

Plant Natives

Native plants are plants that existed in the region prior to European settlement. When selecting flowers, trees, grasses and shrubs for your landscaping, opt for native species to provide a food source for our native birds, insects and other wildlife. Many residents set out bird feed in the winter, but do not realize that they may be starving the birds in the summer by planting non-native species. Lawn grasses and the non-native landscaping ornamentals have limited wildlife habitat value. One term used for lawns and non-native plants is a “green desert,” because, although they appear vibrant, they offer no habitat value.

One way to address these issues is to reduce the area around your home that you currently devote to lawn, encouraging a more natural landscaping approach with native meadow grasses, trees, and shrubs. This approach saves you money on fuel by mowing less and boosts the aesthetic value of your property. It's also an ideal solution for backyard wet spots – native wildflowers will soak up more water than grass.

Remove Invasive Plants from your Yard

Invasive plants are exotic species that were either intentionally or inadvertently introduced from other continents. An invasive exotic plant spreads aggressively into other areas and environments. Due to the absence of natural controls, invasive plants reproduce rapidly and can form stands that exclude nearly all other plants. In the process, they damage natural areas, altering ecosystem processes and displacing desirable native plant species. Invasive plants are a serious problem throughout the state; over 27% of the vascular plants species now growing within the borders of Pennsylvania are not native. Removing invasive plants from your yard and replacing them with native plants will be a big help to the region's wildlife.

Protect Local Streams and Rivers by Retaining and Filtering Water on your Property

Rain Barrels sit beneath downspouts to collect water from a roof during each rain event; the water can be saved and used to water plants in your yard and garden during dry spells. Rain barrels help to save groundwater resources, utilize higher quality water for plants, and decrease water bills.

Conserve drinking water resources. On average, nearly 30% of our daily water use is attributed to lawn and garden care. Collecting water from rain events decreases the amount of drinking water used to water plants.

Decrease water bills. Capturing rain water also reduces the amount of water needed from municipal sources and consequently reduces associated bills.

Utilize higher quality water for plants. Water collected from rain events is better for plants than treated water (which often contains chlorine); however, rain water should be used with some caution. Water collected from the roof can be laden with leaf litter, bird droppings (potential for bacteria), dust, other airborne materials, and chemicals from the roof. It is best to use the water on inedible plants such as the lawn or flowers. To ensure safety when watering vegetables, make sure to water near the base of the plant and avoid the fruit and foliage, especially in leafy greens.

Rain Gardens are an attractive solution to retaining and filtering water. Rain gardens are landscaped depressions planted with native wildflowers, specifically designed to collect and soak up water from downspouts. When it rains, water fills up the garden and slowly infiltrates into the soil. This helps protect our local waterways by filtering pollutants and recharging the groundwater supply.

Naturalizing Your Yard

Improving your Yard's Ecology while Saving Money



Naturalizing Your Yard

In some cases, changing your current routine to incorporate practices that are environmentally friendly can be challenging. However, in this brochure you will find many easy-to-implement ideas to protect and preserve our natural resources... and also your pocketbook.

Create a Healthier, Eco-friendly Lawn

The image of the flawless, vividly green lawn comes at a high environmental cost of pesticides and fertilizers running into streams and rivers.

There are many miles of streams in the Lehigh Valley that are designated as *impaired*; that mileage continues to increase every year. Eliminating the use of fertilizers and pesticides on your lawn is one way to improve stream health. **For a healthy lawn, try these techniques:**

Mow high: Mowing your grass at 3 to 4 inches in height reduces mowing frequency, thus saving fuel. High mowing also discourages weeds because higher grass shades out weeds. It also provides a larger area for each blade to perform photosynthesis, strengthening the plant.

Leave the clippings: Instead of paying for fertilizers, leave the clippings and mow over fallen leaves. It's the most efficient way to return nutrients and organic matter to the soil. Eliminating the use of chemical fertilizers will also yield healthier soil and grass. Lawns that are frequently treated with chemical fertilizers are essentially "lazy" lawns. They have much shorter root systems since the nutrients are applied right at the surface. The grass becomes dependent on the applications which weakens the plant. Grasses with longer roots adapt better to changes in climate because they can absorb the nutrients they need from the soil, creating healthier plants.

Stop using pesticides: Pesticides kill off beneficial insects and microorganisms that improve the soil. Pests over time can become immune to applications, requiring more frequent and more toxic applications. Encouraging beneficial insects with native landscaping will help keep pest populations in check.

Plant Trees

Trees provide many vital ecological services – filter pollutants from water, provide oxygen, remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, provide habitat – but they can also help your bank account. By planting trees on your property, you can increase your property value and save on heating and cooling bills. Trees can act as windbreaks to reduce heating bills by 10-20%, conversely, in the summer months, they provide shade to help cool your house.

Create a Compost Pile

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the average person generates 1.35 pounds of food waste per day. In the U.S., this amounts to 12.5% of the total material entering landfills. Diverting food scraps from your garbage will not only prolong the life of landfills, but when mixed with leaves or grass clippings, will create a valuable resource. **Compost** enriches the soil by adding nutrients and organic matter. Compost can be used in your landscaping or garden areas, which will save money on soil amendments. Sorting out your food scraps will also reduce your trash bill.

Start a Backyard Vegetable Garden

Backyard vegetable and fruit gardens provide your family with fresher, cheaper, and more nutritious produce. Growing your own food also cuts down on carbon dioxide emissions and fuel consumption created by the length of transit (7 to 10 days) from the farm to the grocery store. Most produce purchased in a grocery store has traveled 1,500 to 2,000 miles from the farm where it was grown, which adds a considerable amount of carbon dioxide and noxious pollutants to the atmosphere. Garden expert Rosalind Creasy calculated that a 10 foot by 10 foot area will yield over \$700 in produce! Lastly, growing, harvesting, and eating your own food can be very rewarding!



Naturalizing Your Yard

Protecting and Preserving
Natural Resources while
Helping your Pocketbook



BEFORE



AFTER



- 6** Native wildflowers will soak up more water than grass — a perfect solution for wet spots.
- 7** Wildlife boxes create additional habitat for threatened species and are easy to make.
- 8** A native wildflower patch or butterfly garden will boost aesthetics of your property.
- 9** Rain barrels help conserve drinking water resources and can save you money.
- 1** Plant trees. Trees can act as windbreaks to reduce heating bills by 10-20% and shade and cool your house in the summer.
- 2** Rain gardens collect and soak up water from downspouts.
- 3** Reduce mowed areas. Landscape naturally with native meadow grasses, trees, and shrubs to attract birds, butterflies and other wildlife to your yard.
- 4** Native wildflowers will soak up more water than grass — a perfect solution for wet spots.
- 5** Wildlife boxes create additional habitat for threatened species and are easy to make.
- 6** A native wildflower patch or butterfly garden will boost aesthetics of your property.
- 7** Rain barrels help conserve drinking water resources and can save you money.
- 8** Planting trees on your property can increase your curbside appeal and your property value.
- 9** Backyard vegetable gardens provide your family with fresher, cheaper, and more nutritious produce.
- 10** Compost piles create rich, nutrient-filled organic matter to enrich your soil. Composting food scraps will reduce your trash bill and prolong the life of landfills.
- 11** Plant native trees and shrubs to create habitat for wildlife and reduce the need for mowing.
- 12** Mow high. Mowing your grass at 3 to 4 inches in height will reduce your frequency of mowing, thus saving fuel, and help to discourage weeds.



RESOURCES: To find your county conservation district: <http://pacd.org/your-district/find-your-district/>