

Guide to the Ecological Restoration of the Grotto

University of St. Thomas
Office of Sustainability Initiatives



About the Guide

Welcome to the Grotto, a place of peace, prayer, and connection with nature.

As part of the restoration of the Grotto, native woodland species were planted along the ravine's slope. This guide shares the characteristics of the plants that were selected, why each species was chosen, and how each contributes to the beauty and ecological health of the Grotto.

While many of the plants are not yet visible above ground, they will grow and become established over the coming years. Their gradual growth reflects the purpose of the Grotto itself: a place where spiritual and personal growth unfolds through prayer, reflection, and contemplation.

The descriptions that follow were provided by the Grotto's design team. Illustrations are by Jessica Turtle, Sustainability Artist-in-Residence.

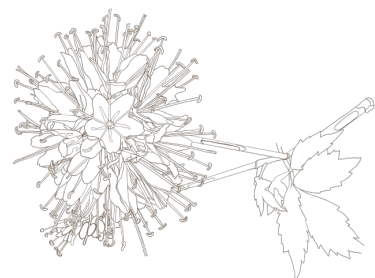


Shady Woodland Seed Mix

A diverse native seed mix provides the **ecological foundation** of the restoration.

The seed mix contains a diversity of native woodland species representing different layers and seasons of the woodland understory. The mix helps stabilize soils and limit erosion, fills areas between individual plantings, and supports pollinators and wildlife.

Grasses, sedges, and rushes, which comprise 42% of the seed mix, provide the structural ground layer. Wildflowers comprise 58% of the mix and provide food and habitat for pollinators. Some plants in the seed mix will establish quickly, while others, like spring woodland species, can take 3-5 years or more to fully establish.



Oval Sedge

A native sedge appropriate for **woodland and partially shaded conditions**. It provides a fine-textured, durable ground layer and helps stabilize soil, which is particularly important in a ravine environment.



Pennsylvania Sedge

A **native woodland groundcover** that tolerates dry shade and can form a dense, low-growing matrix. It helps suppress weeds, reduce exposed soil, and create the appearance of a naturally occurring woodland floor.



Virginia Bluebells

A native woodland spring ephemeral selected for **seasonal color and ecological value**. It flowers early in spring before the tree canopy fully develops, providing a significant visual moment around the Grotto while naturally fitting a woodland setting.



Virginia Waterleaf

A native woodland perennial particularly appropriate for **moist, shaded ravine conditions**. It provides mid-season foliage and flowers and contributes to the diverse native understory community.



Spotted Geranium

A native woodland perennial that provides **longer-lasting seasonal interest** through foliage and flowers. It is well suited to shaded conditions and helps create a diverse, understory rather than relying on a single groundcover.



Jacob's Ladder

A native woodland perennial selected for its **delicate blue flowers and distinctive foliage**. It adds another layer of seasonal interest and complements the blue and purple tones of the Virginia Bluebells while fitting the woodland ecology of the site.



White Pine

A native Minnesota evergreen that is well suited to the regional woodland character. It provides **year-round structure, vertical scale, and winter interest**, while helping reinforce the wooded character of the ravine.



Royal Star Magnolia

Provides a deliberate **ornamental accent** near the Grotto that is anticipated to bloom around Easter each season. Its white spring flowers complement the religious and architectural character of the Grotto, while its relatively compact size makes it appropriate where a larger shade tree would be too dominant. It will provide a canopy of beautiful spring blooms each spring.



