

Why Are Native Plants Important?

- ❖ Native plants are equipped to live with the local climate, soil types, and animals. Plants and animals that have evolved together depend upon each other for survival. Native plants and animals form a complex network of relationships, an intricate web of life with each species' life cycle highly dependent on the others. For example, native plants do a better job of providing food and shelter for native wild animals than do introduced plants. Native plants are the foundation of our natural ecosystems and protect biodiversity. **Biodiversity**, short for biological diversity, describes the variety of life found in an ecosystem.
- ❖ Native plants are used in the development of new foods, medicines and industrial products.
- ❖ Native plants have developed their own natural defenses against many pests and diseases, requiring less pesticide use. Reducing or eliminating the use of pesticides keeps these toxins out of our watersheds.
- ❖ Native plant communities provide opportunities for people to experience and appreciate Pennsylvania's rich natural heritage. They are what make different regions unique. Native plants help connect people to nature.

Go Native with these 6 Basic Guidelines:

(Taken from "Landscaping with Native Plants" a PA DCNR publication)

Native plants are being lost to habitat destruction, invasive plants and introduced pests and diseases. However, action can be taken to protect and enhance the remaining diversity of beautiful and often useful native plants throughout Pennsylvania using the following six basic guidelines.

1. Protect native plant communities and minimize habitat destruction.

The most important guideline is to conserve already existing areas of native plants as a whole functioning ecosystem. The easiest, least expensive, and best way to conserve Pennsylvania's plant heritage is to protect existing native plant communities from further disturbance. If disturbance is necessary, strive for minimum habitat destruction. In some cases it may be necessary to plant native species and remove invasive, introduced species.

2. Landscape with native plants.

Native plant communities have been destroyed in many areas. Intelligent landscaping in parks, yards and campuses can help restore this loss. Well-chosen native plants can flourish in these landscapes. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)-Bureau of Forestry (BOF) recommends avoiding rare, endangered, and threatened plants and, instead, choosing native plant species which grow commonly throughout the state. These hardy and adaptable plants do well in a wide variety of conditions and have a much better chance of success.

3. Learn more about native plants.

Learn what plants are native in your area. There are many field guides for native trees and wildflowers that can get you started.

4. Buy nursery-grown native plants.

Most retail nurseries and mail-order catalogs now offer native plants. The more consumers request native plants, the more this supply will grow.

5. Do not remove native plants from the wild.

Taking native plants from the wild depletes native populations. In addition, many wild-collected plants do not survive transplanting. Prevent wild-collecting of plants by making sure that plants you buy are grown at a nursery.

6. Practice responsible landscaping techniques.

The first rule of responsible landscaping is to plant the right plants in the right environment and never introduce invasive plants to your landscape that will aggressively spread off your property and invade native plant communities. They can drastically alter ecosystems and give you and your neighbors maintenance headaches for years to come. Also, remove nearby invasive plants and take out severely diseased plants, or ones with insect infestations.

When landscaping with native plants, it is important to choose plants that will grow well at the site: wet or dry, shade or sun, acid or neutral soil. Many native plants attract beneficial insects which help control pests, so try creating habitat for "good bugs."