

Growing Native Plants for Biodiversity

Support Biodiversity and Midwest Native Plant Society by Planting Natives and Purchasing your Sign!

What exactly are Native Plants?

Native plants are those that occur naturally within a defined area. They evolved over thousands of years, shaped by the local climate conditions, geology, flora and fauna. Native plants include trees, shrubs, vines, annuals and perennials.

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the shortened form of two words "biological" and "diversity". It refers to all the variety of life that can be found on Earth (plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms). Ecosystems are comprised of all these organisms interconnected in a complex, stable and sustainable network of life. The more biodiverse an ecosystem the better it's able to withstand change and negative impacts.

Why care about Native Plants?

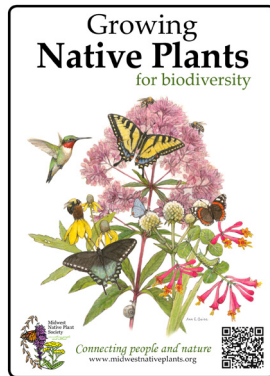
Not only are native plants fascinating, beautiful and evolved to thrive in the local landscape, they serve an essential role in biodiversity. Besides providing nutritious leaves for countless herbivores, they serve an essential role by providing nectar, pollen and *specific host food for native insects and their larvae*, which in turn, sustain local and migrating birds, bats and other wildlife. Native plants are the foundation of biodiversity!

How many Native Plants do I need to make a difference?

Studies tell us that every time that you add a productive native plant to your landscape you improve your local food web. Moreover, woody plants (trees and shrubs) support more wildlife species than herbaceous plants but nectaring plants are necessary for pollinators. The important thing is to get native plants of all types into your landscape. Since most of our suburbs contain around 90% lawn that provides neither food nor shelter, even small additions of native plants can quickly make a big difference.

How do I start?

Creating a biodiverse landscape with native plants is a rewarding step by step process. Start planting a few natives at a time. Remember it is a work in progress. As you add more plants they will begin attracting butterflies, moths, birds and more! The important thing is to get started. According to author Dr. Doug Tallamy in his latest book, *Nature's Best Hope*, planting "keystone" species (plants that have a "disproportionately large effect on the abundance and diversity of other species in an ecosystem") is a successful way to start or to add to your native landscape palette. The National Wildlife Federation has a website that provides keystone species for your area just by entering your zip code at <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>.



Remove Invasive Species.

Habitat loss and invasive plants are the leading cause of native biodiversity loss. Invasive plant species spread aggressively and can displace native plants, create monocultures and provide little benefit to wildlife. *Never introduce exotic plants that are known to be invasive.* More information can be found on the Ohio Invasive Plants Council website at: <https://www.oipc.info>.

Native Species -- Straight and Nativars.

It's always best to grow plants that are native to your region or near by. For example, if you live in southern Ohio, Michigan natives may not be as beneficial as those found closer to your region. Always keep in mind specific growing requirements such as sun/shade tolerance, soil moisture, soil pH, etc.

Cultivars of native plants are often termed "nativars" (usually a 'catchy' name is listed after the species name). They are propagated for aesthetic characteristics such as unique flower and foliage color, flower density or size. These adaptations, however, may reduce their value as a food source by insects. When purchasing plants to create a food web that supports biodiversity we recommend using straight native species when possible.

Limit use of Pesticides and Herbicides.

These compounds, through their production, use, and disposal, adversely affect biodiversity on which life depends; the loss of biodiversity worldwide is well documented. Many of these "icides" -- insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and rodenticides -- often unintentionally cause harm to wildlife, pets and people. For more information, visit www.beyondpesticides.org.

Purchase your Sign and Spread the Word!

By displaying your "Growing Native Plants for Biodiversity" sign you are showing your pledge to making your landscape a nature-friendly environment. It's a great conversation starter with your friends and neighbors. *The more landscapes planted with native plants the more positive the impact on biodiversity.*

For more information on getting started with natives and purchasing your sign visit: www.midwestnativeplants.org.



Midwest Native Plant Society, Inc.
www.midwestnativeplants.org

Sign artwork by Ann E. Geise
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