ILLINOIS NATIVE PLANTS

This brochure is a guide to the characteristics and benefits of selected Illinois plants to help home gardeners choose native plants appropriate for site-specific conditions.

By using native plants in your landscape, you help support healthy ecosystems on land and water. Many are food sources for pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Native plants promote clean water and conservation by reducing the need for garden inputs. They rarely require fertilizer and pesticides when planted in conditions similar to their natural ecosystems. Further, native plants have extensive root systems that, once established, help them thrive without watering.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL NATIVE PLANTINGS

Whether you're a native plant purist or if you simply want to add them to your existing landscape, there are a few things to keep in mind:

1. For design inspiration, look to natural areas, although you may want to interpret your design for the property's scale, which is likely smaller. One strategy is to emphasize an iconic feature, such as a mass planting of Prairie Dropseed with seasonal flowers, to represent a prairie. Another approach is to contain the bed with a defined border. Whatever your design, check local municipal or homeowner’s association ordinances to ensure compliance.

2. Know your property’s site conditions. This informs which plants work best (or do not). Use this brochure to match your site’s sun, moisture, and soil type to plants suited to those conditions.

3. Before digging, call JULIE at 811 or 800-892-0123 or visit www.illinois1call.com to place a local utility request. When you know it’s safe to dig, start by preparing your garden bed.

4. If you are using small plugs, consider soaking them in a small bucket. It can be difficult to rehydrate them once they dry out.

5. To plant, dig a hole as deep and a little wider than the pot the plant came in. If the plant is root-bound, cut off the bottom 1/4” of the roots to stimulate new growth. Place the plant in the hole and backfill with soil. Be sure the level of the plant’s soil matches the level of the ground around it.

6. Add 2-3” of natural shredded mulch, leaving a circle approximately 2” in diameter of bare soil around the stem.

7. Water your new plants every other day for two weeks if it doesn’t rain. After two weeks, additional watering may be necessary if the weather is hot and dry.

8. Your native plant may not bloom in the first two years while it’s busy putting down deep roots. To have color during perennial establishment, you can intermingle them with annuals.

9. Although native plants are often described as low maintenance, this does not mean no maintenance, especially in the first two years when they are establishing root systems. During this critical time, expect to pull weeds and to maintain the mulch layer to discourage unwanted plants.

WHERE TO FIND PLANTS AND MORE INFORMATION

The plant palette is inspired by the Red Oak Rain Garden: www.redoakraingarden.org. The Illinois Native Plant Society webpage lists sources of native plants. For more information about plants, see the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture website.

PUT YOUR NATIVE PLANT GARDEN ON THE MAP

You can be part of a network of native plantings by registering your Illinois native plant garden or rain garden. This helps build community and encourage native plant use.

Add your native plant garden to the map: http://go.illinois.edu/GardenMap

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding provided by Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant.
Produced by C. Eliana Brown, University of Illinois Extension.
Researched and designed by Layne Knoche with contributions from Kate Gardiner, University of Illinois Extension.
Edited by Irene Miles and Joel Davenport, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant.