

Go Native When You Plan Your Landscape

By Judith J. Castillo, Neighborhood News Staff Writer

Driving around Texas, you'll certainly see Native Texan bumper stickers, but are we Texans really setting down roots? Let's take native pride to the soil and plant more local species.

Why native?

Native gardening doesn't have to be a complete overhaul of your landscape; phase it in over a few seasons. Adding a little here and a little there each season will add up to the best change for the environment. Experts have found that human activity and urban development are causing native plant species to disappear and thus, the habitat loss for native animals. New construction of neighborhoods and commercial properties includes planting non-native species, presenting a problem. Homogenized landscapes are more susceptible to pests and diseases, require more work and water, and most detrimentally, do not provide habitat or food sources for local animals and insects.

Where to begin? Do your research.

First, observe the flora and fauna around your area. Recognizing what plants thrive naturally and their placement within the ecosystem will help you conceive placement within your yard. Are the plants in a shaded area, or full sun? Do they grow in a wooded area, grassy area, or out in the open? Take pictures of these species and locations and show them to your local plant nursery for advice on what plants to purchase.

Get digging...or not

Digging up soil can damage the soil food web. Avoid disturbing healthy soil by creating your own. It's as easy as making lasagna—just layer. Start by putting down cardboard and pile layers of alternating green and brown organic matter in the fall, and by spring you'll have compost started. Search lasagna composting online to find how-tos. When you're ready to put plants in the ground, create a hole bigger than the size of the root ball, and carefully remove the plant from the pot. Avoid damaging the plant by not pulling from the stem. Other tips for your native plant garden are:

- For a natural look, avoid planting in rows
- Water plants during period of establishment for optimal success
- Mulch helps plants stay moist and helps prevent weeds
- Native plants don't require fertilizer

For further reading, check out these resources:

- Guide to Native Plant Gardening - <https://www.wildflower.org/learn/guide-native-plant-gardening>
- Getting Started with a Native Garden - <https://westcook.wildones.org/getting-started-with-a-native-garden/>

- How to Make Your Own Compost - <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/sheet-mulching-aka-lasagna-composting-builds-soil-saves-time>
- Recommended Native Plants by Region - <https://www.wildflower.org/collections/>
- National Audubon Society Native Plant Database by Zip Code - <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants/search?zipcode=94610>
- Native Plant Society of Texas: List of Nurseries that Sell Native Plants - <https://npsot.org/wp/resources/finding-natives/>





