

Cues to Designing and Caring for Native Plant Gardens

Native plants provide a welcome addition to our gardens: native plants are beautiful; they support native wildlife; and since they are adapted for this area, they generally require less watering, no fertilizers, and are easier to maintain. However, *every* garden, including those with primarily native plants, requires maintenance.

Many people less familiar with native plants may view them as wild and untidy. They may think that native plants will create messy yards, despite their ecological benefits. The dominant front yard design in urban and suburban communities is neat and orderly – often characterized by mowed lawn and well-defined flowerbeds – and tends to be interpreted as intentional and neighborly.

Native landscapes in these settings can also be neat and orderly, and reflect intentional design by featuring some of the following elements:

Mowing: Mow a strip along bordering properties, driveways, and sidewalks to create a visual cue delineating edges.

Weeding Plant Beds: remove weeds and thin native plant beds to create tidy, uncrowded spaces.

Layering Plants in Beds: Provide progressively taller plants in beds to create visual interest.



Defined Trails and Paths: Wood chips and stones provide orderly pathways through native plantings.

Terracing and Edgings: Create patterns and edgings to define and contain natural plantings.

Foundation Plantings: Native shrubbery around foundations helps provide structure for native gardens, especially in the winter months.

Fences and Trellises: These both contain plants and provide scaffolding for taller plants and vines.

Well-Maintained Streetscape: Well-trimmed plants allow clear views of sidewalks and walkways.

Wildlife Feeders, Houses, and Water Features: All provide a visual and functional connection to the wildlife garden.

Flowering Plants: Blooms throughout the seasons, even when mixed with non-flowering plants, provide a welcome visual experience.



Additional Resources

Bayscapes Homeowners' Guide to Designing Your Property,
http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/raingarden_design/downloads/BayscapesHomeownersGuideDesigningYourProperty.PDF

Chesapeake Conservation Council
<http://www.chesapeakelandscape.org/>

Landscaping with Native Plants in the Middle Atlantic Region by Elizabeth DuPont. 1978:
Brandywine Conservancy.

The Living Landscape by Rick Darke and Doug Tallamy. 2014: Timber Press.

Visit local native plant display gardens to get ideas. Good examples of native plant design in our area include:

- Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria, VA 22312
- Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, 9750 Meadowlark Gardens Court, Vienna, VA 22182, 703-255-3631