

A Guide to Native Plants

Preserving What's Left, Cultivating a New Vision



Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) at Perrot State Park prairie before rain. 2009 Photo Contest Finalist—Scott Reber

Through centuries of adaptations, native plant species have perfected their roles in the ecosystems in which they have evolved. They build soil, contributing to microbial and insect life underground; they provide food and shelter for native mammals, bees and other pollinators and birds.

Habitat loss and urban sprawl appear inevitable, but imagine the positive impact if new developments included native flowers, trees and shrubs around new homes, sacrificing even a modest portion of what would be mowed lawn to a native rain garden or small prairie planting. Imagine the ecological improvement

if the landscaping standard were the native Red Maple, not the invasive Norway Maple tree, or if native Columbine became widely recognized as a better hummingbird attractor than an *Aquilegia* cultivar.



Bringing Nature Home

Douglas Tallamy

This revolutionary book explains the unbreakable link between native plants and native wildlife. Gardeners and restorationists have the power to make a significant contribution toward sustaining biodiversity. 358 pages.

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Natives vs. Aliens

Increasing public interest in native landscaping has generated more commercial activity, often fostering confusion over terms used to describe plants. At Prairie Moon Nursery we handle only native species, those indigenous to North America prior to European settlement.

Some other companies, however, sell species advertised as 'wildflowers' that are alien species, originating outside North America. A few examples of naturalized aliens that should be avoided are Oxeye (Shasta) Daisy, Bouncing Bet, Queen Anne's Lace, Chicory, Dame's Rocket, Bird's Foot Trefoil, and Crown Vetch.

The dangers of planting alien species have been well-documented. Their introduction has resulted in such tragedies as the loss of wetland plant communities to the aggressive dominant alien Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) or the smothering of our North American woodland plants by the non-native Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*).

Also entering the native plant trade are horticulturally selected species known as *cultivars*. In some cases the breeding selection is to favor certain characteristics such as uniformity of size and color or aggressiveness and heavy seed set. Cultivars may not have the genetic variety of their wild relatives, may be overly aggressive, or may deprive native pollinators of their traditional food sources.

We believe that alien, naturalized species and cultivars should be avoided in restoration work and native landscaping, particularly when they might contaminate native gene pools.

With the wide array of truly attractive native plants available, why degrade the environment with aggressive, weedy non-natives that don't co-exist with native ecosystems?

Terms & Concepts

Some of the terminology you will find throughout this catalog may be new to you. Since our roots, literally and figuratively, are in prairie restoration, we use associated vegetation ecology terms such as *forb* and *mesic soil*. We also list all plants and seeds by their Genus/species name, also known as Latin or scientific name. This avoids the confusion that often arises when a plant carries several common names.

Forbs, simply put, are wildflowers. The term forb is often used in vegetation ecology, specifically when describing flowering plants in a field, prairie or meadow that are not graminoids (grasses).

Mesic Soil is medium-moisture soil. Other soil moisture terms would be hydric (wet) and xeric (dry) soils. Each species in the catalog is described with a five-point scale to indicate preference for soil moisture-holding capacity. (See p.12)

Sun Exposure: To describe the amount of sun in which a plant grows well, we don't use terms like *full sun* or *partial shade*. We refer instead to the plant's natural habitat: Prairie, Savanna or Woodland. (See p.12)

Planting Time: While spring is often thought of as planting time, most native seeds should be planted outdoors in the fall because many have built-in dormancy mechanisms that prohibit germination until over-wintering occurs. We call this over-wintering process *cold, moist stratification*. (Learn more about Germination Codes on p.13)

If you will be artificially stratifying, be aware that some of the seeds require relatively long stratification times (up to 120 days), so it is important to order these species early.

Planning a Native Plant Community

Planting a complete ecosystem, including forbs (wildflowers) and grasses, creates a more natural effect. Once established, the dense, fibrous roots of the native grasses and forbs keep new weeds from finding a home.

Where weeds may be a problem, select a taller, more aggressive mix of flowers and grasses. Heavy, rich soils support larger plants. Shorter species prefer drier habitats and thus can be difficult to establish in heavy soils.

Diversity is the key to many native landscape requirements. All of our designed seed mixes (p.54-59) have species that bloom throughout the growing season, attracting birds, butterflies and other wildlife to your site all year. Diversity also will create structure or texture for your planting. Once mature, it will have pockets of taller and shorter vegetation, giving your planting a natural appeal.

For a more interesting landscape, intersperse different species as appropriate to create transition zones. If transitioning from one site condition to another—for example, from a dry to a wet area—combine portions of two site-specific seed mixes and plant that blend for a transition zone.

Well-designed plantings contain flowers that bloom throughout the season, from spring to fall, and provide different colors and textures. Many grasses are at their prime in late fall and continue to display interesting forms even in the dead of winter, when the flowers are gone.

When to Plant? See p.61