



CREATING YOUR OWN

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# NATIVE GARDEN DESIGN

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A GUIDE TO CREATING BEAUTIFUL  
HOME LANDSCAPES







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*\*Many of the photos featured in this guide are courtesy of Wild Ones members.*

# CHOOSE NATIVE PLANTS CREATE STRIKING HOME LANDSCAPES THAT BENEFIT WILDLIFE.



Over thousands of years, wild plants have grown naturally, adapting to each region's unique environmental conditions. When grown in your garden, native plants bring beauty and excitement to your yard, creating a welcoming sanctuary that can be enjoyed at home along with many other benefits.

- Natives plants are sustainable, adapted to thrive in your region's soils and weather conditions.
- Landscaping with native plants restores a healthy, natural environment and

creates wildlife habitat.

- Many natives are deep-rooted, slowing down storm water and improving water quality as well as reducing erosion, carbon and excess nutrients.
- Natives need no fertilizer or extra watering once established.
- They act as natural pest controls and reduce the need for pesticides; many are deer-resistant.
- Native plants are the foundation of life and provide quality food for wildlife like



caterpillars, as well as shelter for birds and other wildlife.

- They also invite butterflies and other pollinators with pollen and nectar.

Connecting with native plant communities in your area can prove invaluable on your native garden journey. A local Wild Ones Chapter may help you.

Wild Ones is a non-profit organization that provides educational resources and online

learning opportunities with respected experts like Wild Ones Honorary Directors Neil Diboll, Heather Holm, Doug Tallamy and Larry Weaner. Wild Ones also publishes a quarterly digital journal and awards Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Program grants to engage youth in caring for native gardens.

For more information or to become a Wild Ones member, visit: [wildones.org](http://wildones.org).

# CREATE YOUR GARDEN PLAN

## USE THESE DESIGN BASICS TO CREATE A GORGEOUS HOME LANDSCAPE.

<b>1</b>	<b>Study your site</b> taking note of sun, shade, soil type, drainage and soil moisture.	<b>6</b>	<b>Leave enough room for plants</b> to reach their mature size.
<b>2</b>	<b>Then, map out your space.</b> Mark all existing plants currently on your site.	<b>7</b>	<b>Create a focal point</b> to draw your eye through your garden.
<b>3</b>	<b>Study your neighborhood</b> and consider what design elements would look great in your community.	<b>8</b>	<b>Add water features</b> like birdbaths or small fountains to add interest and benefits to wildlife in your landscape.
<b>4</b>	<b>Research designs you love.</b> Get inspiration from other garden designs specific to your region.	<b>9</b>	<b>Group plants together</b> for visual impact. Plant in groups of odd numbers with a minimum of three of each plant.
<b>5</b>	<b>Design with the right plant</b> in the right place.	<b>10</b>	<b>In each area, choose 3 to 5 species in broad drifts</b> that repeat throughout the planting area.

**11**

**Use a mixture of textures**

with fine, bolder foliage, tall fine-textured grasses as a frame behind lower rounded perennials.

**12**

**Keep plants in scale:**

maximum plant height should be half the width of your bed.

**13**

**Choose plants to ensure blooms**

and foliage interest in all seasons.

**14**

**Give your planting bed a clean edge**

to serve as a frame that accents your planting.

**15**

**Consider your budget.**

Review the time and money you have available for installation and maintenance.



# WORK YOUR PLAN INSTALL YOUR GARDEN ONE PHASE AT A TIME.

Your garden doesn't need to be completed in one phase. Many gardeners add new garden areas incrementally, especially if they have modest budgets.





1

Plant densely! The more plants you use, the more design impact you will achieve and the less mulching and watering is needed. All native plants should be ethically sourced from local and regional native nurseries, or shared by Wild Ones members.

2

Remove turf areas using sod cutting, solarization, or smothering with newspaper or cardboard. If possible, do not use herbicides.

3

Make room by removing exotic invasives. Consult with your state's invasive pest/plant council for up to date information about invasive plants in your area.

4

Consider adding native trees and shrubs. These long-living plants provide structure, wildlife habitat, help to reduce stormwater runoff and moderate climate.

5

For large garden areas, consider adding stepping stones so you can access your plantings for maintenance.

6

Consider adding plant ID markers to help you remember what is in your garden (and what should not be). ID markers are a helpful and educational addition for visitors, especially those interested in starting their own native gardens!

7

You can seed in native annuals like Indian blanket and Partridge pea to help provide color and interest for your new garden areas.

8

Take time to document your progress so you can fully appreciate your native garden journey and your accomplishments along the way.

9

Share your amazing work with us so that we can use it to inspire others who are beginning their native garden journey: <https://nativegardendesigns.wildones.org/share-your-garden/>

# KEEP IT BEAUTIFUL WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER, WHEN MAINTAINING YOUR GARDEN.

1	New plantings need regular watering until established. Trees take weekly watering for years, especially in droughts.	5	Old plant stems provide a place for many wild bees to lay eggs that will hatch into next year's pollinators. Simply cut them to 15" or so.
2	Disturb your garden soil as little as possible, as it invites weed growth from the existing soil seed bank. Instead of pulling out weeds, try clipping them at their base.	6	Leave the leaves! Minimal fall clean up is needed. Leaf litter in your garden provides nutrition and shelter for overwintering butterfly chrysalises and eggs.
3	Some plants may not make it. Be prepared to plant replacements and note which plants are flourishing for future planting.	7	Share your extras with others! Seed swaps and plant giveaways are an economical way people can obtain native plants and grow in native plant knowledge.
4	When flowers are finished blooming, leave the seed heads for birds and other seedeaters. Seed heads also provide texture and winter interest.	8	The connections between native plants and wildlife provide for year-round nature watching. It's no wonder gardening is an important mental health activity!

To see a growing list of home-printer-friendly native garden design plans for regions in the United States, as well as a list of nurseries that Wild Ones partners with, visit [nativegardendesigns.wildones.org](http://nativegardendesigns.wildones.org).

A photograph of a tree with vibrant red and orange autumn foliage, set against a background of green and yellow leaves. The tree is the central focus, with its branches spreading out. The ground is covered in fallen yellow leaves, and there are ferns and other plants in the foreground.

## BE PATIENT!

Since most plants in native garden designs are perennials, they may take more time to get established in your garden and may flower for a shorter period of time than annuals. The saying “first year they sleep, second year they creep and third year they leap” describes perennial life cycles.

The wait is well worth it! While a native garden may take more time and a few more steps to establish, the rewards are great. Natural landscapes are dynamic, diverse and highly attractive to birds, pollinators and other wildlife.



*"Healing the Earth, one yard at a time."*

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