

Fertile Fragments—Champlain Valley Clayplain Forest



When most people think of the Champlain Valley, they envision open fields and rolling farmland. Try picturing, instead, rolling forestlands, punctuated with wetlands. That's how the Champlain Valley looked before European settlers began cutting the forest to grow crops and raise livestock.

The clayplain forest, named for the fertile soils that lie beneath once covered more than half of the southern Champlain Valley. It now covers roughly 7% of the valley, in fragments of less than 100 acres. These fragments isolate the plants and animals within them, disrupting migratory movement and breeding.



Swamp White Oak



Natural Cornucopia

The clayplain forest's rich soil and moderate climate support more species of trees than any other forest type in northern New England. Look for white, red, swamp white, and bur oaks, shagbark hickory, maples, elm, ash, beech, hemlock, and white pine. Notice the variety of shrubs and herbaceous plants growing beneath the trees. These, in turn, host abundant wildlife, including the rare red-headed woodpecker.

What you can do:

- The Champlain Valley Clayplain Forest Project, www.clayplain.org, helps coordinate conservation and restoration of clayplain forests. Take part in their educational hikes, data gathering, and tree plantings.
- Avoid clearing clayplain woodlands or, better yet, expand them by allowing cleared areas to return naturally to forest.
- Plant native species.
- Contact the Poultny Mettowe Watershed Partnership and get involved in their streamside restoration projects.



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