

ADVANTAGES OF USING TEXAS NATIVE PLANTS

By Anita Maddox, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

Have you heard people asking about native plants at your local nursery? Interest in using Texas native plants in suburban landscapes has greatly increased. What is considered a “native” plant?

There isn't a universal definition, but most people consider native plants those that were here before European settlers arrived and brought plants with them. The U.S. Department of Agriculture refers to native plants as those that are indigenous species that have evolved and occur naturally in a particular region, ecosystem, and habitat.



Brown-Eyed Susan

Although not native, some of the plants brought from outside this country or moved from one distant location inside the country to another in the last 200 – 300 years have become “naturalized”. Many of these introduced species of plants work quite well in our Texas landscapes. A few non-native plants became very aggressive and invasive to the detriment of our native plants, like Kudzu and the Tallow Tree.

So, if you're wondering why native plants are becoming more popular with homeowners, here are some of the reasons.

1. **Native plants require less water** than non-native plants once they are established. Not ALL native plants can get away with less water – just the ones accustomed to our local weather, soil, and the amount of annual rainfall, and of course an amount of sun or shade similar to what



Turk's Cap

they received in the wild. (You wouldn't choose a cactus for our clay soil unless you were willing to put in a lot of work amending that soil!)

2. **The need for fertilizers and pesticides is decreased.** Native plants have survived well without care for hundreds of years in their natural environment.
3. **Native plants provide food and habitat** for butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects that pollinate our food crops and home landscapes. (Did you know that at least 97% of insects are beneficial, not only for pollination but by keeping non-beneficial insects from harming your plants?)
4. **Maintaining biological diversity** is another reason. For instance, the total number of some species of birds and insects in the U.S. have decreased significantly in the last 50 years, partially due to habitat loss. Native plants support these birds, insects and other wildlife by providing habitat and food.

Sometimes people say, "Well, I can't replace my whole landscape!" Even a few native plants in your landscape will offer the benefits listed above. If your neighbors also plant a few native plants in their yards, it will provide a connected "corridor" for insects and wildlife.

There are many resources to help you choose which plants will suit our local environment. Here are a few of them.

- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center – Native Plant Information Network
<https://www.wildflower.org/>
- The Aggie-Horticulture website
<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals/natives>
<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/texasnativeshrubs>
- Native Plant Society of Texas – Houston Chapter
<https://npsot.org/wp/houston/>



Passionflower Vine

Also, some nurseries in our area specialize in native plants so these plants are no longer as difficult to find. And some local native plant organizations, the Audubon Society, and environmental organizations offer periodic plant sales.

If you would like to see some examples of native plants in a landscape, you can visit the Native Garden at the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners demonstration gardens in Rosenberg. Find more information about our gardens at fbmg.org.

Fort Bend County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who assist Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in educating the community using research-based horticultural information.

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