

# *Benefits of Using Native Plants*

Landscaping with native plants improves the environment. Native plants are hardy because they have adapted to the local conditions. Once established, native plants do not need pesticides, fertilizers, or watering. Not only is this good for the environment, it saves time and money. A native landscape does not need to be mowed like a conventional lawn. This reduces the demand for non-renewable resources and improves the water and air quality. The periodic burning (or mowing when burning is not practical) required for maintenance of a prairie landscape mimics the natural prairie cycle and is much better for the environment.

Landscaping with native wildflowers and grasses helps return the area to a healthy ecosystem. Diverse varieties of birds, butterflies and animals, are attracted to the native plants, thus enhancing the biodiversity of the area. The beauty of native wildflowers and grasses creates a sense of place, both at home and work. The native plants increase our connection to nature, help educate our neighbors, and provide a beautiful, peaceful place to relax.

**Reduced Use of Pesticides** Since native plants have adapted to local conditions, they are more resistant to pest problems. Sometimes individuals use non-persistent pesticides, which break down into harmless components, before sowing native plant seeds to minimize competition from the weeds. Once the native plants are established, pesticides are seldom needed.

**Improved Air Quality** Native landscaping practices can help improve air quality on a local, regional and global level. Locally, smog (ground level ozone) and air toxics can be drastically reduced by the virtual elimination of the need for lawn maintenance equipment (lawn mowers, weed edgers, leaf blowers, etc.) which is fueled by gasoline, electricity or batteries. All of these fuel types are associated with the emissions of the following air pollutants: carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), nitrous oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), VOCs (volatile organic compounds) and air toxics such as benzene. Gasoline lawn and garden equipment, on average, produces 5% of ozone-forming VOCs in areas with smog problems. This equipment also emits toxics and particulates.



Regionally, NO<sub>x</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> released from lawn maintenance equipment react with water in the atmosphere to form acid rain. Globally, native landscaping practices help to combat global warming in two ways. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is a major greenhouse gas and by reducing the use of lawn maintenance equipment, the associated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are also reduced. Native plants help to reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere by taking in CO<sub>2</sub> and storing the carbon in the body of the plants, roots and soil. Native plants work much better than traditional mowed grass as a carbon sink due to their extensive root systems and increased ability to retain and store water.

**Improved Water Quality** In conventional landscaping, pesticides are often wrongly applied at times when target insects are not vulnerable. Overuse and inappropriate use often kill beneficial insects and other wildlife. Less than 10% of all insects are harmful to plants. Pesticides have the potential to cause serious human health problems when not handled properly or applied according to the label directions. By eliminating or minimizing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, these pollutants will not run-off into streams, lake, and bays. This improves the quality of the water and the aquatic life in it. In healthy water systems, natural controls, such as fish, frogs, and snails will help keep insect populations under control and reduce algae buildup.

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