

- Is existing vegetation relatively weed-free? If so, consider inter-seeding, (no till), or plugging plants into existing vegetation places such as thin lawns, or sparsely vegetated old fields. This can result in fewer new weeds. Remember that the less you disturb the soil, the fewer weeds you will likely have.

For garden areas:

- An option for home garden plots is to spread 20-page thick newspapers on the ground in the fall, cover it with mulch, and plug plant your selections in the spring. This method also acts as a weed barrier.
 - Are there noxious weeds or problem species that will compete with the native species? Seek competent advice on control techniques and eliminate them before planting your native plants.
 - Some alternatives include careful use of EPA recommended herbicides, hand pulling, using weed wrenches, cultivation, or mowing.
- ♦ **Manage your site.** "Low maintenance" does not mean "no maintenance". The first few growing seasons especially require maintenance. Develop a plan that takes these factors into account:
 - ♦ **Plan for weed control.** There are a variety of weed control methods. Find the one(s) that suits your situation. In early plantings, mulch can help choke weeds and support seedlings. In prairie/savannah settings, plan to mow before weeds reach 6" - 12". For trees and forest plantings, weed control and protection from wildlife is often necessary for small seedlings. For home gardens, the newspaper method works well for weeds. Some plants may require protection from general wildlife until established.

Other Gardening Tips

Remember that you can always start smaller and add to your garden in successive years, as you become more practiced at using native plants, and more attuned to your yard's particular characteristics. Plan for emergencies and contingencies, and use low cost methods when possible. Shop for better prices between stores and nurseries, but look for quality products that will increase your chances of success and your confidence in their ability to perform well over a number of years. Use a median price for your budget, and be aware that changes may occur that make some products or services more difficult to find or more expensive for a contractor to perform.

Pay attention to local zoning ordinances, and talk with your neighbors, so that you have no unpleasant 'surprises' as your garden progresses. As your yard grows more beautiful, your neighbors will likely be admire your yard, become impressed with your methods, and be persuaded to change their methods and include native plantings in their own yard—or they may plan to attract wildlife, as well. It is important to emphasize to your neighbors that you are striving to protect the environment that they live in, as well.



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To order a copy on disk of our "Homeowner's Guidebook of Native Plants, Integrated Pest Management, and Pollution Prevention", please contact:

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Garden Design with Native Plants

Going Native

Why would someone decide to use native plants in their home gardens and flower beds? Native plants are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions where they naturally occur. These important plant species provide nectar, pollen, and seeds that serve as food for native butterflies, insects, birds, and other animals. Unlike natives, common horticulture plants do not provide energetic rewards for their visitors and often require insect pest control to survive. In fact, the more native plants you have in your yard, the more advantageous it is to the homeowner. Native wildflowers, trees, and shrubs:

- ♦ **Require fewer fertilizers and pesticides than lawns or flower beds of non-native flowers.**
- ♦ **Require less water than lawns and help prevent erosion.** The deep root systems of many native Midwestern plants increase the soils capacity to store water. Native plants can significantly reduce water runoff, and consequently flooding.
- ♦ **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.
- ♦ **Provide food and shelter for wildlife.**
- ♦ **Promote biodiversity and stewardship of our natural heritage.**
- ♦ **Increase scenic values, making your home more marketable.**

The Native Garden's Purpose

What is your goal, as a property owner, for your native garden? Are you looking for something that will cover or camouflage a trouble spot in your yard? Provide additional privacy? Attract wildlife to your yard for observation? Repel troublesome wildlife from your yard? Help to promote the absorption of rainwater into the ground to prevent runoff or beautify an area with occasional standing water? Landscape your property for less maintenance, while increasing the value of your home? Are you interested in becoming more environmentally friendly, and wish to act as a steward for our native heritage? The use of native plants can help you meet any of the goals listed.

Native wildflowers are mainly perennial plants that live from year to year without replanting, increasing the value of your initial investment. Many of these plants may be purchased throughout the state, but different parts of the state may have specific species that are more suited to that area's general ecology. Before you plan your garden, decide the specific results that you wish to accomplish, and what general type of plants that will be in your search. Particular species may be native to other states, but are not considered to be native to Kentucky, and visa-versa.

Another factor to consider is the use or introduction of non-native or exotic invasive species into your yard. While many exotic invasive species can be pretty, such as Purple Loosestrife, introduction of these plants into your garden can easily pose a problem, as the plants are notably invasive, and 'crowd out' native species.



Photo courtesy Salato Wildlife Center, Frankfort, KY

Lastly, some gardeners prefer to mix non-native plants with native plants, perennial plants with annual plants, or prefer to have a garden that attracts specific wildlife forms, such as birds or butterflies. If you are planning for a low maintenance garden, it is not a good idea to include many annual, non-native species, which must be replanted yearly, or many non-native species that may require additional care to thrive in your yard's environment. As you plan your garden, keep your overall goal in mind. Select plants that will help you meet your goals, while thriving in the environment to which it is assigned.



