

Native Plantings

Why choose natives?

Birds are singing, bees are buzzing, and the woodland wildflowers are blooming. With the lengthening daylight, Spring is a time when we start to think about planting in our yards. This year, we encourage you to consider planting native perennials, shrubs, and trees. What is a native plant and why are they important?

A native plant is a part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem. Only plants found in this country before European settlement are considered to be native to the United States. The word native should always be used with a geographic qualifier, as a plant native to one area of a state/country may not be native elsewhere, such as: Southern vs Northern Illinois. For La Grange Park, a Native plant is one that co-evolved with the other flora (plants) and fauna (animals) in our Northern Illinois ecosystems, is adapted to our seasonal climate, grows naturally in zone 5, and requires no extra watering once established.

Choosing native plants helps you and the animals that depend upon our local flora. Because the native plants co-evolved with our local fauna, many species of caterpillar, bees, and birds are species specific - meaning they look for a particular species of plant flower to sip nectar from, such as the cardinal flower with hummingbirds, or a particular plant to lay eggs upon, such as the monarch butterfly with the milkweed. Planting more of these native plants in your yard will help give our local animals food and shelter. Planting natives also benefits you and the community. A balanced ecosystem, once established, soaks up excess rain from storms, protects valuable resources of water and soil, supports human health, and is easier to maintain because it requires less watering and weeding, saving you money and time.

How can you tell if what you want to plant is a native and suitable for your site? This is where your research comes in handy. There are several websites dedicated to helping promote native plantings. Some require just your zip code, some ask for the features you want from your plant such as interesting bark or it attracts hummingbirds. Here are a few websites to investigate.

<https://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-and-plant-advice/tree-species-list/filters>

- * The Morton Arboretum is a local wealth of information. As a tree museum, it has its own plant clinic offering free advice on everything from plant pests and diseases to landscaping options.
- * The tree selector allows you to input your site's conditions and desired tree qualities to produce a list of species best suited to that space. Example inputs: a front yard with Western sun, clay soil, spring flowers, seasonal interest. native to northern illinois.

<https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder>

- * Input your zip code to find native plants that will attract the insects needed to attract birds.

<https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>

- * A favorite - input your zip code and it will offer suggestions of native plants along with the bird species it can attract.

www.homegrownnationalpark.org<<http://www.homegrownnationalpark.org>>

- * Lots of good information on planting natives

In general, depending on soil moisture and sun conditions, some good native options for our area include:

- * Any native oak - oaks support the most wildlife than any other tree species in our area
- * Serviceberry - great for seasonal interest and attracting birds
- * Bottlebrush Buckeye - thrives in wet/shady spots
- * Perennials
 - * Asters
 - * Stiff Goldenrod
 - * Coneflowers
 - * Butterfly Weed
 - * Common Milkweed

We hope that you have found this information helpful. Here's to the perfect planting season ahead.