

Creating a Native Garden in the Home Landscape

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In recent years there has been a positive trend towards using native plants in home landscape design. For too long, housing projects have been clearing away native trees, shrubs and groundcover. This leaves wildlife without homes or food. The wildlife move on to other sites or disappear altogether leaving large expanses of land open to problems with water management and overpopulation of certain wildlife and insect species. Other pests and diseases find a foothold without the natural defenses of our native species.

The benefits of creating a more natural design with native plants are numerous. When a gardener brings back native plants, wildlife and insects return. The best natural pest and disease control is a balanced ecosystem, and a healthy ecosystem means an increase in pollinators, stronger plants, healthier soil and better absorption of rainwater.

A successful native garden needs to provide four elements for a variety of wildlife; **1** a year round food source which can include seeds, nuts, fruit and insects, **2** water, **3** shelter, and **4** nesting sites. Take any of these necessities away and the species moves on or dies out. Do not use pesticides in the garden. In a balanced garden birds and beneficial insects will keep the harmful insects in check.

All life needs water to drink, bathe and in some cases, generate new life. While a bird bath is a start to providing drinking water, it is not a fresh supply of water for all wildlife. A natural pond or rain garden is a simple solution to provide a water supply. An area that has erosion or excessive dampness after rainstorms may be a perfect site to create a rock-lined streambed or a

Native for Wet sites:
Button Bush,



Native perennial:
New York Ironweed,



Native Shrub:
Summersweet,



Native Tree:
Serviceberry,



Native Grass:
Little Bluestem,



rain garden. Use a natural depression as the basis for a pond. Wildlife will flock to a small pond with shallow edges and a sandy or gravel "beach" where they can bathe or drink. Scatter rocks around as perches for frogs, insects or birds to sunbathe. Be aware, however, that standing water can be a breeding place for mosquitoes.

A diversity of wildlife will call your backyard home if you also provide multiple places for them to shelter and raise their young. A layering of groundcover, perennials, shrubs and trees are needed for a well-rounded habitat. Shredded leaves are an appropriate mulch in a native garden as insects and other wildlife overwinter in leaves. Allow perennials to remain standing through winter for food and shelter. Keep a few dead trees and hollow logs as well as vines on the property for nesting sites and homes for insects.

Just how do you begin to create this natural garden to encourage a diversity of wildlife to call your backyard "home"? One needn't bring in an excavator and create a new or expensive setting. Start with the natural framework of your property and build from the ground up. Don't fight Mother Nature - use it. Observe what wildlife already comes to your garden and where they like to roost: a large outcropping of rocks, a dead tree, or densely planted areas of shrubs. Note the various microclimates and light conditions within your garden and use them as the basic building blocks of a native plant garden.

Your native garden plan should emulate nature with open areas as well as wooded areas. Start out small around the house with a low layer of plants and move outward toward larger plants and trees.

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The garden around the house can be more refined and tidy. As the garden progresses outward it can be more informal and reflective of nature. Our eyes first see the ground layer full of ground-covers, perennials and low shrubs. As the landscape moves further away from the residence it should have a middle layer of larger shrubs and perennials. Finally, emulate the natural landscape with a backdrop of trees and evergreens. This layering creates a more welcoming setting for wildlife and a more private landscape for the homeowner. By building your native garden slower over many seasons you will create a garden that is just the right size for you to maintain. Replace turf grass, invasive non-native plants with natives over several seasons. Start with 5 or 6 basic plants and plant in drifts or groupings.

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Dense plantings help to crowd out non-natives and weeds and require less maintenance. Don't forget to incorporate color, fragrance and texture to tantalize your senses. Bringing wildlife back to your yard creates a balanced and a healthy ecosystem. A native garden will reduce the need for watering, weeding, mulching and pesticides. A healthier garden is a healthier you.

wet sites:

Pickereel weed, Blue Flag Iris, Sweet Flag Iris, Arrow Arum, Swamp Milkweed, Cardinal Flower, Three Way Sedge, Three Square Bullrush, Soft Rush, Shallow Sedge, Button Bush, Pussy Willow, Smooth Alder

Native perennials:

Aster, Boneset, Joe Pye Weed, Turtlehead, Coneflower, Goldenrod, New York Ironweed, Blazing Star, Bee Balm, Beard Tongue, Amsonia, Black Eyed Susan, and Cinnamon, Ostrich and Sensitive Ferns

Native Shrubs:

Winterberry, Inkberry, Virginia Sweetspire, Chokeberry, Red Twig Dogwood, Silky Dogwood, Spicebush, Summersweet, Cranberry Bush Viburnum, Oak leaf Hydrangea

Native Trees:

Black and Green Ash, Sweet Gum, Native Dogwood, Redbud, Eastern Red Cedar, Pin and Willow Oak, River Birch, Red Maple, Serviceberry, Sweet Bay Magnolia, Hornbeam, Beech, White Pine

Native Grasses:

Bluestem, Switch Grass