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Selecting and Buying Native Plants

There are many issues to think about in selecting and buying native plants. This information sheet discusses the importance of local genotypes (using plants grown from southeast Michigan sources), and issues involved in buying native plants from local growers and nurseries. Much of the information comes from materials developed by Grass Roots, Inc., a Michigan landscape company that professionally rescues native plants from development sites.



cally different than a Black-eyed susan from Minnesota. The differences are slight and are most likely not visible, but the plant adapted to Michigan will be better suited for Michigan's growing conditions than the same species that is adapted to Minnesota's growing conditions. This same theory can be applied to regions as well. Plants adapted to southeast Michigan will be genetically different than plants adapted to northern Michigan.

This may not seem important. But a benefit of growing native plants is to preserve our local genetic "databank," and natural heritage. By bringing in the same species with a different genetic makeup, *our* plant's genes could be polluted (during pollination) with the genes from another area, making our plants less adapted over time to our area. Using local genotypes is also important with species that are uncommon in Springfield Township. For instance, if our local genotype of Stiff Coreopsis is

already scarce, it may disappear if a more vigorous western strain is planted nearby.

Deciding to use local genotypes is each person's decision. If properly sited, plants with local genetic stock will flourish as they have in the wild for many centuries. You can be assured they are hardy to our area and that, once established, they will take care of themselves. On Information Sheet #7, we have provided a listing of nurseries that sell plants grown or propagated from local populations.

Using Local Genotypes

Just like people, plants have a genetic code. This code tells the plant what flower color it is, and where it can live, among many other things. Throughout time, as plant species migrated across the land, the plants adapted to the local soil and climate conditions. This adaptation resulted in a unique genetic makeup of that species in that locale. In other words, a Black-eyed susan from Michigan has adapted to become geneti-

Buying Native Plants Responsibly

The recent popularity of native plants in landscaping has caused a surge in demand for plants, and as a result, an increase in unlawful collecting of wild plants for sale. Here are some tips to help you purchase plants from reputable dealers:

Ask if the plant has been nursery propagated

"Nursery propagated" plants are raised in nurseries from seed, cuttings or root stock of legally obtained native

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“Plant rescue” describes the practice of “rescuing” plants that would otherwise be lost to land development.

With some initiative and the property owner's permission, you could have a chance to collect plants and seeds with local genotypes.



Many native shrubs that live near water, such as Black Chokeberry and Shrubby Cinquefoil, adapt well to typical garden soil.

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plants. Many native plants are labeled “nursery grown,” which means that these plants are often collected from the wild and grown for a while in a greenhouse or nursery. Your plant dealer has the responsibility to know where the plants are coming from, and whether

or not they have been wild collected. (Note that wild plants can be legally collected for sale if they will otherwise be destroyed by development. If this is the case, then the dealer would have proof of landowner permission and that the sale of the plants conforms to relevant laws.)

Don't buy if you aren't convinced

Listen to your instincts and if you are not convinced by the dealer's explanations, don't buy the plants. The market is what drives these folks to compromise wild plant populations, and you have the power to curb these activities.

Collecting Native Plants Responsibly

If you have natural areas on your property, you may choose to collect plants from these areas for transplanting around your home. There are several things to keep in mind:

Know what you are collecting

The state's laws differ considerably between collecting wild “native” plants and collecting “alien” or “exotic” plants. Native plants are those that have grown in a specific area of Michigan before European settlement. Alien or exotic plants are those that were introduced from areas outside their original geographical region. Aliens could also be plants that were originally native to other regions of North America, but have been introduced into Michigan and are outside their original range. Before collecting any plants, **make sure you know what you are digging up.** This may require that you

research the plant or even get a reliable on-site identification before taking any part of the plant.

Collecting native plants

There are laws protecting native plants and regulating their collection in the wild. Collecting native plants on *private property* is governed by private property laws and the Christmas Greens Act. These laws work, in part, to protect private landowners from the removal of salable plants by unscrupulous plant dealers. Collecting native plants on *public land* is allowed only with the direct permission of the land managing agency, and often requires a permit.

Endangered and threatened native species are additionally protected by the Endangered Species Act. “Endangered” means a species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant part of its range.

“Threatened” means a species which is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. No parts of these plants may be collected, *even on your own or another's private property*, without first consulting with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Collecting Do's and Don'ts

When you disturb an area, you are inviting invasion by exotic plants (see Information Sheet #5 for a list of problem plants). Be sure to disturb the smallest area possible, including your path in and out. If plants can be grown from seed, harvest the seed instead of digging up the mature plant. If harvesting seed, take only some seed and leave the rest to reseed the natural area and for wildlife. Cuttings are another way to propagate plants without taking the whole plant.