

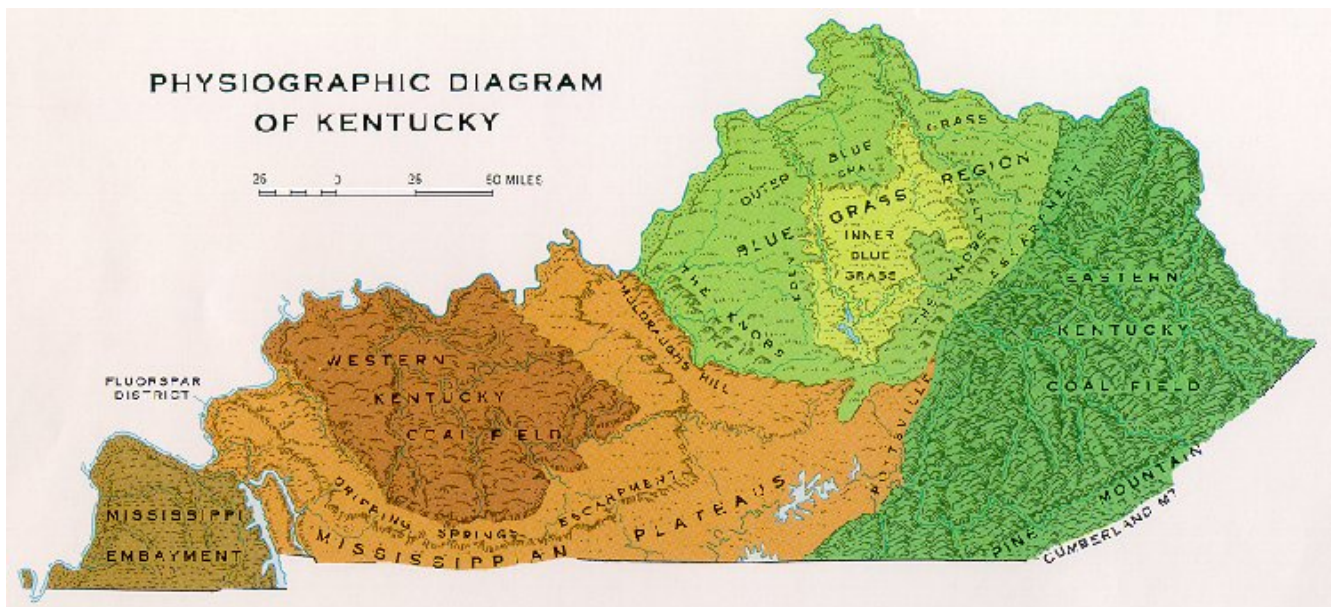


## Why Use Native Plants?

### Introduction

Native plants are species that were growing in Kentucky prior to European Settlement. These plants have adapted to certain habitats in response to specific climatic, geologic, and topographic variables.

Kentucky has over 3000 species of plants growing within its borders. The diversity of plant life is due to the state being a mixing ground on North, South, East, and West. We share many Appalachian species with adjacent states. Some Southern Appalachian species extend into our southern most Appalachian regions, and some Northern Appalachian species survive only at the highest elevations of the mountains. Other northern species that are relics of the glaciations of the Pleistocene Epoch may be found in isolated pockets. At the other extreme, we share many plants with the coastal plain found in the Jackson Purchase area, and a large number of species from the mid-western tall prairie grass region. Finally, we have species that are commonly found throughout Eastern North America.



Physiographic Regions of Kentucky, from the Kentucky Geological Survey

Another factor of diversification is the underlying geologic rocks that develop a variety and unique characteristic soils. The physiography of the state, from the mountains in the east to the coast plains in the west, determines many of the types of plants that have naturally grown within the state.

While there is still a great store of wildflowers within the state, many species are becoming rare, and many are not as abundant as they were in the past. All plants have habitat needs, like animals, and we are destroying the habitats for the native wildflowers at a phenomenal rate. It is reported that Kentucky loses more than 160 acres of rural land each day to development. Other factors, including modern road construction, development of agricultural areas, development of industrial properties, improper collecting, and the introduction of more exotic and non-native, invasive species, have all had an impact on this decline.

## Why Use Native Plants?

If you enjoy observing nature, are concerned about the environment, or wish to make a long-term contribution to your community's ecosystem, then using native plants is a responsible, money-saving, long-term, positive investment to both your property and your community. Native plants are advantageous, because:

- ◆ Native plants do not require fertilizers and require fewer pesticides than lawns;
- ◆ Native plants require less water than lawns and help prevent erosion of the soils. The deep root capacity of many native Midwestern plants increase the ability of the soil to store water. Once established, native plants can significantly reduce water runoff, and, consequently pollution and flooding;
- ◆ Native plants help reduce air pollution. Native plantscapes do not require mowing. Excessive carbon from the burning of fossil fuels contributes to global warming. Native plants sequester, or remove, carbon from the atmosphere;
- ◆ Native plants provide shelter and food for wildlife, or, based on your selection of plants, repel some types of wildlife that you may consider to be a nuisance;
- ◆ Native plants provide biodiversity and stewardship of our national heritage;
- ◆ Native plants are often more cost effective to purchase in the long run, as the plants are hardier and more likely to survive in our community's ecosystem; and
- ◆ Native plants are beautiful and increase scenic value.



The New England Aster is a popular native wildflower in Kentucky.

## How Native Plants Benefit Wildlife

If you enjoy observing nature, then you will probably want to attract more wildlife to your yard. To a bird-watcher, this may mean cardinals, nuthatches, or hummingbirds. To a gardener, it may mean butterflies. To a general nature lover, it may mean deer, chipmunks, squirrels, or other wildlife.

Wildlife does not just randomly appear in a given area. It is there because of a favorable habitat. To attract more wildlife, you need to apply specific wildlife management practices. To reach your wildlife goals, you must manipulate the habitat, the animal population, or manage the landowners.

Keep these needs in mind when designing our backyard wildlife habitat:

- ◆ Food;
- ◆ Water;
- ◆ Cover; and
- ◆ Space for wildlife to raise their offspring.



Butterfly sipping nectar from a backyard lily.  
Photo by T. Barnes, University of Kentucky.

