

Going native can be a smart choice for Michigan landscapes

Joy Landis, MSU Integrated Pest Management Program

What if you could create a beautiful landscape in your yard with plants that came well-adapted to your soil and climate? There would be less need for fertilizing. You could back off the watering, saving time and energy as well as water. When fall sets in, you'd need fewer protective barriers to prepare your landscape for winter cold. These hardy plants would be perennials with incredible root systems that rebuild the soil, help filter water and better resist pests. When you purchase the plants, "buying local" would be a natural thing to do. You can reap all these benefits by planting native plants.



Common boneset.



Blue lobelia.

plant size, flower color and bloom period. Native ground covers are an ideal choice for those interested in cutting back on the amount of turf in their lawn.

If you're not sure where to start with selecting plants, visit MSU's new website, www.nativeplants.msu.edu. Look under the "Regional Plant Lists" section for recommendations for Michigan's southern and northern Lower Peninsulas and the Upper Peninsula. The handy tables for wildflowers, ferns, trees/shrubs/vines and grasses/sedges/rushes identify how much sun and moisture each needs and indicates the flower color

Getting smart around your home

Home landscaping and flower gardens can be designed with native perennial, shrub and tree species. Native plants offer a variety of choices in

and average plant height. In the "Plant Facts" section of the website, there are fact sheets with pictures and notes from MSU researchers about how attractive the plant is to pollinators and to natural enemies that help control pests.



Steven Katovich, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Monarch butterfly larvae (caterpillars) will ONLY eat several species of native milkweed plants. Without these milkweeds, there are no monarchs.



Rebecca Finneran, MSUE

Garden with mixed native and non-native plants

For any new planting, Michigan State University Extension recommends [testing the soil](#) in the area you want to plant every three years. Armed with the results from your test, plant suppliers can better guide you through selecting plants that fit your garden's conditions.

When you're ready to shop, many nurseries have recently expanded to include native plants in their inventory. Some plant producers specialize in only seeds and plants that are grown in Michigan and originate from Michigan genotypes. These growers are members of the Michigan Native Plant Producers Association and you can find them listed at their website, www.mnppa.org.

Take it up a notch with a Certified Wildlife Habitat

If you have a soft spot for wildlife, and many of us in Michigan do, you can be intentional about choosing plants that appeal to the birds and other wildlife you'd like to support. According to the National Wildlife Federation, you can create a Certified Wildlife Habitat in any size space from an apartment balcony to a 20-acre farm. They offer extensive information at their website, www.nwf.org.

Smart shorelines

According to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan has over 36,000 miles of streams, and more than 11,000 lakes and ponds. You can have a beautiful lakefront protected against erosion with a careful planting of upland plants along with native shoreline and shallow plants. MSU



Jim Brueck, Owner Native Landscapes, LLC

This native riparian buffer creates a beautiful shoreline.

Extension has two publications with information for landscaping along a lake or other body of water. The four-page "Natural Shoreline Landscape" offers advice for creating landscapes that restore and preserve the shoreline. The more comprehensive "Natural Shoreline Landscapes on Michigan's Inland Lakes" is 70 pages with images, diagrams and thorough descriptions. Visit the [Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership's resources](#).

Resources

- Native Plants and Ecosystem Services: Producing Win-Win Solutions for Agriculture, Communities and the Environment, www.shop.msu.edu #E3167

For more information on a wide variety of **smart gardening** articles, or to find out about smart gardening classes and events, visit www.migarden.msu.edu.

