

# Landscaping with Native Plants

The growing conditions in Kansas and Missouri are tough for gardening. Because we have no mountains or oceans to temper the climate, plants face wild fluctuations in cold, heat, wind and water.

Native plants, however, are already adapted to these extreme conditions and perform beautifully. They have survived for thousands of years by adapting themselves to local conditions. Gardening with natives offers a delightful and diverse treasure of plants for gardeners.

“If one way be better than another, that you may be sure is nature’s way.”

—Aristotle

## What Is a Native Plant?

A **native plant** is one that was growing in North America before the Europeans settled here. These plants have evolved naturally, spreading seeds by animals, birds, wind and water, and adapted themselves to our specific environmental conditions.

What isn’t a native plant? It is a plant spread accidentally or deliberately by human intervention. Sometimes these alien plants become invasive—such as kudzu— and threaten the continued existence of our regional native plants.

There are hundreds of plants that are native to Kansas and Missouri. Page two contains a partial list. There is truly a native annual, perennial, tree, shrub, vines, grass, or fern for every garden.

## Why Go Native?

The reasons for growing native plants are compelling. Consider the following. Native plants:

- Require little maintenance. When properly placed in a habitat that is similar to their native one, they need little supplemental water, no fertilizer and no chemical pesticides. This is good news for gardeners!
- Add beauty to the landscape and preserve our natural heritage.
- Provide food and habitat for birds, butterflies and other desirable wildlife.
- Are self-sustaining, vigorous and hardy. Because they are adapted to a local region, native plants tend to resist damage from freezing, drought, common diseases and plant-eating animals.
- Decrease the amount of water needed for landscape maintenance.
- Produce long root systems to hold soil in place.
- Protect water quality by controlling soil erosion and moderating floods and droughts.
- Are interesting! The diversity of native plants includes interesting flowers and foliage. Native shrubs and trees provide a variety of heights, shapes and textures in the landscape. Many provide winter interest through their bark or seed pods.

## Plants Native to Kansas and Missouri

Common Name	Botanical Name
<b>Annuals</b>	
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>
Bur Marigold	<i>Bidens polylepis</i>
Partridge Pea	<i>Cassia fasciculata</i>
Virginia Copperleaf	<i>Acalypha virginica</i>
<b>Perennials</b>	
Celandine Poppy	<i>Stylophorum diphyllum</i>
Foxglove Beard Tongue	<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>
Garden Phlox	<i>Phlox paniculata</i>
Goat's Beard	<i>Arunacus dioicus</i>
Golden Alexanders	<i>Zizia aptera</i>
Joe Pye Weed	<i>Eupatorium purpureum</i>
Pale Coneflower	<i>Echinacea pallida</i>
Sneezeweed	<i>Helenium autumnales</i>
Spotted Geranium	<i>Geranium maculatum</i>
Squaw-weed	<i>Senecio obovatus</i>
Tickseed	<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>
Wild Ginger	<i>Asarum canadense</i>
<b>Trees</b>	
American Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>
Basswood	<i>Tilia americana</i>
Bur Oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>
Chinquapin Oak	<i>Quercus muehlenbergii</i>
Ironwood	<i>Ostra Virginiana</i>
Kentucky Coffeetree	<i>Gymnocladus dioicus</i>
Pawpaw	<i>Asimina triloba</i>
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>
Shagbark Hickory	<i>Carya ovata</i>
Wahoo	<i>Euonymus atropurpureus</i>
Western Soapberry	<i>Sapindus drummondii</i>
White Oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>
Yellowwood	<i>Cladrastis kentukea</i>
<b>Shrubs</b>	
Buttonbush	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>
Coralberry	<i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i>
Fragrant Sumac	<i>Rhus aromatica</i>
Lead Plant	<i>Amorpha canescens</i>
Nannyberry Viburnum	<i>Viburnum lentago</i>
New Jersey Tea	<i>Ceanothus americanus</i>

Common Name	Botanical Name
<b>Shrubs (cont.)</b>	
Ninebark	<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>
Possum Haw	<i>Ilex decidus</i>
Spicebush	<i>Lindera benzpoin</i>
Virginia Sweetpire	<i>Itea virginica</i>
Witch Hazel	<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>
<b>Vines</b>	
Bittersweet	<i>Celastrus scandens</i>
Common Hop	<i>Humulus lupulus</i>
Climbing Milkweed	<i>Cynanchum leave</i>
Dutchman's Pipe vine	<i>Aristolochia tomentosa</i>
Grayback Grape	<i>Vitis cinerea</i>
Groundnut	<i>Apios Americana</i>
Leatherflower	<i>Clematis pitcheri</i>
Trumpet Creeper	<i>Campsis radicans</i>
Virgin's Bower	<i>Clematis virginiana</i>
Virginia Creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>
White Morning Glory	<i>Ipomoea lacunose</i>
Yellow Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera flava</i>
<b>Grasses and Sedges</b>	
Big Bluestem	<i>Andropogon gerardi</i>
Broomsedge Bluestem	<i>Andropogon virginicus</i>
Canada Wild Rye	<i>Elymus Canadensis</i>
Eastern Gama Grass	<i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>
Indiangrass	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>
Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>
Northern Sea Oats	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>
Porcupine Grass	<i>Stipa spartea</i>
Prairie Dropseed	<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>
Sideoats Grama	<i>Bouteloua curtispindula</i>
Switch Grass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>
Tussock Sedge	<i>Carex stricta</i>
<b>Ferns</b>	
Christmas Fern	<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i>
Cinnamon Fern	<i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>
Goldie's Fern	<i>Dryopteris goldiana</i>
Lady Fern	<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>
Maidenhair Fern	<i>Adiantum pedatum</i>
Ostrich Fern	<i>Matteucia struthiopteris</i>

## Obtaining Native Plants

**Never dig a native plant from the wild.** The chances of a successful transplant are slim to none. Additionally, one could be destroying the habitat in which the plant needs to grow.

