

# Planning, Implementing and Maintaining a Native Garden

## Planning

Evaluate the landscape in all seasons before making changes. Notice sun & shade conditions, low areas that retain moisture or spots that have poor or compacted soil. Spots that are difficult to mow. Notice views you would like to screen out or enhance.

Take time to look at plant magazines, native gardening books, attend Wild Ones programs, visit local public native gardens and ask questions BEFORE doing any planting.

Take note of any overhead utility lines so appropriately sized trees or shrubs are planted beneath them and do not grow into them.

Create a simple observational base plan of your property noting problems spots or sections you want to enhance, then prioritize these areas. Be sure to Call Miss Dig (811) to mark buried utility lines.

Use your base plan and develop bubble ideas of what you want for your landscape. Begin work in small phases, try to complete one area before beginning another.

Identify any invasive species or non-native plants that you would like to replace with native species. Remove these before planting.

Begin collecting leaves/lawn clippings to compost for use as mulch. If downsizing lawn area, begin smothering unwanted turf with overlapping cardboard covered with 2–3" of mulch or leaves. Fall is good time for this project, by spring the cardboard will have deteriorated and the site is ready for planting. If using seed, no mulch should be used but it is crucial that all weeds be eliminated before direct seeding onto the soil.

## Plant Selection/Implementation

Research plants that would be appropriate for areas of your yard and think about creating plant communities and arranging them in layers (canopy, shrub layer, groundcover).

Avoid planting in straight lines. Curving bed lines and staggered plantings appear more natural and "drifts" of same species gives a more intentional look. Use repetition of groups of plants and colors to allow the eye to flow through the landscape. If the space is small, use fewer species, maybe 3–5 at the most.

Be aware of each plant's ultimate height and spread at maturity. Do not plant too close to structures or use more plants than needed to fill the space quickly as they will need to be removed when they become overcrowd. Enjoy the growth process and observe the new birds and pollinators that come to use the plants.

Front yards in urban areas should have shorter species, some lawn and include "Cues to Care" like mowed borders or edging around beds, signage, garden art, seating, etc. to lessen the "untamed look" and promote a good neighbor policy.

Try to choose locally grown plant species, if possible. There is a list of native nurseries and plant sales on Wild Ones River City Chapter Resource Page.

### **Planting and Maintenance Tips**

Battery powered drills with augers or soil knives are very efficient tools to use for planting, especially for plug sized plants.

Marking plant names/locations is important so you do not accidentally pull new growth up in the spring when weeding. Rocks make good plant labels or plastic or metal markers using grease pencil for long-lasting results.

Newly planted plants should be watered at least 2 x/week the first growing season to promote strong root systems. Typically, after that, the plants are fine with just rain or maybe some additional water if there is extended drought. No fertilizer or herbicides please! Keep water and leaves on site include rain barrels, raingardens and composting or shredding leaves and using for mulch.

There are numerous brands and types of deer and rabbit repellents. Use them right after planting and mix them up frequently to help deter browsing. Consider fencing plants until roots are strong enough to produce new growth if plants are chewed.

The height of many native perennials can be kept shorter if they are pruned by about 1/2 in late May or early June. This helps prevent flopping, the need for staking and can increase the number of blooms that appear (although sometimes the blooms are smaller).

Garden cleanup should wait until later spring when temperatures are consistently in the 50's. This allows time for pollinators and other insects to emerge from the stems where they have overwintered.

*Created by The Garden Guru,  
The Living Garden & Revery  
(April 2023) for:*



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