



Montana Native Plants

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What is a NATIVE PLANT?

1. Occurs naturally in an area without human introduction
2. Adapted to local soil and climate conditions
3. Co-evolved with other species in the local ecosystem

Benefits of NATIVE PLANTS

1. Resilience: These plants not only survive in our area, but have adapted to thrive in some pretty incredible conditions.
2. Less input: Water, Fertilizer & Pesticides
3. Wildlife: Mammals, Birds & Insects (esp. Pollinators)
4. Soil: Extensive root systems help to stabilize soil, reduce erosion and increase the overall health of the soil.
5. Ecosystem: Promote biodiversity and improve the health of our local ecosystem.

Adaptations of our NATIVE PLANTS

How is it that so many different plants can survive our harsh climate? Here are a few of the astonishing characteristics that our NATIVE plant communities have developed.

- **ROOTS.** Many of our native prairie plants have root systems that extend 4-14 ft deep. Compare this to the average 2-6 in root depth of a Kentucky Bluegrass lawn and it becomes very clear that these plants are well rooted in our community. The increases surface area of the root system grants the plant access to more water and nutrients.
- **CROWNS.** Plant, foliage shape and size to minimize loss of water through evaporation.
- **DORMANCY.** Some plants go dormant during the hottest part of the summer to conserve energy.

NATIVE plant communities...

encompass a diverse group of plants that grow and thrive in similar conditions. Varied plant structures and successive bloom times are two ways plants have evolved within their ecosystem to successfully co-exist, while sharing resources and providing forage for many other species.

Montana ecosystems

Our state is home to such an amazing array of plants and is comprised of many varied ecosystems. Some plants are adapted to very specific site conditions, like an alpine meadow, while others may tolerate a range of growing locations. Site evaluation prior to planting is crucial for selecting the most appropriate plants for your garden.

Getting Started

- *Plant selection: Choose groups of plants that prefer similar site conditions including light, moisture and soil type. Most plants native to Montana will NOT tolerate heavy soil that doesn't drain well. Also consider the plants' structure, height, bloom time and flower color to provide seasonal interest and a succession of pollinator food.*
- *Site Prep: Addressing any weeds before planting is worth the extra time and will allow your new native plants a better chance of a quick, sturdy establishment. Now is also the time to amend the soil, keeping in mind the natural areas that the plants are found.*
- *Planting: A mix of seed, plugs and containerized plants can be used depending on timeline and budget. Spring or fall is ideal for planting plugs and containers, although anytime during the growing season is fine if you are keen on watering.*
- *Mulch: Add a layer of organic mulch to help retain moisture and suppress weeds.*
- *Irrigation: Less frequent, deep watering is best to establish a deep root system. BUT smaller plants or plugs may require frequent watering immediately after planting, especially in hot, windy weather. Many of our native plants will survive in a garden setting with no supplemental water once they are established, which is usually a couple years for smaller plants and 5+ years for larger trees. We highly recommend a temporary drip irrigation system to make watering easy and successful.*
- *Weed control: Our native plants do not compete well with weeds making the task of wrangling weeds imperative for the first couple years while the native plants establish.*
- *Deer: It may be prudent to use fencing or a deer/rabbit repellent spray as your new plants get settled in. And after, unless you've created a "wildlife" forage garden.*