

Introduction to Using Natives in Landscape Design

There has been a big shift in interest from using imported and hybrid plant varieties to using native plants over the last few years. Perhaps one of the biggest reasons is that growing development has challenged our water resources, and pouring thousands of gallons of water onto ornamental landscapes is seen by some as a waste. Native plants, once they have settled into the landscape, can live with little or no supplemental water.

There are a variety of other reasons to favor natives, as well. As a designer, one of the most important is reinforcing a sense of place. When planning a garden, we work to produce a garden that will not only please the client, but be in harmony with both the architectural style of the house and the local environment. “Seating” the house into the nearby landscape, and then into the wider natural landscape, is best done with either native plants or a mix of native and well adapted plants. Creating these gardens with a uniquely regional character has the added benefit of enabling them to remain stable over time, with much less effort than more traditional gardens.

If plants are properly placed, taking into consideration their soil, water, and light requirements, they not only use less water, but they need little if any fertilization or other maintenance. This means that less fertilizer and pesticides run off into our creeks, larger waterways, and into our aquifers. Many natives also reduce erosion, which can be a big problem in our harsh Texas climate alternating between drought and deluge.

Another benefit is that native plants provide a source of food and shelter for local wildlife. Fruits and berries are eaten by both birds and mammals, and then the seeds are dispersed through their droppings. The plants also host a variety of insects, which are eaten by birds and other wildlife. Foliage sustains a variety of caterpillars, and flowers provide nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies, and pollinating insects such as bees and wasps. Flowers and fruits of the native species mature at the proper time for locally occurring wildlife.

Design with native plants can be naturalistic, in the form of woodlands, meadows, and riparian or wetland environments. For those who favor more traditional garden layout, they also lend themselves to beds and borders, hedges/hedgerows and windbreaks, and adorning supports such as fences and trellis. There is no limit to the ways in which they can be used if we choose them wisely and site them in locations similar to where they naturally occur in the

Native Texas Plants

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wild.

Here in Texas we have a multitude of organizations that both educate and foster use of native plants. Both the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Research Center (www.wildflower.org), and the Austin Grow Green program (

www.growgreen.org

) have printed and online information available for homeowners. The Native Plant Society of Texas (

www.npsot.org

) is another wonderful resource for learning more about using our native plants in the residential landscape.

To access several lists of native Texas plants, [click here](#) .