



Sustainable Schoolyards

Planting with Prairie Natives

NEBRASKA STATEWIDE ARBORETUM



Using native prairie plants in a landscape offers many aesthetic and environmental benefits and involves a different approach to design and management than traditional landscape plants. When gardening with natives the goal is to create a dynamic community of plants that interact rather than focus on the needs of each individual plant.

The Look

It is important to remember that a native plant garden will look different than a traditional garden. A native plant garden draws inspiration from a prairie or meadow where plants are grow close together and intermingle. Native plants are adapted to tight growing conditions and rely on each other and the structure of grasses for support.



Native Garden

- Creates a sense of place by connecting the garden to the natural heritage of the area
- Increases water efficiency
- Decreases management time by limiting weeding, mulching and irrigation
- Creates habitat for native birds and pollinating insects
- Provides learning opportunities for people of all ages

VS

Traditional Garden

- Has no connection to the ecological identity of the area
- Often requires significant irrigation
- Requires commitment of time and money for weed control, mulching and irrigation
- Has little habitat value for birds and pollinating insects
- Can be redundant and provides few opportunities for people to experience something new in the landscape

Planting



When planning a native garden it is important to choose species that fulfill all the needs of the plant community. Include plants that provide structure, seasonal interest, and ground cover. A clean edge can be created with small, tidier plants or simply by mowing or trimming. Use small plants (plug to quart sized) in order to make layout and planting easier and keep the cost down. Plan for one plant per square foot to achieve the proper spacing. Use a light layer of straw or grass mulch (woodchip is not ideal) to hold moisture and prevent weeds while the plants establish. Consider seeding dynamic, shorter lived plants in open spaces to further control weeds and provide a finished look while the longer-lived plants mature.

Layers of a Native Garden

Structure: Large, substantial, specimen plants that make up about 10-15% of the plants in the garden.



Seasonal Interest and Grasses: Showy flowers that provide a color theme for each season. Grasses are the visual glue that pulls the garden together and provides support to seasonal plants. Makes up about 30-40% of the plants in



Ground Cover: Plants with a year round presence that may not be as showy but weave between other plants and work hard to prevent weeds and erosion. Makes up about 50% of the plants in the garden.



Fillers (to seed): Dynamic plants that grow quickly from seed to fill in open spaces, prevent weeds and provide a finished look to a new garden. May be short lived but provide an important function in the establishment of a new garden.

