

Native Plants

When planning your next landscape project, consider using native species. Native plants tend to grow better than introduced species because they have evolved under local growing conditions. Native plants are less prone to disease and, once established, require less watering and fertilizer than non-native species. Also, they can reduce the amount of lawn you need to mow.

Design choices are as diverse with native plants as with introduced species. There are trees, shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers to choose from. Native plants come in a vast array of colors--blooming and adding interest to your landscape throughout the year. Many native plants have colorful, decorative leaves in a variety of shapes.

If you want a formal looking yard, group similar plants and colors together, with spacing wide enough to allow plant distinction. If you prefer a more natural look, scatter a variety of plants at random. Then, allow the plants to grow into each other, providing a free flowing form. Whatever your design, the soft pastels of delicate wildflowers are a welcome sign of spring. In winter, tall grasses and silhouettes of leafless shrubs add a texture to the landscape that a mowed lawn will never offer.

If you are enhancing an established yard, inventory your yard and work with the features you have. With the aid of field guides, you may locate hidden treasures in the form of wildflowers you were unaware of. Perhaps a stump, fallen log, or large rock could be a focal point for your garden. And, it can be exciting to build your new landscape design around a mature native tree.

Native plants can attract native animals such as butterflies and birds by providing food and shelter. Fruits such as acorns or berries are vitally important, but sometimes other benefits are less noticeable. Many animals are host dependent--that is, they need a specific type of plant to survive. Butterfly larvae may chew on some new plants you have worked hard to establish, but that could be a small price to pay if you will be rewarded with magnificent butterflies in a few short weeks.

Since the settlement of this country, there has been a rapid decline of both native plant and animal species. Some introduced plants have become invasive, taking over where wild plants once thrived. Planting native plants in your backyard is a step towards preserving your own natural heritage.

Be aware that many localities have laws or ordinances against digging up native plants for transplanting. Native species should be obtained from reputable nurseries and garden centers that offer a selection of plants indigenous to the area. Most states have a native plant society and contacts can be found on the Internet. Local bookstores have books dedicated to plants and animals of the region. By asking a few questions, you can get the information you need to "go native" in your backyard.

Planting native is important for many reasons. Now, perhaps more than ever, since we are experiencing severe drought conditions, it is important to conserve all the water we can. By planting native, you will be doing your part to help in preserving this precious resource for future generations.