

## **The four Es of Native Plants**

### **Why Use Native Plants? The Four "E's" of Native Plants**

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#### **Esthetics**

Native plants are beautiful. While we busied ourselves with plowing up our prairies a hundred years ago, the English were planting our native wildflowers in their gardens! Natives offer four seasons of interest in the landscape. Trees and shrubs offer flowers and foliage in spring and summer, and bark, berries, and needles in winter. Prairie flowers provide color all summer, and prairie grasses show off their golds and crimsons all winter. Native plants attract a wide variety of exciting wildlife, especially songbirds and butterflies. These welcome visitors add a new dimension to the landscape in every season of the year.

#### **Ecology**

Native plants are adapted to the growing conditions of the region. Over the millennia, they have adapted to the extremes of summer heat and drought, as well as winter cold. Pesticides are seldom required by native plants. Insecticides should never be used in a native landscape, as they kill beneficial insects and disrupt the natural ecological balance. Native plants form the foundation of the food chain that supports insects and other invertebrates, which feed the birds, small mammals, and a variety of other creatures. Fertilizers should not be necessary when the appropriate native plants are selected to match the prevailing soil and light conditions. Irrigation is not required for native plants to thrive (except under severe drought conditions). Even under extreme conditions, most native plants have specific adaptive strategies that help them survive the tough times. Deep-rooted prairie flowers and grasses exhibit high rates of infiltration of rainwater, re-charging groundwater while reducing runoff and flooding. A high percentage of rainfall runs off lawns and is lost to storm sewers, adding to flooding and ground water depletion. Unsurpassed habitat for wildlife can be created using native plants. Recent investigations indicate that native wildflowers attract up to three times as many different species of pollinators compared to non-native plants. A combination of native trees and shrubs, planted with prairie and wetland plants can create excellent habitat, even in small spaces.

#### **Energy**

The traditional lawn consume large amounts of energy, including gasoline for lawnmowers, petroleum to make herbicides, and energy to mine and fabricate fertilizers. Often the grass clippings and leaves are often carted off in a truck to be land-filled or composted elsewhere. Native landscapes require little energy input once established. Prairies and wet meadows require only semi-annual burning or mowing. Native woodlands rely on "Nature's fertilizer" in the form of autumn leaves to provide time-released nutrients. No need to rake!

#### **Economics**

Lower maintenance is required by native landscapes, which can save a bundle in upkeep! Economics alone can be an excellent reason to "Go Native!" No need to buy fertilizers,

pesticides, fungicides, or other chemicals. No need to pay to install an irrigation system, much less to operate and maintain it. No need to mow your native landscape every week or two, nor hire someone to do it. Reduce equipment repairs on mowers, blowers, and other loud obnoxious machines. Native plants save you time! Who wants to mow the lawn when you can smell the flowers instead?