



### Native Plant Gardens

More and more homeowners are replacing exotic ornamental plants with **native plant gardens** (also called “**conservation landscapes**”). What explains this growing trend? Well, native plant gardens

- Look great!
- Are good for the environment because they don't need chemical pesticides and fertilizers, which wash into local streams when it rains
- Attract colorful birds and butterflies
- Save you time – they don't require much work (and no mowing!)
- Save you money on all those pesticides and fertilizers you no longer need

To create your own native plant garden, follow the same steps you would for any gardening project: Make a plan, buy and install plants, and maintain the garden.

#### 1) Make a Plan

To determine the best location and native plants for your garden, start with a list of yard conditions and considerations:

- How do you use your yard now – and how would you like to use it in the future?
- How much turf grass (lawn) are you willing to replace with native plants?
- How would you like a native plant garden to function? (Are you beautifying your front yard? Soaking up rain water in a “swampy” backyard? Blocking the view of your neighbor's hot tub?)
- Where is water pooling in your yard or running into storm drains? (Grab an umbrella and head outside the next time it rains.)
- Which area(s) of the yard can you see from the indoor rooms you use most? (Placing a garden where you can see wildlife from inside can increase the fun.)
- Which areas of your yard are in shade and sun? For how many hours of the day?
- Do you have preferences on plant color, fragrance, and size?
- Are you hoping to attract specific birds, butterflies, or other wildlife?

Use stakes or a rope to mark off the area of turf grass you plan to dig up. Dig up a soil sample to determine what you may need to add to the soil to keep plants healthy. (You may want to check the location of utility lines before you start digging.) You also need a plan to dispose of the grass you remove – you could try to plant it in another spot, compost it, or take it to the dump.

#### 2) Buy and Install Plants

The goal of a native plant garden is to soak up the rain water that runs off your yard, carrying pollutants directly into storm drains – and local streams. The two things that will help stop this water are soil quality and plant selection.

**Soil Quality:** The soil around our homes is often hard-packed clay, which causes water to run off quickly. Improving soil quality is as easy as adding compost, which makes the soil fluffy and helps water soak in. Compost is also rich in nutrients that help plants grow quickly and stay healthy. After removing turf grass, loosen the soil with a tiller, rake, or shovel and mix in two inches of compost before installing native plants.

**Plant Selection:** The deeper the roots, the more water plants will hold (and keep out of storm drains). Native plants are generally deeper rooted than non-natives – and have much deeper roots than turf grass. If you have a few favorites that are not natives, it's okay to keep them in the garden. Just aim for at least 75 percent native plants.

#### 3) Maintain the Garden

As with any new garden, it will take time for native plants to become established and fill in. For the first few growing seasons, weed control is important to ensure plants take root (mulch can help prevent weeds), and you may need to protect plants from deer and other wildlife. You may also need to water plants until they become established (a rain barrel can help you do this).