



What are Native Plants?

Plants are considered native, indigenous, or endemic to a region if they originated and are naturally occurring in that region. Many “wild” plants that we think of as native species were actually introduced during European settlement to North America. Plants that are native to Southern Ontario evolved here and have adapted to the regional climate, soils and wildlife.

Most native plants that are native to Southern Ontario are appropriate for planting in the Toronto area. However, Southern Ontario is a large geographic area that varies in environmental conditions. If possible, give preference to plant materials produced from seed collected closest to your planting site. This will ensure that the plants you are using will be best adapted to local environmental conditions. For example, planting a maple tree that came from a seed indigenous to the Toronto area will do better in Toronto than a similar maple that evolved and adapted to conditions in Ottawa or Windsor or Owen Sound.

Using local genetic stock is particularly important if your property is close to one of Toronto’s parks or ravines. This is because there will be exchanges of genetic material from your yard into these natural areas. By using native species from local stock you will ensure that Toronto’s native plants will remain genetically adapted to local conditions.



Examples of species found in an Oak Woodland plant community including Wood Anemone (white flowers), False Solomon’s Seal (bottom right) and Early Meadowrue (top left). *City of Toronto.*

Contributing to Local Ecosystems

The loss of habitat as a result of rapid urbanization in Southern Ontario is affecting ecosystem health and reducing the diversity of native plants and wildlife in natural areas. In addition to the benefits of lower cost and maintenance, using native plants can help sustain local ecosystems. Ecosystems are communities of plants and animals including the physical environment they inhabit. Plant and animal communities are dependent on many environmental factors including sunlight, soil, water, and organic material. Examples of communities found in Toronto are forest, woodland, savannah, prairie, and marsh.

Learning From Nature

When considering the integration of native plants into your garden, you may wish to simply add some native wildflowers to your existing beds with or without a particular goal in mind such as adding colour or attracting butterflies. Alternatively, you may wish to incorporate a **native plant community** into your yard. Plant communities that have evolved together should require no maintenance, other than protection from urban pressures (i.e. trampling, digging, dumping and non-native weeds). For more information on how to plan a backyard planting see Forestry Facts #1.

The different plants in these communities have adapted to local soil conditions and climate, as well as how other plants in their community may affect their environment. For example, native trees tend to leaf out late in the spring, allowing native spring wildflowers enough time to flower before they are shaded over. A non-native tree, such as a Norway Maple, leafs out early and has a very dense canopy, which shades out most plants from its understorey, this in turn often leads to problems with soil erosion. Native wildflowers are perennial or self-seeding, which means you will not have to replace them every year. Woodland species are adapted to pushing through leaf litter while benefiting from its’ insulating, moisture retaining and fertilizing properties. This means that you will save time, money and effort by not having to rake leaves, water or fertilize your naturalized garden.

Examples of native plant communities in Toronto include the globally rare Black Oak Tallgrass Savannah, found in the High Park area or Mixed Hardwood forest communities that include a variety of maples and nut trees. The best way to find out about native plant communities is to go out and see them. Contact a local naturalist or stewardship group for support and advice. A list of groups is available on the City of Toronto Web site at:

