

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Introducing Native Plant Information Sheets

A main goal of Springfield Township is to develop and implement appropriate and effective tools to protect the area's rich natural resources. Important components of our natural resources are the plants that live here, from oaks and hickories to black-eyed susans and trillium. The plants that occur here naturally are very important because they not only help define the character of the Township, they perform environmental functions that

keep our natural environment working. If we didn't have cattails, we wouldn't have clean surface waters; if we didn't have oak trees, we wouldn't have clean air and food for wildlife.

In an effort to educate residents about the importance of using native plants, the Township sought and

received a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to create a database (a CD-ROM) of more than 230 plants native to Springfield Township, as well as written materials that

explain the benefits of using natives, and how to use them in landscaping. This sheet is the first in a series of eight that explains what

native plants are, why they are beneficial to our community, and how you can use them in your landscape. For more information on the plants themselves, you can obtain an easy-to-use CD from the Township Clerk's office (Phone: 248-846-6510). You can also visit www.epa.gov/glnpo, and click on "Native Plant Enhancement Project" to check out the CD online (minus the "plant search" capability).



What are native plants?

Native plants are the trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses, ferns and other plants that have evolved in a particular area (such as southeast Michigan) over thousands of years. In the United States, "native" plants existed here before European settlement. Over this long period of time, the plants have adapted to the particular growing conditions present here, including temperature, rainfall, winds, soils, slopes and wildlife.

Benefits of Landscaping With Native Plants

If you haven't worked with native plants before, you may be wondering how natives are different than daylilies or hostas. The following information answers these questions and will help you begin to see why using at least some natives in your garden can be beneficial to the environment.

Using native plants in your landscape will bring

you many benefits, including the following:

- Native plants are beautiful, providing an entirely new palate of plants to a traditional landscape.
- They are well-adapted to local conditions, therefore requiring little maintenance once established. They eliminate or significantly reduce the need for fertilizers, pesticides, water and lawn maintenance equip-

ment. They also often attract beneficial insects, which prey upon pests, decreasing the need for pesticides.

- Most native species are perennial, or self-seeding biennial plants.
- Native plants attract our native songbirds and butterflies. Just as the plants have evolved and adapted to our area over time, the local wildlife has evolved along



Red-winged Blackbirds use cattails to support their nests, building a new nest for two to three broods a year.

Benefits of Landscaping With Native Plants (Cont.)

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side them, depending on these plants for food and shelter.

- Using native plants promotes biodiversity. Planting a small meadow that once was lawn replaces one plant species with many, increasing the opportunities for beneficial wildlife and insects to live.

- Natives reduce air pollution, improve water quality

and reduce soil erosion.

Using native vegetation, unlike cultivated landscapes, does not require the use of lawn maintenance equipment, a major contributor to air pollution. They improve water quality by filtering contaminated stormwater, and reduce soil erosion by stabilizing soils with their deep root systems.

- Natives maintain our natural heritage and our

community's character.

What would Springfield Township look like without its majestic oaks and familiar wetland plants?

- Native plants are less expensive to maintain. U.S. EPA reports that a prairie or wetland costs approximately \$150 a year per acre to maintain, while the same amount of lawn costs \$1,000 per year per acre to maintain.

Dispelling the Myths about Native Plants

One way to tell if a small tree or shrub is a Dogwood is to gently snap a leaf in two and observe if a "latex" or stretchy substance spans the leaf where the veins were broken.



Red-Osier Dogwood

Anything unknown often comes with its share of myths. Below are several well-known myths about using native plants, and the facts that dispel them.

- **Native plants cause allergies.** Allergies are aggravated by wind-borne pollen. Many native plants, including goldenrod, are insect-pollinated, not wind-pollinated. In fact, non-native grasses, such as Kentucky Blue Grass and Bermuda Grass, are responsible for much of the pollen in the air. (Just a note: Ragweed, a wind-pollinated native, blooms at the same time as goldenrod, but ragweed's flowers are inconspicuous, so goldenrod's showy flowers get the blame!)

- **Tall grasses attract rats.** Rats are attracted by extreme concentrations of food such as grain elevators and garbage. Tall grasses do not themselves attract this rodent.

- **What about mosquitoes?** Mosquitoes need standing water for at least 10 days to breed. Landscapes with native plants do not create standing water or have more insect pests than a traditionally landscaped home.

- **My yard will look like a weed patch.** Native plants are amazingly diverse and beautiful, and can be used in the garden in many ways. They can be important components of a perennial border, butterfly garden, shade garden or any other

landscape style you desire. They can be used as you would use any other ornamental tree, shrub or perennial.

- **Prairie grasses are a fire hazard.** As described in *An Introduction to Naturalized Landscapes*, published by the City of Madison, Wisconsin, dry prairie grasses can be ignited. However, alone, they are insubstantial and have less potential for igniting structures than the dry needles around the base of the commonly used foundation plants such as yews (*Taxus spp.*) and junipers (*Juniperus spp.*) If planting larger areas of prairie grasses, make sure you understand and follow safe methods of prairie installation and management.