
PLANT THIS, NOT THAT.

Many of us have yards landscaped with perennials, shrubs, and trees that are native to Europe, Asia, and elsewhere in North America. While these add beauty and interest to our yards, they don't provide full benefits that plants native to our region can provide. Though ultimately it is a matter of personal choice, there are many native alternatives to commonly used plants.

The benefits of using native plants are vast, including providing food sources for native songbirds, honeybees, butterflies, and beneficial insects that struggle in suburban and urban environments. Native plants are well-adapted to local soils and climate, reducing or even eliminating the need to provide additional watering (once established) and amend or fertilize your soil. Additionally, they are largely resistant to pests and rarely-if ever-require pesticides to keep them healthy. In general, native plants are low maintenance, long-lived, and environmentally-friendly when compared to their non-native counterparts.

When considering the benefits of native plants, many people wonder why they aren't more common in landscapes. There are few reasons for this. First off, you often have to visit a specialty nursery in order to locate them. Second, native plants aren't familiar to most people, and as such, few people request them and the demand is low when compared to the generations-known boxwood (*Buxus* spp.), yew (*Taxus* spp.), and Norway spruce (*Picea abies*).

One important aspect of growing any plant - native or nonnative - is to carefully research the plant's growth requirements and make sure you plant the appropriate plant in the appropriate site. By proper placement, you can maximize the chances that your plants will survive and thrive for many years to come. Some of the more important factors to consider include soil, sun exposure, moisture, and available space. For example, Ohio varies widely in soil types throughout the state as a result of many geologic events, from being acidic sandy loams to alkaline, poorly-drained clays. Just because a plant may be native to Ohio doesn't necessarily mean that it will thrive in your yard.

When searching for native plants at a local nursery, you may notice that finding the exact species might be difficult. To begin with, every species is given a two-part scientific name that is universally accepted when compared to the common name. For example, Black Gum, Sour Gum, and Tupelo all refer to the same tree, *Nyssa sylvatica*. Further, many plants have been selectively bred for certain attributes (fall color, form, etc.). These selectively-bred forms are referred to as cultivars and most are appropriate to use in native gardening. Generally the cultivar name is depicted in single quotations. So, while you may not find Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) for sale, you may easily find 'Summer Wine' Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Summer Wine'), a cultivar of the native species which makes an excellent landscape plant.

Regardless of your current landscape, there is always room to incorporate or even replace nonnative species with their native counterparts. The benefits are extended not only to local plants and wildlife, but also to you as a homeowner as these plants can save time and money by limiting or even eliminating pesticides, soil amendments, and the additional water that is required of many nonnative plants. Additionally, as many nonnative plants are proving to become invasive and degrade local ecosystems (think of honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*)), replacing these with natives promotes good land stewardship that can serve as a positive example to others.



For additional information or to check whether a plant is native to your state or county, please visit the following website:

plants.usda.gov/checklist.html

NATIVE PLANTS

BROAD-LEAFED EVERGREEN

Instead of boxwood (*Buxus* spp.), yew (*Taxus* spp.), consider these alternatives or cultivars of them:

- American holly (*Ilex opaca*)
- Canadian yew (*Taxus canadensis*)
- Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*)
- Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*)

NARROW-LEAFED EVERGREEN

Instead of Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*), Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*) or Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*) and others, consider these:

- Balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*)
- Black spruce (*Picea mariana*)
- Canadian hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*)
- Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)
- Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*)
- Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*)
- White cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*)
- White spruce (*Picea glauca*)

FORMAL DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

Good for borders and front of houses. Instead of roses (*Rosa* spp.), barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), Spiraea (*Spiraea* spp.), try these:

- Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- Fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*)
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)
- Smooth hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*)
- Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)

INFORMAL DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

Good for back of border, hedges, at edge of yards, or informal borders. Great alternatives to honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*) and Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*):

- Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanicum*)
- Bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*)
- Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)
- Devil's Walking-Stick (*Aralia spinosa*)
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)
- Prickly-ash (*Xanthoxylum americanum*)
- Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
- Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*)
- Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*)
- Sweetshrub (*Calycanthus floridus*)
- Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)
- Witch-hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

TREES

Instead of Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) and Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), try these alternatives:

- Large(75+ feet)
- American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)
- Cucumbertree (*Magnolia acuminata*)
- Hickory - various (*Carya* spp.) (L)
- Oak - various, especially bur, swamp white oak, chinkapin, and red (*Quercus macrocarpa*, *Q. bicolor*, *Q. muhlenbergii*, and *Q. rubra*, respectively)
- Tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)
- Yellow buckeye (*Aesculus octandra*)

Medium(50-74 feet)

- Black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*)
- Kentucky coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)
- River birch (*Betula nigra*)
- Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)

Small(20-49 feet)

- American hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*)
- Big-leaf magnolia (*Magnolia macrophylla*)
- Eastern hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*)
- Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*)
- Fringetree (*Chionanthus virginicus*)
- Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)
- Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)
- Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)
- Umbrella magnolia (*Magnolia tripetala*)

SHRUBS WITH SHOWY FRUIT

- Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanicum*)
- Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
- Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)
- Devil's Walking-Stick (*Aralia spinosa*)
- Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.)
- Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)

SPRING-FLOWERING SHRUBS

- Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)
- Flame azalea (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*)
- Fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*)
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.)
- Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

SUMMER-FLOWERING SHRUBS

- Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
- Cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*)
- Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)
- Smooth hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*)
- Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*)
- Sweetshrub (*Calycanthus floridus*)
- Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)

SHOWY FALL FOLIAGE

- Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- Black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*)
- Chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)
- Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*)
- Fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*)
- Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.)
- Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
- Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*)
- Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)
- Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)

GROUNDCOVERS

Instead of using periwinkle (*Vinca* spp.), Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei*), Spurge (*Pachysandra* spp.), and Lily-of-the-Valley (*Convallaria majalis*) try these alternatives:

- Common juniper (*Juniperus communis*)
- Creeping phlox (*Phlox subulata*)
- Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*)
- Allegheny spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*)
- Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*)
- Woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)

NATIVE GRASSES

Many nonnative, ornamental grasses can become very invasive. Try these native alternatives, which prefer quick-draining soil and full sun to look their best:

- Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)
- Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)
- Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
- Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)