www.toronto.ca/greentoronto/greengroups.htm

Native Plants for Toronto by Preferred Habitat Type

	Full Sun	Full Sun – Partial Shade	Partial Shade - Shade
Dry Soil	Black Oak (<i>Quercus velutina</i>) White Pine (<i>Pinus strobus</i>) Smooth Rose (<i>Rosa blanda</i>) American Bittersweet (<i>Celastrus scandens</i>) Harebell (<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>) Big Bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>) Wild Bergamot (<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>) Hoary Vervain (<i>Verbena stricta</i>) Wild Strawberry (<i>Fragaria virginiana</i>)	Black Oak (<i>Quercus velutina</i>) White Pine (<i>Pinus strobus</i>) Choke Cherry (<i>Prunus virginiana</i>) Snowberry (<i>Symphoricarpos alba</i>) Smooth Aster (<i>Aster laevis</i>) Common Wood Sedge (<i>Carex blanda</i>) Foxglove Beardtongue (<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>) Cylindric Blazing Star (<i>Liatris cylindracea</i>) Hairy Bush-clover (<i>Lespedeza hirta</i>)	Sugar Maple (<i>Acer saccharum</i>) Maple-leaf Viburnum (<i>Viburnum acerifolium</i>) Round-leaved Dogwood (<i>Cornus rugosa</i>) Big-leaved Aster (<i>Aster macrophyllus</i>) Bottlebrush Grass (<i>Elymus hystrix</i>) Woodland Strawberry (<i>Fragaria vesca</i>) Woodland Sunflower (<i>Helianthus divaricatus</i>) Zig-zag Goldenrod (<i>Solidago flexicaulus</i>)
Average Soil	Trembling Aspen (<i>Populus tremuloides</i>) Black Cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>) Grey Dogwood (<i>Cornus racemosa</i>) Virgin's Bower (<i>Clematis virginiana</i>) New England Aster (<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>) Evening Primrose (<i>Oenothera biennis</i>) Showy Tick Trefoil (<i>Desmodium canadense</i>) Pale-leaved Sunflower (<i>Helianthus strumosus</i>) Spreading Dogbane (<i>Apocynum androsaemifolium</i>)	White Ash (<i>Fraxinus americana</i>) Red Oak (<i>Quercus rubra</i>) Virginiana Creeper (<i>Parthenocissus vitacea</i>) Smooth Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier laevis</i>) Wild Columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>) Common Wood Sedge (<i>Carex blanda</i>) Michigan Lily (<i>Lilium michiganense</i>) Wild Geranium (<i>Geranium maculatum</i>) Starry False Solomon's Seal (<i>Maianthemum stellatum</i>)	Sugar Maple (<i>Acer saccharum</i>) Witch Hazel (<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>) Alternate Dogwood (<i>Cornus alternifolia</i>) Solomon's Seal (<i>Polygonatum biflorum</i>) Zig-zag Goldenrod (<i>Solidago flexicaulus</i>) Mayapple (<i>Podophyllum peltatum</i>) Red Baneberry (<i>Actaea rubra</i>) Virgin's Bower (<i>Clematis virginiana</i>)
Moist Soil	White Cedar (<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>) Silver Maple (<i>Acer saccharinum</i>) Buttonbush (<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>) Red-osier Dogwood (<i>Cornus stolonifera</i>) Thimbleweed (<i>Anemone virginiana</i>) Canada Wild Rye (<i>Elymus canadensis</i>) Dense Blazing-star (<i>Liatris spicata</i>) Blue Vervain (<i>Verbena hastata</i>) Green-headed Coneflower (<i>Rudbeckia lacinata</i>)	Yellow Birch (<i>Betula alleghaniensis</i>) Green Ash (<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>) Common Elderberry (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>) Nannyberry (<i>Viburnum lentago</i>) Wood Rush (<i>Luzula multiflora</i>) Thin-leaved Sunflower (<i>Helianthus decapetalus</i>) Great Blue Lobelia (<i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>) Turtlehead (<i>Chelon glabra</i>) Bebb's Sedge (<i>Carex bebbii</i>)	Hemlock (<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>) Black Maple (<i>Acer nigrum</i>) Spicebush (<i>Lindera benzoin</i>) Black Currant (<i>Ribes americanum</i>) White Baneberry (<i>Actaea pachypoda</i>) Red Baneberry (<i>Actaea rubra</i>) Canada Anemone (<i>Anemone canadensis</i>) Wild Sarsaparilla (<i>Aralia nudicaulis</i>) Wild Ginger (<i>Asarum canadense</i>)

Native Plant List for Toronto

The preceding list of suggested native plants is provided for the Toronto Region. Because ecosystems are dependent on environmental conditions such as moisture and light, the species listed in each square of the table represents a plant community. Choosing plants from the same community will help them to thrive. Most of these species are available at local nurseries, however you may need to contact several outlets to find a specific plant. Asking for less common native species may help to increase their availability in the horticultural trade.

Recommendations are given for a mix of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants according to their preference for soil and sunlight conditions. See Forestry Facts #1 for more information on determining environmental conditions of your planting site. Dry soils include sandy and gravelly soils that drain readily. Average soils are well-drained silts or clays that may have standing water for short periods after a hard rain. Moist soils include those with high clay content, they will be moist through the growing season and may experience extended periods of standing water. Sun exposure can be estimated by the number of hours your property receives direct sunlight ranging from a minimum of 6 hours for full sun, 2 to 6 hours for part-sun and less than 2 hours for full shade.



Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is a native shrub to Toronto woodlands. Photo: Paul Wray, www.invasive.org

Match your backyard conditions to the species' preferences to obtain the best planting results. You should be able to increase the list of species that are appropriate by reviewing gardening books and nursery catalogues. There is some overlap for the species given since some species are adapted to a range of conditions.

Sources of Native Plants

The origin of native plants is important since plants are adapted to specific site conditions. It is also important that the method of seed collection used maintains a high genetic diversity and prevents wild populations from being depleted. A plant's genetic diversity is important to its ability to adapt to environmental change.

Obtaining native plants from environmental organizations is the best way to ensure that you are obtaining plants from a reliable source. Some volunteer groups and other associations in Toronto sell native plants to the public at designated plant sales. Some nurseries specialize in native plants. However, most commercial nurseries now include some native species in their inventory. To find a reputable nursery, see some of our recommendations or consult the Native Plant Resource Guide for Ontario.

