

Natural Area Preservation
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NATIVE PLANTS

What is a native species?

Native plants are plants that were here before Europeans settled in Michigan in the 1700s. Since then, thousands of plants and animals have been introduced and become naturalized in North America at an unprecedented rate and scale. Naturalized means these non-native (sometimes called introduced or alien) species are capable of establishing and sustaining themselves in the environment without our care. These plants can grow to the exclusion of native plants, becoming what are called invasive plants. Approximately 30% of Michigan's 2,600 plant species are alien plants that have become naturalized, largely in the last hundred years.

Can I garden with native plants?

Absolutely! Native plants can be quite beautiful. But don't think that looks are all these plants have- they're also well-adapted to the local climate and ecosystem, meaning they require less time and effort from their gardener. Native plants generally require little fertilizer, pesticides, or supplemental watering to keep them looking great. Humans aren't the only ones who find them attractive, either- native plants provide valuable habitat to birds, insects, mammals, amphibians, and other wildlife. If you're having a problem with too much water in your garden, they're great for that, too: the deep, fibrous roots of native plants increases rainwater infiltration, reducing stormwater runoff and puddles in your yard. When you garden with native plants, you get all these benefits, PLUS you're helping to conserve and promote the aesthetics and health of plant communities throughout southeast Michigan!

Where should my plants come from?

Many plant species that are native to Michigan have wide geographic ranges. Because they are likely to be genetically different from region to region, and therefore possibly unsuited to your conditions, it is best to use plants grown in your area. Plants from a local nursery are well adapted locally and are usually the safest to use in the long run. For example, a flowering dogwood that is raised in southern Ohio may not survive our winters nearly as well as a dogwood that was raised in Michigan. If you are unable to locate the desired plants locally, try to find them from other Michigan sources. If that's not possible, look in Wisconsin, Minnesota, northern Illinois, or northern Ohio.

Where can I find these plants?

As native plants increase in popularity, more and more nurseries are stocking them. Check with your local nursery to see if it has locally-grown native plants. Nursery staff can help match the appropriate native species to your specific site requirements. You can also obtain them from local native plant producers. The Michigan Native Plant Producers Association (MNPPA, mnppa.org) is a great resource for purchasing those plants. They offer an online Source Guide with a list of nearly 400 native plants and which member nurseries sell them.

A word of caution: While many nurseries carry native plants, it is important to determine where they came from before making your purchase. Collecting plants in the wild can devastate local plant populations, so insist on plants propagated from division, cuttings, or seed. Additionally, propagated plants tend to be healthier than wild-collected plants, so they're not only better for natural areas, they're better for your garden.

Here are some references to help get you started!

NAP offers a brochure series that can help you. Each brochure offers a list of natives with short written descriptions and planting information for each suggested plant and a list of reference material. You can order these brochures by sending in the order form found on our website at www.a2gov.org/nativeplants, or you can stop by our office and pick some up. Brochures available include:

Native Trees	Native Vines	Native Ferns
Native Shrubs	Native Perennials	Native Grasses, Rushes, & Sedges

There are many in-depth resources on the internet about native plants. We recommend:

- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (wildflower.org/plants)
- Wild Ones (www.for-wild.org/chapters/annarbor/)
- USDA Plants Database (plants.usda.gov)
- NatureServe (natureserve.org/explorer)
- Native American Ethnobotany (herb.umd.umich.edu)
- University of Michigan Herbarium (herbarium.lsa.umich.edu)
- Michigan Native Features Inventory (<http://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/>)

The following reference books can provide excellent information on landscaping, plant conservation, and site requirements for specific plants:

- Gardener's Guide to Plant Conservation. Marshall, N. 1993
- Gardening with Native Wild Flowers. Jones, S. Jr., and L. Foote. 1990
- Michigan Flora, Parts I and II. Voss, E. 1985
- Michigan Trees. Barnes, B. and W. H. Wagner. 2004 (1981 1st ed.)
- Michigan Wildflowers. Smith, H. 1966
- Nature's Design: A Practical Guide to Natural Landscaping. Smyser, C. 1984
- Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for Urban and Rural America. Hightshoe, G. 1988
- Shrubs of Michigan. Billington, C. 1949