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Why Use Native Plants

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Why Use Native Plants?

Choosing native plants allows developed landscapes to coexist with nature, rather than compete with it. Increasingly, gardeners in Missouri and elsewhere in the Lower Midwest are choosing native plants. The benefits of native landscaping are fueling a gardening movement that says "no" to pesticides and fertilizers and "yes" to biodiversity and creating more sustainable landscapes. Novice and professional gardeners are turning to native landscaping to manage storm water, reduce maintenance, and promote plant and wildlife conservation.

For Stormwater Management

Using moisture-loving plants in rain gardens and in bioretention and wetland detention basins slows down and absorbs rainwater, thus reducing the quantity and velocity of storm water runoff while improving water quality.

For Less Maintenance

Compared with lawns and mulched tree, shrub, and perennial plantings, landscapes planted with appropriate native plants require less maintenance.

They require minimal watering (except during establishment and drought periods) and they need no chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

Characteristics of native plants that reduce maintenance include:

- Longevity: plants that live for many decades
- Three to four-season interest: plants that are appealing most of the year
- Variable conditions: plants that tolerate a wide range of light and moisture conditions
- Small and compact: plants that are in scale with a given space
- Weed elimination: plants that grow into dense groupings and eliminate weeds
- Seediness: plants that do not spread readily from seed

To Create Wildlife Habitat

A native plant garden or large planting with a diversity of trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses provides food and shelter for insects, birds, amphibians, and mammals throughout the growing season. Leaving seed heads and plant structure throughout winter provides continuing food and shelter for many creatures and provides opportunities to observe nature up close. To underscore the importance of native plants to birds, virtually all terrestrial birds feed their young insects. Native plants provide food for insects, and insects provide food for birds. With no insects, we would have no birds.

For Resistance to Deer Browse

Deer are adaptable and eat a wide variety of plants. Fortunately there are many native plants that deer avoid. Deer rely on their sense of smell to determine whether an area is safe and which plants are desirable to eat. For instance, plants with aromatic foliage such as wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) and round-leaved groundsel (*Senecio obovatus*) deter deer. Some plants repel deer because of their coarse, rough, hairy or spiny textures. This group includes rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) and prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*). A deer-resistant garden includes a high percentage of these types of plants.

Educational Opportunities

Native plant gardens present endless opportunities for learning about seasonal cycles, wildlife, and plant life cycles. Quiet spaces outside can be used for art and reading classes. Environmental and conservation topics are taught best outdoors.

For a Sense of Place

People who have lived in one place for a time develop images of their home that create a sense of belonging and familiarity. For instance, those who have lived in rural Missouri know about flowering dogwood—its blossoms and berries have made their mark in the hearts and thoughts of so many Missouri residents that it is the state tree. Many people have recognized this heartfelt connection with nature, and it often is referred to as "sense of place."

For Beautification

Native wildflowers, flowering vines, shrubs, and trees offer a wide range of colors, textures and forms to create dynamic seasonal displays. Grasses and sedges have interesting flowers and seed heads and yellow-orange fall color. Shrubs and trees have fall color and berries that persist into the winter. Choosing a wide assortment of plants ensures seasonal interest, with the bonus of attracting colorful birds, butterflies and insects.

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“Biological diversity is the key to the maintenance of the world as we know it.”

~ E.O. Wilson, Biodiversity

Love native plants? Help conserve them in original prairie habitats by becoming a member of or making a donation to Grow Native's parent organization, the [Missouri Prairie Foundation](http://www.moprairie.org/become-a-member/donate/)

(<http://www.moprairie.org/become-a-member/donate/>).

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