Buying Native Plants from Commercial Nurseries

Finding appropriate native plants can be challenging since most commercial nurseries carry cultivated varieties of native species. Since they are often reproduced from cuttings in large quantities from one individual plant, cultivated varieties have low genetic diversity. Ask staff about the source of plant material and use Scientific (Latin) names to make sure you receive true native varieties. Give preference to plants that have been propagated from seed that was collected closest to your planting site. Be cautious about species labelled as Red Maple, White Birch, Snowberry, Highbush Cranberry and Pussy Willow since they are often substituted with non-native invasive varieties. See Forestry Facts #3 for more information on invasive plants. Some woodland plants including ferns and trilliums are very difficult to grow in large quantities, therefore the source should be questioned to ensure they were not dug from the wild.

Additional Resources:

'Native Plant Resource Guide for Ontario'

Ministry of Natural Resources Stores

Web site:

[http://mnr.stores.gov.on.ca/mnr/english/publication_subj
ects.asp?tid=0&cat=2&subcat=0](http://mnr.stores.gov.on.ca/mnr/english/publication_subj
ects.asp?tid=0&cat=2&subcat=0)

Minimal Charge.

North American Native Plant Society (NANPS)

PO Box 84, Station D, Toronto, Ontario M9A 4X1

Phone: (416) 631-4438

E-mail: nanps@nanps.org

Web site: www.nanps.org

Forest Gene Conservation Association

Suite 233, 266 Charlotte Street, Peterborough, ON

K9J 2V4 Phone: (705) 755-3284 Fax: (705) 755-3292

Email: barb.boysen@mnr.gov.on.ca

Sources of Native Plants in the Toronto Area

Local Native Plant Sales:

High Park Volunteer Stewardship Program

Plant Sale Dates: spring & fall; typically end of April & early October

Location of Sale: High Park

Type of Material: mostly herbaceous plants, most appropriate for High Park area;

sunny habitat with sandy soils

Further Information:

Contact Volunteer Stewardship Program

c/o High Park Community Advisory Council

PO Box 108, Swansea Town Hall

95 Lavinia Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6S 3H9

Phone: (416) 392-1748

Web site: www.highpark.org

Evergreen

355 Adelaide Street West, Fifth Floor

Toronto, Ontario M5V 1S2

Phone: (416) 596-1495 Fax: (416) 596-1443

E-mail: info@evergreen.ca

Web site: www.evergreen.ca

Canadian Wildlife Federation

350 Michael Cowpland Drive

Kanata, Ontario K2M 2W1

Phone: 1-800-563-WILD Fax: (613) 599-4428

E-mail: info@cwf-fcf.org

Web site: www.cwf-fcf.org

North American Native Plant Society

Plant Sale Dates: spring; typically early May

Location of Sale: Markham Civic Centre, 101 Town Centre Boulevard, Toronto

Type of Material: large variety of herbaceous plants; some vines, shrubs & trees

Further Information:

Contact NANPS

PO Box 84, Station D

Etobicoke, Ontario M9A 4X1

Phone: (416) 631-4438

E-mail: nanps@nanps.org

Web Site: www.nanps.org

Tree Planting Programs:

LEAF Backyard Tree Planting Program

Supply some native perennials, trees & shrubs

Phone: (416) 413-9244

Web site: www.leaftoronto.org

City of Toronto Urban Forestry

Provide free front yard street tree,

Choose species native to Southern Ontario

Phone: (416) 338-TREE (8733)

Web site: www.toronto.ca/trees

Private Land Tree Planting Program

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

Applicable to landowners with a minimum of 2 acres of land within the GTA.

Phone: (905) 851-2809

Web site: www.trca.on.ca

Selected List of Native Plant Nurseries

Native Plants in Claremont

4965 Westney Road
Pickering (Claremont), ON
L1Y 1A2

Phone: 905-649-8176

E-mail: info@nativeplants.ca

Web site: www.nativeplants.ca

Online catalogue available.

Type of Material: mostly herbaceous plants, some vines & shrubs

Native Plant Nurseries

12965 Regional Road 39

PO Box 169

Zephyr, ON

LOE 1T0

Phone: 905-473-2743

E-mail: nativeplantnurseries@hotmail.com

Type of Material: mostly herbaceous plants

Baker Tree Farm

RR #5, Georgetown, ON L7G 4S8

Phone: (905) 877-9390 Fax: (905) 877-6536

Email: bakertreefarm@castle.on.ca

Type of Material: trees & shrubs

Urban Forest Associates Inc.

331 Linsmore Crescent

Toronto, ON M4J 4M1

Phone/Fax: (416) 423-3387

E-mail: stephen@ufora.ca

Web site: www.ufora.ca

Van Den Nest Nursery

Box 20, 9594 Somer Rd., Eden, ON N0J 1H0

Phone: (519) 866-5269 Fax: (519) 866-5507

Email: edentree@amtelecom.net

Web site: www.amtelecom.net/~edentree

Online catalogue available.

Type of Material: trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants.

Grand Moraine Growers

7369 12th Line, RR#2 Alma, ON N0B 1A0

Phone: (519) 638-1101 Fax: (519) 638-1124

E-mail: pems@sentex.net

Web site: www.sentex.net/~pems/

Type of Material: mostly herbaceous plants, some woody species

Nursery contact list updated April 2007.