NATURAL LANDSCAPING

a beautiful, healthy, and economical alternative for your yard

Protecting Bloomington's natural resources is a priority for many residents. However, habitat loss due to land development and other human activities continues to increase in Bloomington and across the nation. Urban sprawl has brought more people into areas previously functioning as wildlife habitat. Landscapes associated with human development typically consist of well-manicured lawns, which frequently rely on chemicals and high water use. Lawn turf is not beneficial to wildlife and does not promote biodiversity. In addition, many of the ornamental plants commonly used in residential landscaping are non-native, and in some cases invasive. Natural landscaping restores some of the biodiversity that has been lost over time.

What is Natural Landscaping?

The idea behind "natural landscaping: is to create yards and gardens that come as close as possible to what is found in nature. By mimicking what works naturally in our own geographic location, green spaces created by humans can bring the same benefits that natural, untouched areas bring, including rain and stormwater filtration, habitats for animals, and low-maintenance ground cover. Use of natural landscaping favors local native plant species over harmful, invasive, exotic species that are a threat to a stable ecosystem. By providing natural landscaping in Bloomington, you can promote healthier relationships between natural ecosystems and human communities, create beautiful spaces, and save money too!

Queen of the prairie (back), coneflower (front)

What are Native Plants?

Native plants are species that have naturally evolved in a specific geographic location and climate. They are adapted to the local environment, including soil, moisture, weather conditions, microbes, and animals. Native plantings promote natural biodiversity, contribute a rich source of nutrients to the soil, and provide food and habitat for native songbirds, butterflies and beneficial insects. They are hardy, drought resistant, low maintenance, and once established, significantly reduce the need for fertilizers, pesticides, and water.
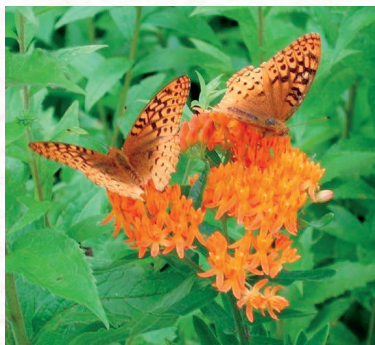
What are Invasive Plants?

The federal government defines an invasive species as a non-native species whose introduction causes or may cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. Invasive plant species are a threat to natural areas in Indiana. They displace native plants, eliminate food and cover for wildlife, and threaten rare plant and animal species. Invasive plants are spread primarily by human activities, often unintended. Plants introduced as ornamentals in landscaping can become invasive by escaping into wild areas because they have no natural controls to limit their spread.

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources Terrestrial Plant Rule designates 44 species of plants as invasive pests. This rule makes it illegal to sell, gift, barter, exchange, distribute, transport, or introduce these plants in the State of Indiana. Additionally, the City of Bloomington Municipal Code (BMC) contains a list of plants that are prohibited within the city limits (see BMC 20.04.080 Landscaping, buffering, and fences at bton.in/MivLX).

New England Aster

Butterfly weed

Scarlet Beebalm (Bergamot)

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Getting Started on a Native Garden

Your yard is part of an ecosystem that includes your neighborhood and nearby natural areas. Take a look around and determine how to build on what you already have.

1. Does your yard already include native plants? If you need help identifying species, there are many smartphone apps available for this purpose. Check out Seek by iNaturalist.
2. What other plants do you have to work with? A non-native plant is not the same as an invasive plant. Gardening with native plants doesn't mean tearing out all your non-native ornamentals.
3. What types of plant communities will best suit your yard? Is your yard mostly sunny? Do you have shady spots? Are some areas wetter than others? These conditions will help you choose what to plant and where.
4. Can you identify any invasive plants? The first step in installing a natural landscape is identifying, removing, and controlling invasive plants. Monroe County Identify and Reduce Invasive Species (MC-IRIS) can help! Their website, mc-iris.org, is an excellent resource. You can borrow a toolkit, sign up to participate in the Reduce One Invasive Species Challenge, or request a property survey during which a volunteer will visit your home to teach you how to identify and reduce common invasive plants.

Additional Resources

City of Bloomington, HAND Neighborhood Grants
Small & Simple Grant to Control Invasive Plant Species
bton.in/OHJgS

Monroe County Identify and Reduce Invasive Species (MC-IRIS)
mc-iris.org

Monroe County Rain Garden Starter Guide
co.monroe.in.us/egov/documents/1531788419_09736.pdf

Indiana Native Plant Society
Landscape Uses of Native Plants
indiananativeplants.org/landscaping/landscape-uses-of-native-plants/

Indiana Department or Natural Resources
Terrestrial Plant Rule
in.gov/dnr/rules-and-regulations/invasive-species/terrestrial-invasive-species-plants

US Department of Agriculture
National Invasive Species Information Center
invasivespeciesinfo.gov/

US Environmental Protection Agency
Landscaping with Native Plants (Midwest)
nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPURL.cgi?Dockey=94005TMX.txt

National Wildlife Federation
Garden for Wildlife
nwf.org/garden

Where to Buy Native Plants

Abell Nursery
7667 W State Road 45, Bloomington, 47403
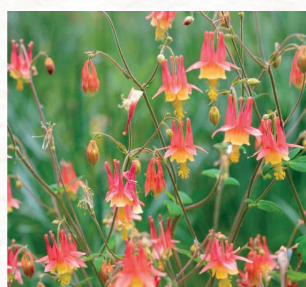812-825-2530
abellnursery.com/

Bloomington Valley Nursery
5230 S Old State Road 37, Bloomington, 47401
812-824-8813
bloomingtonvalleynursery.com/

May's Greenhouse
6280 S Old State Road 37, Bloomington, 47401
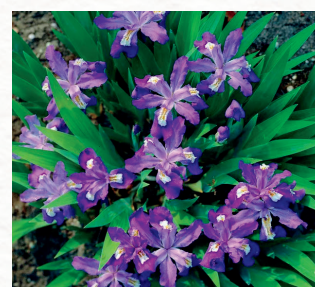812-824-8630
maysgreenhouse.net/

Hinkle-Garton Farmstead Daisy Days Native Plant Sale
annually in late-April
bloomingtonrestorations.org/about-us/hinkle-garton-farmstead/

MC-IRIS Native Plant Sale
annually in early-September
mc-iris.org/native-plant-sale.html

National Wildlife Federation Garden for Wildlife
Shop native plants by zip code
gardenforwildlife.com/

Eastern Columbine

Dwarf crested iris