

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



## Designing With Native Plants

Think of native plants as a whole new palate of plants to work with in your garden. You may want to add an aster or goldenrod to your perennial border, build a “wetland” pond, or transform your entire property into a woodland. Many people who use natives in their landscapes want a more naturalized, less formal look. Whatever the scale or style, natives can be a small or large part of the whole scheme. This sheet describes creating a special place for native plants in your yard, and includes a few tips on how you can make your entire landscape into a more naturalized garden.

### Choosing the Garden Type

Instead of choosing a garden for your landscape, let your landscape tell you what kind of garden you should create. On Sheet #2 of this series, the common native plant communities of Springfield Township are described. Review this information and first determine which plant communities existed on your property before it was developed. This will give you clues about the soil and moisture conditions, and will tell you the type of gardens that will do well in your yard.

Next, do an analysis of your yard. Get a copy of your property survey and

draw in all the existing features, such as utilities, patios, downspouts, etc.

Things like sun, shade and moisture levels are also important to note.

### Locating the Garden

Now you've got the necessary information to decide what types of gardens will do well in different areas of your yard. If cattails are continually springing up in a wet spot at the edge of your property, you may want to design a wetland garden there. The amount of sun will tell you if you should use marsh-type plants or wooded wetland plants. By letting your landscape tell you what will work best, you will avoid the constant struggle of babying plants that are not suited to the growing conditions. Again, it is the “right plant, right place” philosophy.

### Modeling Your Garden after Nature

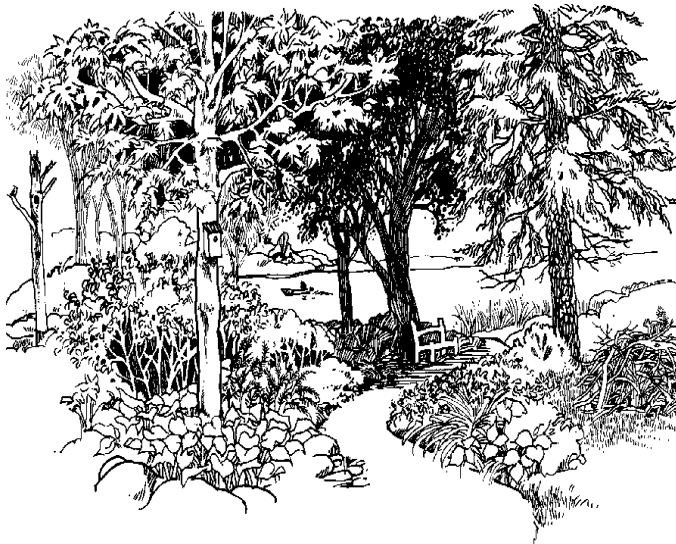
Once you've figured out the plant community(ies) that will grow well in your yard, you can design the garden using the plant members of this community. This is an easy process since there are a limited number of plants that grow in each community. (However, re-

### Native Plant Community Map

For some, one goal of using native plants is to recreate beautiful natural places in their yard. To understand the character or “design” of natural areas, it's fun to visit high quality woodlands or wetlands to see how these “gardens” are put together.

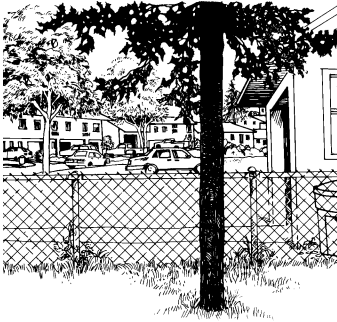
A map was created as part of this series that identifies areas within the Township you can visit to study the different plant communities. Each plant community is described on Information Sheet #2, and under the “Habitat” category used on the Native Plant CD.

member that species are often found in more than one community.) Another advantage of using the community approach is the plants “go together.” For instance, yellow and purple are opposites on the color wheel, making them complementary colors. A prairie in the fall is covered by yellow goldenrod and purple asters! This pattern is repeated across many plant communities.



## Designing With Native Plants (Cont.)

Continued from Page 1



Before...Native plants can serve the same functions (screening, etc.) as ornamental plants. See how this typical scene can be transformed by using a combination of native species and non-native, traditional garden plants below.

"Nature is the ultimate model for us to follow. Everything in Nature has its own carefully selected place."

- Colston Burrell

There are certain design principles that are simple to use in your native garden that will make it look more "natural."

### 1. Study Nature

If you want to recreate the feeling of a particular plant community, the first thing you should do is look at a nearby high-quality plant community. By studying a wetland or woodland, you will notice how the plants are arranged, how many it takes to create a certain look, and how they relate to each other and the land forms. For example, a woodland looks like a woodland because there are many trees of different sizes and species, often closely clustered together. A woodland also has a shrub layer, and a ground layer of small herbaceous plants. The only way to recreate this character is to spend time in a woodland

and take notes! Better yet, make small sketches of what you see. It doesn't matter what the sketches look like, but the process of drawing helps you observe how the plant community is put together.

### 2. Use Curving Lines

Nature does not know a straight line. If you want your native garden to appear more natural, use a curving line to create the edge of your bed. Curving lines should also be used in placing the plants throughout the bed.

### 3. Cluster the Same Species

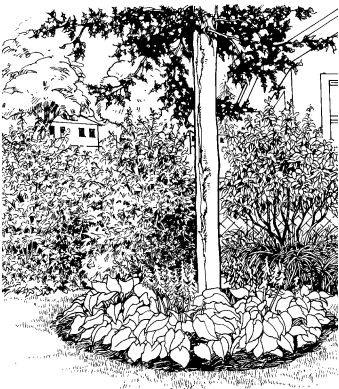
It is very unusual in nature to see just one plant representing a species in a plant community. Generally, you see great numbers or masses of the same species in any given area. To recreate this look, plant several of the

same species together, so that they create a mass, and a bigger impact, in the garden. Also, plant the masses so that they mesh together.

### What to Expect

Many native plants work on developing their root systems before you see growth in the top of the plant. This is particularly true if you use seed to establish a prairie garden. During this time of establishment, (which in some cases could be a few years), weeding, watering and mulching as you would a traditional garden may be necessary. So, be prepared to wait a few seasons before you reap the benefits of a native plant garden. To help you during this time, just remember: "*The first year they sleep, the second year they creep, the third year they leap!*"

## Being Neighborly



After... landscaping with a combination of non-native hostas at the base of the tree, and a backdrop of wildflowers and native shrubs.

If your tastes lean toward the natural side, here are some ideas from the *Wild Ones Natural Landscapers Handbook* to help your neighbors understand, appreciate, and live with your garden style.

**Create Borders.** A fence, mown path or other border next to your neighbor's property or beside a public walk can create a feeling of order to your naturalized landscape.

### Advertise Your Stewardship.

Before you tear up your front yard to put in a prairie, tell your neighbors. They need to know the benefits of a naturalized landscape if they are to understand and accept it. Another good idea is publicity through a sign in your garden. It could explain that this garden is a native ecosystem providing food and nectar to birds and many beneficial insects.

**Start Small.** By creating your garden in phases, you can educate your neighbors about naturalized landscaping and native plants as you learn. Planting a small area is also more affordable!

### Add Human Touches.

As you would in any garden, put in bird feeders, benches and other touches that invite people into the garden to enjoy the plants.