

Why Use Native Plants?

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There are several definitions of the term "native plant." The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources describes a native plant as one which occurred within this region before settlement by Europeans. Native plants include the ferns, grasses, perennial and annual wildflowers, woody trees, shrubs, and vines that covered Penn's Woods when the first settlers came.

Native plants preserve Pennsylvania's biodiversity.

Biodiversity means the number and variety of living things in a specific region. Our native wildlife, especially birds, butterflies, pollinators, and other organisms, evolved with the plants here; many can only feed on plants they co-evolved with. Unfortunately, unwise development has led to large expanses of lawn and exotic (nonnative) plants replacing natural areas. If your garden has no native plants, it becomes an ecological desert for the pollinating insects that are essential to our survival. Without insects to pollinate our crops, we would have none, or humans would need to perform the task. This is occurring in China where they use costly hand pollination for some fruit crops due to the lack of pollinating bees. Additionally, native plants are needed to support songbirds by supplying food for the insects that most baby birds require. They provide the habitat (food, cover, and places to rear their young) that wildlife needs. Without native plants, our wildlife is at risk of extinction.

Native plants are generally easier to grow and cheaper to maintain.

Native plants are well adapted to our climate and soils because they evolved here. This means they are generally easier to care for once they are established, needing little or no pruning, deadheading, watering, or fertilizing. *Large lawns and showy exotic plants demand high levels of fossil fuel use, fertilizers, pesticides, and supplemental water, making natives a less costly option.* Also native plant gardens reduces noise pollution from mowers, blowers, and trimmers.

Where to Buy Native Plants

Do not take native plants from the wild as this is a threat to their populations and a disruption of the ecosystem. Purchase from a reputable source. Your favorite nursery may stock them, or you may wish to visit one that specializes in natives.

Tips on How to Use Native Plants

Here are some suggestions on how to use native plants:

- Integrate them into your perennial borders.
- Naturalize a large area such as a meadow or woodland with more aggressive natives.
- Create a rain garden with natives; their root systems stabilize and hold the soil.
- Replace unsightly and invasive plants with natives.
- Reduce the size of your lawn by adding a bed of native plants.
- Create a butterfly garden.

Educate yourself about native plants that are native to your area. Obtain reliable, unbiased information from university or government publications and websites. Visit native plant nurseries and preserves to get ideas. Then use native plants in your garden, knowing that you are preserving biodiversity, enhancing the livability of your home, and ensuring a legacy for your children and grandchildren.

The Green Team's purpose is to "raise awareness of and advocate for the care of creation." Our mission is to support and encourage creation care ministries, raise awareness, model creation care advocacy consistent with ELCA teachings in our faith communities and public life.

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