herbicide tolerant mix followed by a mix of less tolerant species. The purpose of the strategy was to allow the imazapic tolerant species to establish while reducing weed pressure for the second phase seeding of less tolerant species.

Unfortunately, after years of waiting only 3 of 11 flowering species seeded ever established.

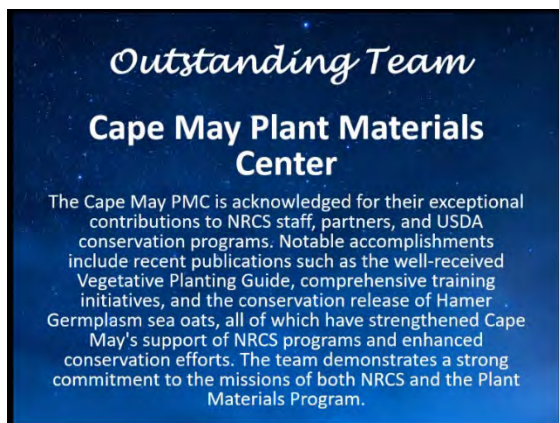
This year NJPMC staff worked with Xerces Society staff to develop a follow up conservation trial reseeding attempt examining several field preparation treatments aiming to salvage the existing pollinator beneficial species while establishing a more diverse mix to improve the overall pollinator benefit. Replicated plots were treated with either light tillage or an application of a grass specific herbicide. Plots were broadcast seeded and cultipacked. The seed mix included common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), yellow wild indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*), golden tickseed (*Coreopsis tinctoria*), eastern purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), crimson-eyed rosemallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*), spotted beebalm (*Monarda punctata*), eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*), hairy beardtongue (*Penstemon hirsutus*), narrowleaf mountainmint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*), cutleaf coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*), Maryland senna (*Senna marilandica*), stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*), wrinkle leaf goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*), amberique-bean (*Strophostyles helvola*), and New England aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*). Hopefully this attempt will result in more diverse, pollinator-friendly habitat.

Salinity Tolerance Trials Continue With 'Meadowcrest' Eastern Gamagrass

An additional phase of a series of salinity tolerance trials was completed this year examining the Big Flats Plant Materials Center's release [Meadowcrest](#). The series of trials are conducted in a climate-controlled greenhouse using ebb and flow hydroponic grow systems irrigated with a range of salinity solutions (0, 10 20, and 30 ppt). Details and results of this phase of the project were published in a [final study report](#).



Week 10 photos of Meadowcrest eastern gamagrass salinity tolerance study conducted at the New Jersey Plant Materials Center, Cape May Court House, NJ.



Award presentation slide from the online awards ceremony.



Team photo (from left) Scott Snell, Study Leader; Dan Mull, Biological Science Technician; Mike Yacovelli, Farm Foreman; Chris Miller, Manager.

NJPMC Hosts Field Exercise of Prescribed Burn Training

NRCS NJ offered NRCS field staff and partner employees a three-day Prescribed Burning Training this year. The first day classroom portion of the training covered NRCS Prescribed Burning policy, NJ rules governing prescribed burning permitting issues (smoke management / air quality standards), an overview of fire behavior,

and fire ecology in different systems (pinelands, grasslands, and hardwoods). Day two started in the classroom to cover fire safety and equipment then the rest of the training was in the field to observe and discuss prescribed burns. Field site visits included Wharton State Forest, prescribed burn research plots at Stockton University, and the NJPMC. While at the PMC, staff provided an overview of the Plant Materials Program and the NJPMC to provide context to trainees before discussing the how and why of incorporating prescribed burning in the management plan for conservation plant seed and vegetative production plots. Special thanks to the NRCS NJ State Office for inviting the NJPMC to be a part of this training and to the NJ Forest Fire Service for their contribution by leading a significant portion of the training.

NJPMC Staff Receives the 2025 Plant Materials Program Outstanding Team Award

The staff of the Cape May Plant Materials Center was honored with the recognition of a national award this year. Of the 25 PMCs and their talented staffs that constitute the Plant Materials Program nationwide, the NJPMC staff was nominated for and awarded the 2025 Plant Materials Program Outstanding Team Award. Among the accomplishments cited to justify such an honor were the release of [Hamer Germplasm sea oats](#), regularly developing and publishing documents to enhance the library of Plant Materials Program publications including a significant contribution to the revised edition of the [New Jersey Vegetative Plantings Technical Reference Establishment and Maintenance Guide](#), and the comprehensive field staff training opportunities coordinated and offered. These accomplishments support the implementation of NRCS programs and help NRCS field staff make conservation happen.

Congratulations to all the award recipients that were also recognized this year during the [online awards ceremony](#)!



Saltmeadow cordgrass study plots at the NJPMC are burned by the NJ Forest Fire Service.



Trays of sampled and labeled Timber Germplasm switchgrass are held in the greenhouse for the genetic analysis of conservation plant releases national study.

