Native Plants

An Educational Series For Stream Teams To Learn and Collect

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This beautiful and diverse landscape evolved during these thousands of years with the interaction of climate, soils, native grazers, and the native peoples’ use of fire to cover more than a third of the state — 15 million acres. However, in the last 150 years or so that vast native prairie system has been reduced to fewer than 90,000 acres. This rapid transformation began when European settlers introduced change in land use with plants they transported to the New World to continue familiar agricultural practices, and converted the landscape to cropland, cities, roads, and highways. Savannas, glades, wetlands, forests, and forested river corridors have also been greatly impacted with this change in land use.

Functions of Native Plants

As so often happens, the value of something is not recognized until it is gone or nearly gone. This is the case with the plants of our native landscape. We now know many of the important and irreplaceable services native plants provide. Because of this knowledge, many efforts are being made to promote their use in landscapes, including individual lawn-scaping, business landscaping, agricultural use for grazing, stream restoration, green spaces, and highway right-of-ways.

Some of the many functions of native plants that benefit water quality and water quantity include:

- Many native grasses and forbs have exceptionally long and complex root systems. This vast array of roots serves to facilitate the absorption of stormwater into the ground where it is available to replenish aquifers that are important in maintaining a
Possibilities for native plantings in urban areas include rain gardens and landscaping with native trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses to benefit water quality while providing vital habitat for birds, insects, and other creatures.

Parks and road right-of-ways are great places for native plants. Become an advocate in your community to promote plantings of natives in these areas.

In rural areas, natives provide excellent nutrition for livestock grazing while improving soil and sequestering carbon. They are extremely beneficial for important habitat and water quality as crop buffers and strips through cropped fields. Natives are also economically important in other ways such as nut trees, timber, and providing decorative features.

Help educate the members of your community about the many benefits of native plants and promote their use in landscapes.

Support organizations whose mission is to protect our native landscapes.

**Actions To Take**

First, it is important to understand what is meant by the term “native.” All plants are native to some place, so before pursuing a native planting project, learn which plants are native to your area. This information can be found at [plants.usda.gov/java/](http://plants.usda.gov/java/).

To help acquaint you with native Missouri plants, the Grow Native! website [grownative.org](http://grownative.org) is an excellent source of information and features a number of photos of native plantings.

Don’t forget to send your questions to [streamteam@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:streamteam@mdc.mo.gov) or call 1-800-781-1989.

**Additional Resources:**

- Bentrup, Gary. Conservation Buffers, Design Guidelines for Buffers, Corridors & Greenways. [nac.unl.edu/buffers/index.html](http://nac.unl.edu/buffers/index.html)
- Tallamy, Douglas W. *Bringing Nature Home*
- Tylka, Dave. *Native Landscaping for Wildlife and People*
- Grow Native! [grownative.org](http://grownative.org)
- Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder: [missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/plantfindersearch.aspx](http://missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/plantfindersearch.aspx)