



Whether you are new to gardening or an old hand – if you have not tried some of the wonderful native plants readily available, give them a whirl. They will add beauty, color, and interesting structures and textures to your home landscape. And you may be pleasantly surprised at how they will intrigue you and your garden visitors.

In deciding on and searching for plant material, consider the question – what is a native plant? Native plants are those that have their origins within a considered area – whether that is a 20 acre prairie site, an entire state, a national region, an entire country, either the U.S. or in other parts of the world. The term native is definitely relative to perspective. Keep in mind that while we see many plants growing in naturalized settings, that does not necessarily mean that they are true native plants. Whatever specific origin area you are looking for, seed source, not just plant source – can be an important part of that native plant equation.

Do a little work on the front end before getting the checkbook out. Consider the light levels, soil, moisture, pH, and nutrient levels naturally available in your landscape to nurture those potentially new additions. Once those are thought out, begin the search for plants that will flourish within those conditions and meet your design needs. Native plants have the same diverse requirements as other plant material, so a bit of consideration is in order. Understanding the nature, habitat and origin of any plant you are interested in will help to ensure a correct placement and care for a long and productive life. (And that front end work can save you a bundle in replacement plants or additives.) When you begin to look into native plants, you will discover a huge world. There are wonderful nature areas that are easily accessible to the general public, with staff and volunteers waiting and willing to help you through the discovery process. Don't forget about all of the fantastic books available to help guide you as well.

The native plant choices are diverse, allowing you to have a full season of natives within your landscape whether you have full, dry sun or dense, moist shade. Do consider bloom time, because we all enjoy the pretty flowers, whatever their form, but also look at the texture of the flower head when not in bloom. There are many that will hold distinctive shape or change color as they pass through that bloom period and provide interest in following

seasons. Some that can provide interest while in seed are *Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red' (digitalis), *Echinacea purpurea* (purple coneflower), *Eryngium yuccifolium* (rattlesnake master), *Liatris* (blazing star), *Rudbeckia* (black-eyed susan), *Sedum*, *Stachys officinalis* (lamb's ear), and *Veronia fasciculata* (ironweed). For other textural interests, try *Dodecatheon radicans* (shooting star) for its smooth, shiny leaves, and *Petalostemum purpureum* (purple prairie clover) with its small narrowly pointed leaves will add a soft, gentle spike to the landscape. *Allium stellatum* (prairie onion) with smooth, vertical stems, *Polygonatum biflorum* (Soloman's seal) that has beautifully arching branches, and *Verbena stricta* (hoary vervain) with its fun hairy leaves will all add a different look to an appropriate mix of plants.

Grasses and sedges are gaining in popularity for use in the home landscape and worthy of any garden setting. There are so many to choose from - perennial and annual as well as invasive and non-invasive – so again, make sure to do a bit of homework before purchase to make sure you are getting what you expect to receive. Some native grasses to start with: *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster', *Carex*, *Miscanthus sinensis*, *Panicum virgatum*, and *Sporobolus heterolepis*. When placed appropriately for their environmental requirements, grasses will be healthy and add an interesting new level of structure and movement to the garden. Upright, statuesque forms will bring swaying height and verticality to areas that need a lift without the permanence of a physical structure. Arching forms create pockets of movement, catching light at unexpected heights. During the growing season, the seed heads will delight with colors from silver and gold to lavender and red with stems glowing in a multitude of green shades.

Remember to purchase your plants from a reputable source or grower (we have many in this area) and never dig plants or collect seed on your own without express landowner permission and after checking into the laws. Many native species are protected and trespassing laws in this area are seriously enforced.