



Pest-Free Landscaping and the Use of Reduced Risk Pesticides

It is often said that: “a lawn is the most expensive crop you’ll never eat”. But the expense of a lawn, the water requirements, fertilizers and pesticides – not to mention the mowing trimming and aerating, goes far beyond the tangible costs of establishing and maintaining turf grass.

Few homeowners consider their choices of landscaping, plants and planting habits. They focus on the appearance of their lawns and often imitate other landowners when designing their landscapes. Recently, the use of native plants in residential communities has drawn serious attention by environmentally conscious landscapers, developers, planners and homeowners. Instead of planting large expanses of turf grass interspersed with exotic trees, flowers and shrubs, the use of native plants and natural gardening techniques are growing in popularity. Native plant species can be used to create beautiful and more diverse habitats that are more compatible with regional conditions. As such, native plants effectively reduce the need for fertilizers, reduce water consumption, minimize runoff and require less use of pesticides.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines native plants as:

“...plants that have evolved over thousands of years in a particular region. They have adapted to the geography, hydrology, and climate of that region. Native plants occur in communities, that is, they have evolved together with other plants. As a result, a community of native plants provides habitat for a variety of native wildlife species such as songbirds and butterflies.”

Native species are hardier, sturdier, winter-tough and drought resistant. They provide excellent food sources and habitat for a variety of wildlife species and they allow owners to become relatively lazy, when it comes to upkeep and maintenance.

North American plants and insects have evolved for millions of years. Many insects like promethea moths and certain types of butterflies depend on the availability of native plants to provide larval foods or nectar for adults. Conversely, insects provide a check against the over growth of native species and create a more vibrant micro-environment than non-native, exotic plant species. Native plants that developers, landscaper and property owners might wish to consider include: coneflowers (*Echinacea*), wild bergamot – also known as bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*), black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Joepye (*Eupatorium maculatum*), native azaleas (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*), spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), winterberry holly (*Ilex opaca*) and nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*), to name only a few.

An excellent resource for natural gardening in Pennsylvania is *Bringing Home Nature*, written by Dr. Douglas Tallamy, an entomologist from southeastern Pennsylvania. The book is an excellent resource for natural gardening practices and his theories can be applied to larger developments interested in creating sustainable and low-maintenance habitats.

What You Need to Know

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The National Wildlife Federation Program (www.nwf.org) also has a program that aids landowners in creating and actually certifying quality, natural wildlife habitat. If your property is NWF certified, you receive an attractive yard sign that conveys your commitment to wildlife conservation and the environment.

If however, you prefer the look of the exotic plants in common use today, there are alternative, reduced risk pesticides that you can use to control common pests such as gypsy moths caterpillars, grubs and adult Japanese Beetles. U.S. EPA's Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances publishes a reduced risk pesticides (see: [reduced risk pesticides.pdf](#)) list that identifies common commercial grades of pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, plant growth regulators, repellents and rodenticides) and provides less toxic application and the unintended impacts on desirable plants, animals, insects and waterways

The use of native plants and reduced risk pesticides is another way that the [Healthy Roots Project](#) can help homeowners and developers create sustainable, healthy living conditions for people and wildlife for generations to come.

References

- EPA website. <http://www.epa.gov/greenacres/nativeplants/factsht.html>. June, 2008.
National Wildlife Federation website. <http://www.nwf.org/backyard>. June 2008.
Tallamy, D., *Bringing Nature Home*. Timber Press. Portland Oregon, 2007.