

Benefits of Using Native Plants

Landscaping with native plants improves the environment. Native plants are hardy because they have adapted to the local conditions. Once established, native plants do not need pesticides, fertilizers, or watering. Not only is this good for the environment, it saves time and money. A native landscape does not need to be mowed like a conventional lawn. This reduces the demand for non-renewable resources and improves the water and air quality. The periodic burning (or mowing when burning is not practical) required for maintenance of a prairie landscape mimics the natural prairie cycle and is much better for the environment.

Landscaping with native wildflowers and grasses helps return the area to a healthy ecosystem. Diverse varieties of birds, butterflies and animals, are attracted to the native plants, thus enhancing the biodiversity of the area. The beauty of native wildflowers and grasses creates a sense of place, both at home and work. The native plants increase our connection to nature, help educate our neighbors, and provide a beautiful, peaceful place to relax.

Reduced Use of Pesticides Since native plants have adapted to local conditions, they are more resistant to pest problems. Sometimes individuals use non-persistent pesticides, which break down into harmless components, before sowing native plant seeds to minimize competition from the weeds. Once the native plants are established, pesticides are seldom needed.

Improved Air Quality Native landscaping practices can help improve air quality on a local, regional and global level. Locally, smog (ground level ozone) and air toxics can be drastically reduced by the virtual elimination of the need for lawn maintenance equipment (lawn mowers, weed edgers, leaf blowers, etc.) which is fueled by gasoline, electricity or batteries. All of these fuel types are associated with the emissions of the following air pollutants: carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxides (NO_x), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and air toxics such as benzene. Gasoline lawn and garden equipment, on average, produces 5% of ozone-forming VOCs in areas with smog problems. This equipment also emits toxics and particulates.



Regionally, NO_x and SO₂ released from lawn maintenance equipment react with water in the atmosphere to form acid rain. Globally, native landscaping practices help to combat global warming in two ways. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is a major greenhouse gas and by reducing the use of lawn maintenance equipment, the associated CO₂ emissions are also reduced. Native plants help to reduce the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere by taking in CO₂ and storing the carbon in the body of the plants, roots and soil. Native plants work much better than traditional mowed grass as a carbon sink due to their extensive root systems and increased ability to retain and store water.

Improved Water Quality In conventional landscaping, pesticides are often wrongly applied at times when target insects are not vulnerable. Overuse and inappropriate use often kill beneficial insects and other wildlife. Less than 10% of all insects are harmful to plants. Pesticides have the potential to cause serious human health problems when not handled properly or applied according to the label directions. By eliminating or minimizing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, these pollutants will not run-off into streams, lake, and bays. This improves the quality of the water and the aquatic life in it. In healthy water systems, natural controls, such as fish, frogs, and snails will help keep insect populations under control and reduce algae buildup.

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Benefits of *Naturescaping* with Native Plants



There are many benefits to naturescaping, whether practiced in place of or in addition to traditional landscaping. The benefits include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Ease of Use** - Native plants evolved to grow in local conditions and to predictable sizes. They do not require watering (except during establishment), chemical pesticides and fertilizers, or frequent cutting.
- **Public Health** (lowers cancer rates)- Traditional landscaping uses large amounts of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, some of which are suspected carcinogens. During rains, these chemicals often run off into public water supplies.
- **Air Pollution**- Lawnmowers, weed eaters and blowers use large quantities of fossil fuels, creating greenhouse gas and other pollutants. Lawnmowing may cause up to 5% of total air pollution, and an Exxon Valdez of oil is spilled by lawnmowers each year in the U.S. Traditional landscaping also contributes to noise pollution.
- **Saves you Money** -The cost of maintaining a naturescape is dramatically less than that of a traditional landscape because a naturescape essentially takes care of itself. Naturescapes also save you time - and how valuable is your time?
- **Water Use**- In the West, 60% of consumed water goes to lawns; in the East, 30%. This water diversion harms the environment, kills fish, and returns polluted water to our streams and rivers. It also costs you - on irrigation system installation and maintenance, and on your water bill.
- **Song Birds** -Our song bird populations having dropped steadily - 5-10% per year, depending on the species - for the last several decades, and there is no end in sight. The loss is primarily due to habitat loss. Adopting naturescaping is critical if song birds are to find food and shelter.
- **Enhanced Livability** -An ecologically functional landscape offers so much more than a sterile, static landscape. It stimulates our children with color, sound and wonder. It is cleaner, quieter and healthier, and may increase property values.

Traditional landscaping attempts to create a landscape that "looks" the same regardless of location. This is, in part, pushed by nurseries that sell the same plant across wide markets, maximizing revenue through efficiencies of scale. (Nurseries aggressively market this limited number of plants through garden magazines, local newspapers, and radio and television programs, etc.) It is also driven by landscape designers who tend to use the same plants regardless of where the site is (less burdensome than learning new plants). Lastly, it is driven by homeowners and property managers who grew up learning one set of plants and understandably use those plants as a frame of reference as they move about the country.

These and other forces have created an atmosphere that emphasizes using the same plants regardless of location and changing a site to accommodate these plants. Site changing often entails installing irrigation, bringing in new soil or soil amendments, regularly applying chemical products (pesticides, fertilizer, etc.), and frequently cutting, pruning and weeding. This is traditional landscaping. Resulting monocultures may cause extinction of many species.