

The Importance of Native Plants



Did you know that what you plant in your yard can help your environment? Native plants and trees in your yard provide important habitat for wildlife including pollinators like birds, bees and butterflies. As city and communities continue to grow, it has become necessary to look at our own backyards as a place of greenspace to keep Ohio's natural environmental heritage in place. Native organisms including mammals, birds, amphibians, and insects can all be attracted with the use of native plants, thus creating an intricate web of life all in your backyard for you to enjoy.

What is a native plant you may ask? Simply put, a native plant is one that that occurs naturally in the place where it evolved. Ohio has a great number of native plants that originated in the surrounding area including white pine, common juniper, and scarlet elder. Native plants in Ohio are known for their deep root systems underground. Their thick and hardy roots anchor the plant well into the soil and sturdy the plant during hard rainfalls or snow events. Their roots are also spread out to absorb nutrients and water from the soil. For example, native spring wild flowers provide nectar to little flies that, in return, pollinate the flowers. These flies become food for early spring birds. Coincidentally, native plants produce seeds and berries when the birds need them to feed. Bird droppings then disperse the seeds for a chance of new life to begin. Plants and animals that have evolved together depend upon each other for survival. Using native plants in public and private landscapes and gardens can help reduce the threat of invasive non-native species to the region's biodiversity.

Native plants in the garden:

- *Attract native wildlife
- * Reduce soil erosion with their long roots
- * Require less fertilizer and watering because they are adapted to our local climate
- * Promote native regional biodiversity
- * Thrive under natural conditions
- *Connect people to nature *

Native plants can be hard to come by with invasive non-native plants dominating sales in garden centers and nurseries. However, more nurseries are carrying native plants and there are local resources to help you find the plants that will work best in your yard and garden. Most Soil and Water Conservation Districts host tree sales in the Spring and additionally sell Rain Garden Plant kits with all native plants throughout the early summer. A rain garden is an attractive, landscaped areas planted with perennial native plants, designed to capture and filter storm water runoff from impervious surfaces around the home, such as rooftops and driveways.

For more information, contact the Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District at 216/524-6580. Don't forget to check out our Conservation Crusader webpage for videos on native plants and other conservation topics.
<http://www.cuyahogawcd.org/ConservationCrusader.htm>



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