

2024 Native Plant *Shopping Guide*



Why Native Plants

Native plants are the foundational block in the ecosystem we all rely on. They have coevolved with weather patterns and other factors for centuries. This means your success rate increases when you choose native plants over species from different countries. During this evolution, they also created unique relationships with the wildlife. For example, the migrating Monarch Butterfly requires the host plant milkweed to lay her eggs and feed the soon to hatch caterpillars. This serves as a poisonous protection against some predators that would like to make a meal out of all life stages of the butterfly. Some native bees and pollinators require specific plants or flower shapes to survive. Healthy pollinator populations mean better crop yields for humans! Not to mention all of the water management, carbon sequestering, and general pollutant cleaning characteristics of our native plants.

The Basics

Before heading out to shop, make sure to know the garden site you will be planting in. Just think of typical gardening practices such as how much sunlight, soil type, and moisture levels the bed has. Perhaps it is best to keep a journal or digital notes on your phone with garden site location specifics. This is also a great place to jot down native plants that you might learn about and want to purchase in the future. Keeping it all in one spot and easy to grab to take with you shopping is a huge help!

When shopping use the full scientific name, including the first (Genus) and second (species) names. Common names are not as accurate and may refer to more than one plant. Our chapter suggests using the [New York Flora Atlas](#) to confirm if the plant is native to New York and to have the most recent scientific name with a record of past names. Since this organization is based here in the state and run by industry experts/leaders they have some of the most specific information. If you are not committed to New York native only then feel free to use [BONAP](#) or any other book to confirm it is native to the US. Just note that we live in an area with harsh winters, some native USA plants won't tolerate it well here and end up only surviving for one growing season. This means any wildlife that used that plant will miss it the following year.



For the time being it is best to avoid cultivars or “nativars” of native plants. The current trend is to create more attractive traits for humans, such as color changes and double blooms. Until the industry starts propagating native plants to sustain the wildlife that depend on them these nativars offer no ecological support. Some scientific research is being done but has not undergone peer review so who knows what the future will hold.

Questions to Ask

- Does the nursery use any biocides? If yes then walk away, the point is to feed the food chain and many pesticides or herbicides are systemic and reside in the plant or soil for weeks to years. These residues can kill off pollinators and leach into your soil killing off other plants in your garden.
- Where do they source their plants?

Ideal: Grown from locally and ethically sourced seed. This is the best way to introduce the most biodiversity and genetic diversity. Local ecotype seeds will also be completely adjusted to the growing conditions described in the [“Why Native Plants”](#) section.

Good: Grown from an ethically sourced cutting. This is great for slower growing plants such as shrubs. There won't be as much biodiversity but there will be a shrub producing more berries to support birds and other winter wildlife faster than grown by seed.

Avoid: Generic Locally Grown as it does not mean the same as Local Ecotype unless the nursery can confirm the origins of the seed/cutting. Plants that were dug from the wild, this is an extreme case type of situation, like about to be bulldozed and destroyed. Most native plants have a well established root system that does not like being transplanted. Not to mention this method is an easy way to transfer invasive species unknowingly.

- If they would be interested in learning more and offering native plant species, point them to Wild Ones, we would be happy to help. Sometimes it doesn't hurt to ask even if you are just starting the journey and not an expert, you have the right connections now!



Advanced

Seed as this is typically the most cost efficient method. It is best to sow close to collection as many native plant seeds need species specific stratification periods in order to germinate. In some cases, you can hold the seed back until Winter or right before the first snowfall as this will protect your seeds from any hungry wildlife. Yes, we do want to feed them but we need to establish the plants first! Research Winter Sowing in upcycled containers such as clean milk jugs. This gives the seeds as close to the environmental conditions as possible while preventing most critters from eating the seeds.

Online ordering has become easier to access in recent years. Just make sure you have already decided if you are sticking to the local ecotype, native to NY, or just native to the USA with similar growing conditions. Many websites have a Q&A or common questions that you should read to learn a bit more about their growing process and shipping/refund policy. If you are looking for reputable online ordering then check out the [Wild Ones Journal](#), many companies place ads in the Journal.

Division is ok depending on the plant species and if you are just expanding your garden bed. Since this is so specific it is best to research that specific plant before digging. Currently, it is also suggested not to share plants between different properties. Jumping worms and other invasive species could unknowingly transfer as seeds or eggs on the plant to the new garden.

Last Thoughts

Most of us grew up learning the specimen style of gardening, when one plant is showcased and heavily mulched. Our native plants are used to growing in a matrix or community so do not be afraid to plant them close together. Leaving open soil provides habitat for ground nesting bees and pollinators but also space for native plant seeds to germinate. Make it a goal to remove as much monoculture turf area to the absolute bare minimum that you actually use. We do not need to blindly follow tradition, let's get back to our roots.

Get into succession gardening and mix plants that will bloom in spring, summer, and fall. Plant in swaths or ribbons of the same species by placing 3-6 of the same species together to make it easier for pollinators to forage. Don't shy away from native grasses; they prevent plants from flopping over, add a new texture, and typically add interest year round. Replace your bird feeders by leaving past their prime flowers to go to seed. Plant shrubs and trees that produce berries and nuts to feed wild game birds. There is a whole world out there looking for food and your garden can help them.



About Wild Ones

We improve the environment through local chapters by connecting people and native plants for a healthy planet. By promoting native landscapes through education, advocacy, and collaborative action we will see native plants and natural landscapes thriving in every community.

Learn about our programs, resources, and our native plant sales at

capitalregionny.wildones.org and on Facebook at facebook.com/WOCapitalRegionNY.

Please consider joining [Wild Ones](#) or [making a donation](#) directly to our chapter to help us spread our critical mission. The more resources we have the more people we can reach and the more native plants we can get in the ground!

If you would like more help planning your garden please check out the resources Wild Ones provides. Check out NativeGardenDesigns.WildOnes.org/ not only do they provide a starting point for those new to these practices but also specific designs with plant lists.

While there is not a current design for the Capital Region the [Boston Design](#) is of a similar ecoregion and all plants suggested are native to NY. Then join us in supporting our native plant demonstration garden at 1500 Western in Albany, NY which will soon be joining those free designs.