Planting a garden designed to attract specific types of wildlife can be unusually rewarding for the nature lover!

Helpful Hints for Using Native Plants

Going **NATIVE**, (with native plants), is exciting! There are a few key things to remember when beginning to use native plants:

- ◆ **It takes time for native plants to get established.** It is important to know from the outset that it may take a few years for native plantings to look attractive. Prairie plants need a few years to establish strong roots. In time, native plants will spread and propagate, creating patterns that work well in each space.
- ◆ **Gain an understanding of the native plant communities in your area.** Plant communities occur in your area because they are adapted to the specific climate, landscape, and soil conditions. You can visit local agencies to learn more about the plants that are specific to your area; plants that are hardy, grow easily, and will make a positive contribution to your local community. You can contact state agencies, arboretums, and native plant societies to obtain information about the natural vegetation in your area.
- ◆ **Understand local regulations.** Check local regulations that may affect the use and ongoing management of natural landscaping. Regulations may affect the location of natural landscaping on your site and the types of plants used. You may need to know local weed ordinances, fire regulations, or recommended tree and shrubbery plantings before you begin to design a landscape plan.
- ◆ **Get to know your particular site.** Many factors determine what kinds of site preparation will be needed, and which species should be used, such as:
 1. **Existing plants** - you may already have native plants at your site that are desirable for that site and should not be disturbed. Be sure you are not removing desirable native plants that are already well-adapted to your site.
 2. **Sun exposure** - How much sun is there? How long is the site exposed to sunlight? Is it morning sun or afternoon sun? It can pay to "map" your site through a day, hour by hour, to show shady areas and sunny areas.
 3. **Soil type** - Is the soil clay, loam, peat, sandy, rich in humus, or average? What is the soil pH? Is the soil naturally fertile, or do you need to modify the soil in a small area to make it a more amenable environment? (You can add sand and/or peat to small areas to improve the soil drainage and humus levels in small areas.) You can consult your county soil atlas, or contact your Cooperative Extension Service about procedures for soil testing. In urban areas, there may be 'fill' on your site, and several different kinds of soil.
 4. **Drainage and soil moisture** - Does the soil hold moisture? Is it dry, well-drained, or wet?
- ◆ **Look at neighboring natural vegetation, if possible.** While this may be difficult in urban areas, you can determine if your planting will negatively influence wild native plants already in place and thriving, or be susceptible to invasion by nearby weeds and non-native exotics. Plan your native planting to harmonize with adjacent areas.



The Louisville Nature Center provides hiking trails, native plant sales, and education about the diversity of native plants within the Louisville, Kentucky area. Directly across the street from the Louisville Zoo, the Center may be reached at 502-458-1328.



The Salato Wildlife Education Center, located on Highway 60, just west of Frankfort, Kentucky offers hiking trails, a small fishing lake, picnic shelters, and a native planting of every habitat found in Kentucky. The Center offers education about a wide variety of subjects and may be reached at 502-564-7863.

- ◆ **Consider your budget.** The cost of using native plants for landscaping is usually less expensive when factored over a period of time. A perennial native planting is a long-term investment; it can be built in phases. It is important to plan according to how much money and time you have now and may have in the future.
 1. Money may be needed for site preparation, plant materials, and maintenance.
 2. Budget your time and resources. You can choose to do site preparation yourself or hire a contractor. You may be able to gather seed, or may need to buy seed and/or plants.
 3. Consider these options based on available money—
 - Plant the entire site with many different species;
 - Plant the entire site with a few species, and add more diversity as your budget allows;
 - Plant many species on part of the site, and then use your own resulting seeds and seedlings to expand the planted area;
 - Select a small area for a beginning, and plan to add to your site yearly.
- ◆ **Create a wish list of species for your site.** Visit natural areas to learn how local native species grow in a plant community setting, and consult planting and identification guides. Diverse plantings that resemble the native plant community in your area are likely to have the most success and benefits. To help you choose species, some producers provide guides or species lists. The guide contained within this booklet has been developed for the Louisville, Kentucky area, although many of the species will thrive in other areas as well, and are native to other states.
- ◆ **Shop for native plant materials.** Look for sources selling seeds and plants produced from seeds of local origin.
 1. For seeds, the highest success usually comes from cleaned local origin seed with a high percentage of pure live seed, (PLS).
 2. Make sure plants are not dug from the wild. This depletes the resource. Many plants do not thrive after transplanting. Lastly, you may introduce microbes, fungi, or other undesirable elements to your lawn.
- ◆ **Prepare and plant the site. For lawns:**
 1. Do you have proper planting equipment? For prairie seeds, ask seed producers about a drill for large sites and hand operated seeders for small sites. Broadcasting prairie seeds by hand is often a viable option, and may result in more natural planting patterns.