

Native Plant Basics

What is a native plant? Native plants are those that exist in a region without having been brought there by human activity. These plants can be any type of plant, from mosses, to woodland or sun-loving wildflowers, to shrubs, vines, and trees.

Many plants growing in our region are exotic plants which have been naturalized. Some of these are very problematic because they displace native plants via their aggressive growth and reproductive traits. Removal of invasive, exotic plants is as important as selection of plants to add to your landscapes.

Choosing native plants over exotics in your home garden has numerous benefits to local the local ecosystem, and is a great way to be not just a property owner, but a good steward of your land.

Cultivars are cultivated varieties of plants found in nature. These are usually selected for some trait that makes them more appealing in a landscape, like double blooms, unusual color, or particular form. After selection, most, but not all, cultivars are propagated via vegetative means...tissue culture, cuttings, etcetera. Using cultivars exclusively limits the potential of the gardener to contribute to the overall genetic diversity of the plant species they are growing. In addition, many cultivars, particularly those with double blooms, are not as beneficial to native wildlife. Also, keep in mind that sometimes a cultivar is developed just to increase sales, because the nursery industry knows that consumers prefer designer labels.

Provenance matters. Using native plants that are not only native to the region, but have been propagated in the region from wild populations can help to preserve biodiversity of local plants and animals, promotes stability of the species, and can be a way to insure that the plants perform well in your landscape. Conversely, planting native species with origins in other regions can serve to pollute the gene pool among wild plant communities, as pollen from the ones in your landscape intermingles with flowers in the wild.

Sourcing matters! Unscrupulous nursery owners and hobbyists dig plants from the wild all the time. Be alert for signs of theft including soil in the pots instead of potting mix, appearance of having been recently transplanted, exceptionally low price, lack of knowledge on the part of the seller. Buy nursery propagated, not just nursery grown.

Thank you for your interest in native plants!

Christy Shivell and Family

Shy Valley Farm Studio & Garden

growers of herbs, heirloom plants, and nursery propagated native plants since 2001

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