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## **Landscaping with Native Plants**

Think about what you want, and also about what you need. Do children need a place to play? Do you want strategically placed trees and shrubs for a privacy screen, or for energy savings? Do you want to attract wildlife? Are your neighbors cranky? Do they have chemically-dependent yards (if so, rethink wildlife)?

Do a soil pH test and a drainage test if you are not familiar with your yard's characteristics. Learn what plant community existed before development—in many cases that will give you your basic plant palette. Fill may have very different characteristics from native soil, especially in coastal areas.

Know your local landscape code.

Make a scaled drawing of your present landscape, noting structures, sidewalks and driveways, power lines, trees and other plantings, slopes, runoff pathways, areas of perpetual sun or shade, and compass orientation. Decide what, if anything, is to be removed. Make several copies, so you can play with alternate designs.

Do you want a pond? If you want something more elaborate than a simple birdbath on the ground for wildlife, now is the time to plan it. Now is also the time to think about trellises, fences, gazebos, paths, and the like.

Learn about your options: learn what plants are suitable for your area, how big they get, their growth habits, and any other characteristics important to you.

Design. You can select plants first, if you are sure you want them.

Use the principles of biological, structural, and temporal diversity to select your plants, for a well-planned native landscape is ever-changing. It can tell you what month it is. It can also minimize maintenance and reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

Please yourself with your design, and put features such as brush and compost piles out of public view. Look at your design from inside your home, as well as outside. Think about maintenance now, in the design phase. Your plan should reflect the mature size of the plants you select, or you will be doing a lot of pruning and digging up. Think curves. They are pleasing to the eye, softening the hard edges of masonry and asphalt.

A thoughtfully planned native landscape will almost never require irrigation after establishment, will survive freezes, floods, and droughts, and give you a taste of the real and vanishing Florida that William Bartram described more than 200 years ago.

## **Notes on Landscaping for Wildlife**

Planning a landscape for wildlife, whether a whole yard or fifty square feet, simply means identifying the creatures you want to attract, analyzing your present landscape, and designing your new one to meet the needs of your desired "tenants."

Wildlife need food, water, and cover. By selecting plants for a maximum diversity of flowering and fruiting times, planting them in structural arrangements to offer cover, and providing a reliable water source, you will entice far more animals to linger and, perhaps, to live in your yard.

Be realistic in your expectations. If the creatures you wish to attract have special needs you cannot fill, or they are not found in your area, you won't get them no matter what you do. Keep wintering birds in mind if you do your plan when they are not around. Part of the fun in planning is observation to learn what wildlife is in the neighborhood and might be induced to settle down. This may entail purchasing or borrowing a couple of field guides and binoculars; you can get a good pair of binoculars for under \$100.

## STEPS IN PLANNING A NATIVE PLANT LANDSCAPE

### **Analyze...**

...your desires. Analyze your yard. Test the soil. Do a drainage test. Look for runoff patterns. Watch the movements of shade and sun. Try to determine the pre-development plant community. Do you have fill, or native soil? Consider your neighbors' yards and local landscape codes.

### **Draw...**

...the existing yard. Show structures, sidewalks, power lines, driveways, existing plantings, grades, fences. Make a copy or two.

### **Decide...**

...about water features, other features (fences, trellises, paths). What goes and what stays? Where will the focal points be? Where will any trees go? Where will compost, brush piles (if any) be? Revise your drawing to reflect your plan and copy it again.

### **Identify...** (if you wish to attract wildlife)

...local natural areas, migrating and wintering birds, butterflies, other critters, seasonal variations in wildlife.

### **Learn...**

...plants for your region, their season of bloom, fruit, color, whether they are evergreen or deciduous, monoecious (male and female plants) or dioecious, their size at maturity,

### **Select...**

...for diversity of species, structure, seasons, and aesthetic appeal.

### **Design...**

...entire site "dream plan." Use curves. Allow space for mature plants. Look at the landscape from inside your house. Look at it from the street. Think about maintenance.

### **Plant...**

...trees first (but not under power lines, please!) Start small, enjoy, then add another section.

**And last... Enjoy! Share with others!**