

"Gardening in Partnership with Mama Wata"

A Presentation for the Gullah Geechee Coastal Cultures
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"Gardening in Partnership with Mama Wata": Presentation Purpose & Key Topics

- * Highlight the sacred relationship to water in Gullah Geechee Culture
- * Discuss the importance of water quality and plant-based purification
- * Present some examples of planting for partnership with Mama Wata in coastal gardens

Some Gullah proverbs that highlight the importance of water

*"Wata de bring we, wata gwine tek we home."
(Water knows the way home.)*

Reference to water's role in guiding spirits and memory, acknowledging ancestral journey from Africa across the Atlantic (African Ocean).

*"Wen de tide rise, all boat lif' up."
(When the tide rises, all boats lift up.)*

About collective upliftment, to encourage unity and mutual support in the community.

Some Gullah proverbs that highlight the importance of water

"Ebry tide bring sumtin new."

(Every tide brings something new.)

Speaks to the ever-changing nature of life, much like the ebb and flow of water. A reminder to be adaptable and embrace new opportunities.

"Wata don't stay one place."

(Water doesn't stay in one place.)

A lesson in movement, growth, and change—one must keep flowing like water to thrive.

Some Gullah proverbs that highlight the importance of water

"No wata, no crop."

(No water, no crops.)

A straightforward but powerful truth emphasizing water's essential role in farming and sustenance.

"Drip, drip, fill de bucket."

(Drip by drip, the bucket fills.)

A proverb about patience and perseverance, often used in farming and life's work.

Importance of Water in Gullah Geechee Culture

- * **Water as life and heritage:** from the historical cultivation of rice in the Lowcountry to contemporary fishing, crabbing, and oyster harvesting traditions
- * **Spiritual and cultural significance:** Reverence of 'Mama Wata', the African and Diasporic water spirit, symbolizing abundance, protection, and transformation. Many traditional African water rituals were preserved within the Gullah Geechee community.
- * **Role of marshlands and estuaries:** These ecosystems serve as the lifeblood of the region, supporting biodiversity, filtering water, and sustaining cultural foodways:
 - * Climate change and rising sea levels threaten these essential environments.
 - * Water pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial waste, and human activity can degrade the health of wetlands, leading to reduced fish populations and lower crop productivity.

Ancestral and Indigenous Water Conservation techniques

- * Gullah Geechee people have historically utilized natural landscapes to manage water efficiently. Sustainable gardening and farming practices, **rain gardens, swales,** and wetland restoration efforts help

Feature	Rain Garden	Swale
Function	Captures and infiltrates stormwater	Conveys and slows stormwater
Design	Shallow depression with plants	Gently sloped channel with vegetation or gravel
Water Behavior	Holds water temporarily for absorption	Moves water to another location
Location	Near buildings, roads, or low-lying areas	Along roadways, slopes, or large landscapes
Primary Benefit	Water filtration & beautification	Erosion control & flood prevention

Phytoremediation: The Power of Plant-Based Water Purification

- * Many plant species naturally filter toxins, absorb heavy metals, and improve water clarity through **phytoremediation**:
 - * Natural, plant-based technique to clean up contaminated soil, water, and air by using specific plants to absorb, break down, or neutralize pollutants
- * For example, plant roots filter contaminants from water, absorbing heavy metals and other pollutants before the water re-enters the environment (Water hyacinths and reeds used to clean wastewater); this can take a very long time, but remember... *Drip, drip, fill de bucket!*

More Ways Plants Can Help in Water Purification

- * **Soil stabilization and erosion control:** Plants prevent soil erosion by anchoring the ground, especially in coastal areas where high tides and storms threaten the landscape
- * **Biodiversity support:** Plants create habitats for pollinators, birds, and aquatic species, contributing to the overall health of the ecosystem
- * **Examples of natural filtration systems:** The role of native plants in constructed wetlands and rain gardens

Three Examples of Water Partnership With Local Plants

- * **Muhly Grass (Sweetgrass)**
(*Muhlenbergia capillaris*):
 - * Beautiful ornamental grass known for its feathery purple plumes
 - * Used traditionally in Gullah Geechee basket sewing.
 - * Drought-resistant and ideal for erosion control in sandy soils
 - * Attracts pollinators and supports biodiversity



Three Examples of Water Partnership With Local Plants



- * **Lavender (*Lavandula* spp.):**
 - * Thrives in well-drained, sandy soil, making it ideal for coastal gardens
 - * Naturally repels pests and supports beneficial insects.
 - * Enhances soil stability while requiring minimal water once established
 - * Has medicinal and aromatic properties, used in teas, balms, and relaxation therapy and more

Three Examples of Water Partnership With Local Plants

- * **Seaside Goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens*):**
 - * Salt-tolerant and well-adapted to coastal climates
 - * Produces vibrant yellow flowers that attract bees and butterflies
 - * Helps stabilize dunes and wetland edges, preventing soil erosion
 - * Supports migratory species and plays an essential role in pollination networks
 - * Has medicinal and aromatic properties in teas, infused oils and more (anti-inflammatory, pain relief, wound healing, urinary tract support, digestive aide)



Three Examples of Water Partnership With Local Plants

- * **Soil and watering needs:**

- * Muhly Grass prefers well-draining, sandy soil and minimal watering once established.
- * Lavender thrives in alkaline, dry soil with full sun exposure.
- * Seaside Goldenrod adapts to poor soils and requires little maintenance.

- * **Companion planting strategies:**

- * Growing these plants together can create resilient garden spaces that naturally support biodiversity.

- * **Harvesting and usage:**

- * Sweetgrass can be collected for basketry and crafts.
- * Lavender can also be harvested for natural pest control.
- * Seaside Goldenrod flowers can also be harvested for use in natural yellow dyes.

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