



Landscaping with Native Plants

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Across North America, more and more people are discovering the satisfaction in beauty and the benefits to the environment of landscaping their homes, schools, businesses and places of worship with native plants.

For a unique perspective on the natural landscaping movement, read [The Grapevine](#).

What Are Native Plants

Native plants are those that evolved naturally in North America. More specifically, native plants **in a particular area** are those that were growing naturally in the area before humans introduced plants from distant places. In eastern and central North America, native plants typically grew in communities with species adapted to similar soil, moisture, and weather conditions. Some of the widespread communities included oak-hickory-chestnut and beech-maple forests, tallgrass and shortgrass prairies, and freshwater marshes. Additional communities occupied specialized niches, including savannahs, fens, bogs, flood plains and alpine areas.

Why Landscape with Native Plants

Landscaping with native plants has several appealing factors.

Native Plants Save Energy

Native plants have evolved and adapted to local conditions over thousands of years. They are vigorous and hardy, so can survive winter cold and summer heat. Once established, they require no irrigation or



fertilization.

They are resistant to

most pests and diseases. Thus, native plants suit today's interest in "low-maintenance" gardening and landscaping.



A Place for Children to Play

Native plantings will give children a place to play where they can become aware of the workings of the world around them. Research suggests that rural children may think differently from their urban counterparts. Rural children explain other's behavior mainly with references to characteristics of situations (the outer world has impact – you interact with it), while urban children spoke in terms of internal intentions and beliefs. Native landscaping allows us to explore nature within our children's frame of reference.

Native Plants Stay Put

Each native plant species is a member of a community that includes other plants, animals and microorganisms. The natural balance keeps each species in check, allowing it to thrive in conditions where it is suited, but preventing it from running amok. Thus, native species rarely become invasive, as plants introduced from other areas can be.



Native plants provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies and other desirable wildlife. Many help to enrich the soil. Their root systems help rainfall percolate into the soil,

reducing erosion and runoff. This improves water quality.

Native Plants Are Interesting

The diversity of native plants includes interesting flowers and foliage. Native shrubs and trees provide a variety of heights, shapes and textures in the landscape. Many provide winter interest through their bark or seed pods.

Another dimension of native plants is their historical and cultural interest. Some plants played a significant role in Native American culture, or in the European exploration and settlement. Many species have reported value as food or medicine. Others have been used for cordage, textiles, dyestuffs, or similar domestic purposes. Native plants can provide children and adults with a tangible link to the past.

Craig Tufts, Chief Naturalist for the National Wildlife Federation, has written an excellent [introduction](#) to the environmental benefits of landscaping with native plants. Tufts is an honorary director of Wild Ones.

For additional resources please see:

- [Guidelines For Selecting Native Plants](#)
- [Wisconsin's Best Native Plants for Attracting Birds](#)
- [Creating a Bird-Friendly Yard with Native Plants](#)
- [Preservation and Restoration of Native Communities](#)
- [The Grapevine](#)