**Buy only nursery propagated plants.** “Nursery propagated” means a plant was grown from cuttings, division or seed by a nursery. Plant labels can be misleading. “Nursery grown” does not always mean nursery propagated. Ask your nursery person to make sure.

**Buy from nurseries in your growing area.** When possible, it is best to buy plants within 100 miles or so from where you live. Even a plant that is native to a wider region may be different with respect to its hardiness and heat tolerance.

**Buy plants that are the native species.** Many natives are cultivated, selected, and reintroduced as specific cultivars. They may or may not perform the same as the true native species.

### Pick the right plants.

- Select plants whose natural habitat is similar to the growing conditions you can provide in your garden with regard to soil, light and moisture.
- Buy small plants. They are easier to transplant and quicker to establish. Native trees often sink a deep taproot, thus making them difficult to transplant, except as container grown (small) plants.
- Visit regional botanical gardens, wilderness areas, and restored prairies to see plants in their natural splendor.
- Contact native plant societies and prairie preservation organizations for suggested plants in the region.

## Guidelines for Successfully Using Native Plants

Landscaping with native plants is not gardening gone wild. The same principles of design and plant care apply to both ornamental and native plants.

### Study the conditions in your landscape

Most home landscapes have several microclimates. A microclimate is the sun, shade, exposure, wind, and drainage factors that affect plant growth in an area. Determine the microclimates in the different areas of your property by studying it.

There are probably places that are colder or warmer, receive more sun or more shade, and have good or poor drainage. Look for differences in light (all seasons), moisture retention, exposure to wind, sloped areas, and depressions that naturally collect water. In this way, for example, you can identify areas where conditions are most like a woodland prairie, bank of a stream, roadside ditch or dry, rocky slope.

Native plants are adapted to a specific environment, and that environment needs to be reproduced as closely as possible when it comes to soil type, exposure to sun, wind and annual rainfall. Native plants support and are supported by the environment in which they grow.

### Get a soil test

Test the soil before you plant. It is important to know your soil type because it fosters the beneficial microbes and organisms that help to ensure the survival of a plant. Use a soil test to find out:

- If the pH is compatible with the needs of the native plants you select.
- The type of plants your soil will support.
- If you need to add organic matter.

### Soil Testing

For more information go to [www.johnson.ksu.edu](http://www.johnson.ksu.edu) and click **Lawn and Garden > Soil Testing**

**Space plants correctly**

Space the plants according to their mature height and spread.

**Be patient and you will be rewarded.** Native trees, shrubs and perennials may seem to grow slowly at first, but they are doing the important work of establishing their all-important root systems. Native plants often need two or three years to mature. Trees and shrubs can take longer. Once the root system is established, the growth rate for these plants will more than make up for their slowness in getting started.

**Weed**

- Remove all weeds before you plant.
- After planting, keep the garden weed free by hand pulling any invaders.

**Mulch**

- Do not use herbicides. Period.
- Use several inches of an organic mulch. Besides improving the soil as it decomposes, mulch suppresses weeds and helps maintain more constant soil temperature and moisture levels.
- Mulch trees and shrubs several feet out from the base of the trunk to suppress weeds, conserve moisture and prevent damage from lawn equipment.

**Do not fertilize**

Fertilizing native plants can upset their natural balance. Avoid fertilizer.

**Water**

After they are established, native plants need little additional water. They have developed the means to survive drought. Those plants that are found in average or dry soils can literally drown if they receive too much water.

**Sources**

Books

- Armitage, Allan M. *Armitage's Native Plants for North American Gardens*. Timber Press, Portland, OR, 2006.
- Freeman, Craig C. and Eileen K. Schofield. *Roadside Wildflowers of the Southern Great Plains*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1991.
- Jones Jr., Samuel B. and Leonard E. Foote. *Gardening with Native Wild Flowers*. Timber Press, Portland, OR, 1990.
- Snyder, Rachel. *Gardening in the Heartland*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1991.
- Taylor, Patricia A. *Easy Care Native Plants*. Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1996.
- United States Environmental Response Team. "Revegetation with Native Plants, Jumpstarting Natural Selection." Johnson County Kansas Library, Electronic Resource. (August 6, 2007)
- Wasowski, Andy with Sally Wasowski. *The Landscaping Revolution*. Contemporary Books, Lincolnwood, IL, 2000

Web sites

- "An Introduction to Using Native Plants in Restoration Projects." <http://www.nps.gov/plants/restore/pubs/intronatplant/toc.htm> (March 2008)
- "Grow Native. Missouri Department of Conservation and Missouri Department of Agriculture. [www.grownative.org](http://www.grownative.org) (August 2007)
- "Landscaping with Native Plants." Wild Ones. <http://www.for-wild.org/landscap.html> (March 2008)
- "Plants Database." USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. <http://plants.usda.gov> (August 2007)
- Hansen, Jeff. "Kansas Native Plants." Kansas Native Plant Society. [www.kansasnativeplants.com](http://www.kansasnativeplants.com) (August 2007)

**K-STATE**  
**Research and Extension**  
**Johnson County**

**Extension Master Gardener Hotline**  
**(913) 715-7050**  
 garden.help@jocogov.org  
*For your lawn, garden and horticultural questions*

Rev. 12/2013

Johnson County K-State Research and Extension  
 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Suite 1500, Olathe, Kansas 66061-7057  
 (913) 715-7000 — [www.johnson.ksu.edu](http://www.johnson.ksu.edu)

Published by Johnson County Extension  
 Master Gardeners, a volunteer program of  
 K-State Research and Extension, Johnson County