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## Native Plants - Why You Should be Growing Plants Native to Your Area.

By [Marie Iannotti](#), About.com Guide

**Question:** Native Plants - Why You Should be Growing Plants Native to Your Area.

Native plants are often recommended as ideal garden plants, because they are uniquely suited to growing in their native area. But since today's new plants are being bred to have all kinds of desirable qualities such as disease and pest resistance and clumping growing habits, is it really important to grow native plants? And how do I know what plants are native to my area anyway?

**Answer:**

### What is a Native Plant?

Native plants are plants that evolved in the area. Native plants grew naturally in an area, before humans began to bring in outside plants to grow and farm. Plant natives adapted to the climate and cultural conditions of an area and became part of the ecosystem.

That brings us to our next question: what is that area? Plants may be native to North America, but not necessarily native to every state in the U.S. Native plants can evolve in very specific sites, so that a plant native to the Acadia National Park area of Maine, but not near Portland.

There's even more ambiguity with plant natives when you consider that a plant can be native to very diverse climates. For example, the Eastern Redbud is native to both Georgia and New York, but trees that have been growing in Georgia have adapted to Georgia's climate, not New York's. So ideally it would be best to know where the plants you are purchasing were grown. In reality, most plants being offered are from large growers and farms and you may never be certain where your plant originated. However, there's every reason to hope it will adapt.

### Why Should I Garden with Native Plants?

Well for starters, they take less work and resources. Since native plants have spent centuries adapting to your garden's growing conditions, they aren't going to need much in the way of supplemental fertilizer, spraying and winter mulching. New cultivars often make similar claims, but they haven't been tested everywhere and plant descriptions change, the longer they are on the market and grown in a wider range of conditions. They may be able to take the winters in Zone 5, but the relentless humidity of summer could do them in. Even those that succeed will need a period of adjustment in your garden.

Native plants tend to be well behaved in the garden. Plant natives are rarely invasive. Having evolved within the community, they have natural predators that help to keep them in check. It's hard to know that a new plant developed in Zone 6 won't take off and become invasive in Zone 8.

Local wildlife, birds and butterflies have a relationship with your native plants. They rely on them for food, shelter and nesting.

Finally, native plants can be quite beautiful. We often overlook the plants right under our nose, in favor of this year's new plant in town. But garden favorites like coneflowers, coreopsis and yarrow have all been developed from North American natives.

## **Do My Plant Natives have to be Native to My Town? My State?...**

The more local you are in choosing native plants, the better your success rate will be when growing them. However we are gardening, not setting up a preserve. So start by including a handful of plants native to your county or state and build from there.

## **Where Can I Find Out What Plants are Native to My Area?**

The easiest place to start is at your **local Cooperative Extension**. They should be able to provide you with or point you to a native plant list for your area.

Small native plant nurseries are starting to pop up everywhere. These nurseries are a great source for plant natives as well as gardening information specific to your area. [PlantNative](#) has a state by state listing of native plant nurseries.

There are also several native plant directories on the web that provide lists of plant natives by state. Two good ones to get your started are:

1. [eNature.com - Native Gardening and Invasive Plants Guide](#)
2. [Plant Native - Regional Plant List Finder](#)

And always get your native plants from a reputable source. This will help protect endangered species that are illegally harvested in the wild as well as insuring you are getting the plant you want, and not an imposter.

**[http://gardening.about.com/od/wildflowergardens/f/Native\\_Plants.htm](http://gardening.about.com/od/wildflowergardens/f/Native_Plants.htm)**