

The Benefits of Native Plants in Your Garden



Native plants are those that have been in a region for hundreds of years, before commerce introduced new plant species. When native species are outcompeted by aggressive, non-native plants (invasive species) or replaced by non-native plants (such as our lawns), their value and services are lost.

Using native plants in your garden is a wonderful way to beautify your yard and simplify landscape maintenance while benefitting native wildlife and supporting our natural environment.* In addition to their inherent, intrinsic value, the presence of native plants is critically important and beneficial for a number of reasons. For example, they:

- **Reduce Garden Maintenance & Save Money.** Gardens planted with natives need less work and money and require fewer products to keep them healthy and thriving. Native plants are accustomed to the local weather and soil conditions so they grow vigorously and have defense mechanisms to fight off pests. Therefore less water, fertilizers, and pesticides are needed.
- **Provide Pest Control.** It's counterintuitive, but the more insects and the more types of insects in your garden, the fewer pest problems you'll have. Nature has a way of providing checks and balances, so native plants supporting native insects provide you with free, natural and non-toxic pest control.
- **Provide Food Sources for Insects.** Many native, beautiful and beneficial insect species rely on native plants for food sources, such as nectar and plant material. They often cannot digest and do not recognize non-native plants as resources. (Think of the Monarch butterfly and milkweed connection, for example, where the larvae feed ONLY on milkweed leaves.)
- **Support Crop Pollinators.** Almost all the food we eat, whether plant or animal (because animals rely on plants for food) depends on pollination. Many native insect pollinators, like bumble and mason bees, are in decline. Planting native species supports them so they can survive and help pollinate our crops.
- **Secure Wildlife Habitat.** Gardens (and meadows and forests) filled with native plants are inherently custom-designed to support local wildlife species by fulfilling their often unique needs for food, shelter, and nesting materials.
- **Bolster Biodiversity.** Many of the native insects that rely on native plants as a food source are in turn a food source for local amphibians and bird species. The presence of native plants sustains the delicate food web and buttresses against the loss of types and abundance of many local species.

For more information and for lists of native plant, check out these resources: [Native Plants for New England Rain Gardens](#), [Native Plant Trust](#), and [UCONN New England Native Plant Initiative](#).

*Soak Up the Rain New Hampshire strongly encourages the use of at least 80% native plant species in your garden. The occasional use of non-native, non-aggressive ornamental plant species to enhance your garden is, of course, acceptable. Just be sure to check the status of the non-native plants you plan to purchase, as some invasive (non-native and aggressive) plants are still sold at nurseries. See the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food's lists of Prohibited and Restricted Invasive Species as well as suggestions for alternatives at the [NHDAMF Invasive Plants](#) website.