

## Benefits of Planting Native Plants



You may wonder if a plant grows here in Newtown, isn't it a native? Not necessarily, because many plants have been imported from other places around the globe. Native plants have developed over hundreds of thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem. They have co-evolved with pollinators for mutual benefit, and they support plant-eating insects which are food for many wildlife species.

**According to Connecticut Audubon, native plants provide food and shelter for 10-15 times more species of birds, butterflies, and other wildlife than non-native species.**

Native plants are perfect for a variety of landscape conditions, whether full sun, part sun, or shade. Many have showy flowers, produce colorful fruits and gorgeous fall color. These plants flourish because they are meant to be here, adapted to our local soils and climate. Our natives don't require pesticides like many introduced ornamentals. Insects that do feed on native plants are rarely numerous enough to cause harm to the plants. That is what they are meant to do. "A plant that does not feed something isn't doing its job," according to Doug Tallamy, *Bringing Nature Home*.

Natives ensure healthy ecosystems, which benefit us by keeping our air and waterways clean and preventing soil erosion. Landscaping with native plants can help to combat climate change. Reducing lawn areas not only saves time and money, but cuts down on noise and carbon pollution from lawn mower exhaust. Planting long-living trees like maples and oaks is extremely helpful for sequestering carbon dioxide emissions. Also, native plants require less water once established; conserving water is increasingly critical as droughts become more frequent.

Native plants connect us to our unique natural surroundings, and there are real health benefits from including these plants in our landscapes. Lawns and bark-mulched landscapes create the need for artificial fertilizers, chemical pesticides, and herbicides. Choosing native plants that require less care once established creates healthier landscapes for ourselves, our children, our pets and the community without chemicals. Researchers have found that natural settings can actually reduce depression and improve psychological well-being. Being in nature reduces stress hormones and has been shown to have a positive impact on emotions such as anger, sadness, and tension, according to the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Want to include native plants in your landscape but wonder where to purchase them? There are some local nurseries that deal exclusively with native plants, such as Earth Tones in Woodbury. A longer list can be found on our website. Some traditional garden centers do offer a few native plants, but since they may not be labeled or displayed together, you may have to ask. Also, be careful of 'cultivars' with fancy names like 'Rainbow Sherbet'. Extreme changes to flowers are unrecognizable to our native pollinators. Some lack pollen and nectar; others pollinators cannot access. This is often the trade-off for fancy flowers.

A good way to establish a native landscape is by growing the plants yourself. It is easier than you might think, and the winter seed sowing method could give you a head start for next season. This method simply involves planting native seeds in an enclosed container with drainage and placing it outdoors during winter months for germination in spring. It is a very inexpensive and environmentally friendly way to grow native plants. Winter sowing eliminates the need for "hardening off," the gradual introduction of seedlings to outdoor conditions. Also, many native seeds require 30-90 days of cold temperatures for stratification, breaking down the seed shell and allowing germination to begin. Milkweed, for instance, requires prolonged exposure to cold temperatures in order to germinate.

Just in time for getting started this season, there will be a free presentation, Winter Seed Sowing, at the Booth Library on January 9th, 2023 at 6:00 pm. You can contact the library to register at [chboothlibrary.org](http://chboothlibrary.org) or call at 203-426-4533. We hope you can attend and jump start your plans for spring planting of native plants.