

Choosing TN Native Plants

Useful TN native plants are not typically available at big box stores where plants are treated with neonicotinoids and other insect killing chemicals to maintain their hole-free beauty. Many nurseries do have chemical-free native plants, and the number is steadily increasing. Please be sure that you do have TN native plants on your shopping list. Some native plant nurseries are listed on the TNPS website at: <https://tnps.org/more-resources/>. If no native plant nursery is available near you there are some reputable mail order services available, such as <https://nativeplantfinder.nwf.org/>.

Care of Native Plant Gardens

Native plant gardens need less care than typical gardens because they have a bigger purpose than just being pretty. They feed pollinators, birds, wildlife, and even humans. Here are some of the ways we treat them differently.

Little or no soil preparation. Native plants are adapted to our native soils with all the organisms normally found there. Light tilling of the soil allows space for tender new roots to grow, but if the soil is wrong for the selected plants, use different plants. Labels and garden books will say what a plant needs to thrive, so match the plant's needs to the soil conditions available, i.e. rocky soil, clay or loam or sandy soil; wet, moderate or dry; sunny, shady or partial shade.

No fertilizers. Fertilizers overload native plants which cannot process these extra nutrients that are not available to them naturally.

Less water. Transplanting shocks plants, so they require some water after being transplanted and throughout dry periods during the first year or so as the plants are adapting to their new location. After that they only need watering during extended dry periods.

No pesticides. Holes in a leaf mean something is being fed. Native plants have adapted to being eaten by insects of all kinds and other animals as well. If you want to protect the new plants from rabbits and deer, you might want to put a small temporary wire fence around them. If pesticides are applied, you eliminate a food source and often kill the caterpillars, bees, fireflies, butterflies, birds, etc. that need to feed on those plants to survive.

Little or no deadheading. Deadheading removes the seeds that birds feed upon, especially during fall and winter months. The seeds not eaten often become next year's garden plants, and eventually a colony of plants.