NJPMC Embarks on First Phase of a National Plant Materials Program Genetic Study

This year, NJPMC initiated work on the first phase of a national study examining genetic change that may occur inadvertently when native plant seed is produced in an agricultural setting. The NJPMC's contribution to this program wide effort was the assemblage of four lots of [Timber Germplasm switchgrass](#) representing multiple generations and production years produced at the NJPMC. In addition, the six experimental germplasms from which Timber Germplasm was developed, a commercially produced Timber Germplasm lot, and commercially produced 'BoMaster' switchgrass lot were included in the study. BoMaster is a cultivar that was developed by the USDA-Agricultural Research Service and the North Carolina Agricultural Research Service from the same six experimental germplasms as Timber Germplasm. Results from the genetic analysis should show if there is genetic change between generations and production years of Timber Germplasm produced at the NJPMC, how closely

related BoMaster and Timber Germplasm are to one another and their common parental germplasms, and if genetic change occurs when a commercial seed company that offers multiple named switchgrass varieties produces Timber Germplasm. Plants from all collections will be field planted at the NJPMC to evaluate phenotypic characteristics. Information garnered from this study will help determine best production practices to ensure genetic integrity of Plant Materials Program conservation plant releases.

'Tropic Sun' Sunn Hemp Study Revisited

The NJPMC was one of 25 PMCs to participate in a national regional adaptability evaluation of Tropic Sun that examined seeding rates and termination dates. The study was conducted from 2009-2010 producing a wealth of valuable cover crop application data for all regions of the United States. This study also demonstrated a key strength of the Plant Materials Program, the capability of conducting consistent, replicated trials on a national scale. The NJPMC's contribution to this project ([Effect of Seeding Rates and Termination Dates on Productivity of 'Tropic Sun' Sunn Hemp in Southern New Jersey](#)) is now available.



Hawaii Plant Materials Center's conservation plant release 'Tropic Sun' sunn hemp displays vibrant bright yellow blooms.

Publications, Presentations, and Outreach

- [Cape May Plant Materials Center Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Progress Report of Activities](#)
- [Release Brochure for Dune Crest Germplasm shore little bluestem \(*Schizachyrium littorale*\) \(major revision\)](#)
- [Release Brochure for Timber Germplasm switchgrass \(*Panicum virgatum*\) \(major revision\)](#)
- [Cape May Plant Materials Center 60th Anniversary Field Day Brochure and Brief Summary of the Center's History \(brochure\)](#)
- [Amberique bean \(*Strophostyles helvola*\) Plant Guide \(major revision\)](#)
- [American beachgrass \(*Ammophila breviligulata*\) Plant Guide \(major revision\)](#)
- [Sourcing & Distributing Native Seed: Wild & Commercial Webinar - Case Study: NRCS Cape May Plant Materials Center from Seed to Plant \(20 February 2026\)](#)
- [Evaluation of reproductive performance attributes of two American beachgrass \(*Ammophila breviligulata*\) strains \(Final Study Report\)](#)
- [Conservation Plant Establishment to Support Field Elevation Increase Through Beneficial Use of Dredge Material Sediment Application \(poster abstract\)](#)
- [Conservation Plant Establishment to Support Field Elevation Increase Through Beneficial Use of Dredge Material Sediment Application \(poster\)](#)
- [Release Brochure for 'Cape' American beachgrass \(*Ammophila breviligulata*\) \(minor revision\)](#)
- [Cape May Plant Materials Center Coastal Plant Releases \(brochure\)](#)
- [Effect of Seeding Rates and Termination Dates on Productivity of 'Tropic Sun' Sunn Hemp in Southern New Jersey \(Final Study Report\)](#)
- [Greenhouse Evaluation of 'Meadowcrest' Eastern Gamagrass for Restoration of Areas Impacted by Saltwater Intrusion \(Final Study Report\)](#)

Cape May Plant Materials Center

The NJPMC was established in 1965 and is operated by the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. Approximately 80 acres of land are leased from the State of New Jersey for production and field studies while all infrastructure is situated on 4 acres of federally owned land. The NJPMC was added to the Plant Materials Program network of plant materials centers to address coastal restoration needs and to mitigate the impacts of future coastal storms following Hurricane Donna (1960) and the Ash Wednesday Storm (1962 nor'easter). The NJPMC is ideally located to focus on coastal ecosystem conservation concerns given the location of the center near tidal marshes, coastal dune communities, and extensive wetlands.

Program Emphasis

The mission of the Plant Materials Program is to find plant solutions to solve conservation problems through the development of plants and plant technology. The Plant Materials Program uses an integrated approach to transfer developed plant products and plant technology utilizing all NRCS staff levels, other government agencies, academic institutions, and private groups.

The NJPMC provides plant solutions for natural resource conservation concerns pertaining to coastal shorelines, sand dunes, mined lands and critical areas, and coastal grassland habitat serving a nine-state area, including parts of Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Long Island- New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

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Visit our website by scanning the QR code to the right or click the link below.

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