



PLANT NEBRASKA



# Intentionally Wild

## Using native plants in designed landscapes

Using native plants and sustainable management strategies in front of our homes and businesses communicates something about our values to the people who pass by. While perception is slowly changing, many neighbors may still have the impression that native plant landscapes are messy and wild. There are small things we can do to communicate that a landscape was intentionally designed and is being cared for.

1

### Create Clean Edges and Borders

There can be a romance to cottage-style flowers overflowing a garden, but when that overflow begins to impede sidewalk traffic or affect visibility of driveways and corners, the romance turns into annoyance.

- Use smaller, more structural plants along the edges of sidewalks and driveways.
- Keep taller, potentially floppy species to the back.
- Use physical borders, decorative fences, rocks, etc., to keep plants off walkways.
- Cut back edge plants in late spring to encourage them to bloom shorter.

2

### Use Lawn as a Backdrop

Large garden spaces can become overwhelming to both look at and work in. Use shorter lawn areas to create a backdrop for defined garden spaces.

- “Lawn” could be traditional, mowed turf or could include any naturally shorter alternatives, including sedge meadows, bee lawns or groundcovers like creeping thyme.
- Lawn as a backdrop makes it easier for the human eye to find order in a space and focus on the beauty of an individual area.
- Lawn also provides a way to access and care for each garden space without damaging plants or compacting the soil within the garden.

3

### Create Patterns

The human eye likes to find patterns and order within a view. Individual plants or randomized designs can be overwhelming to the casual observer.

- Plant in groups of 3-5. This is also beneficial to specialist insects, as it makes a species easier for them to find.
- Repeat combinations of 3-5 species.
- In “wilder” or more naturalized designs, repeat a base plant or living mulch species throughout the garden.



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## Provide a Focal Point

Use an anchor or specimen plant to draw the eye. This could be the largest plant, showiest flower or a unique texture. Your focal point could also be physical art, like a statue, sculpture, water feature, trellis or bird bath.

### Examples of Anchor Plants

- Leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*)
- Joe-pye plant (*Eutrochium\* maculatum*)
- False blue indigo (*Baptisia minor*)
- Shrubs or ornamental trees \*formerly *Eupatorium*



Leadplant  
(*Amorpha canescens*)



False blue indigo  
(*Baptisia minor*)



Weeping white  
pine  
(*Pinus strobus*)

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## Care for Your Garden

Even native species require some care to look good and grow well. Regardless of the design style you choose, a few basic management principles will keep your garden looking welcoming.

- Annually cut back plants in the spring and remove deeply accumulated debris.
- Weed regularly throughout the year, focusing on the most aggressive and problematic species (bindweed, thistle, etc.). Depending on your style, you may choose to leave more benign or beneficial “weeds” like violets.
- Replace plants as needed

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## Use Signage

This is an optional step and isn't for every garden. Signage can help communicate ownership, pride and/or purpose in a garden and are especially effective in neighborhoods with a lot of foot traffic.

- Name your garden with a sign: “Joe’s Garden” or “Goldenrod Corner.”
- Show its purpose: “Pollinator Habitat,” “Bird Garden.”
- Educational signage can be more detailed and teach people about the species planted or about the management style of your garden.