

Celebrate the beauty and diversity of plants native to Quebec

Here on the shores of the beautiful St. Lawrence River, we are fortunate to live in an area favoured by natural beauty over all four seasons. Just as architecture inspired by local materials and traditions creates a sense of place, native plants also create a connection with the natural setting of our region. Include native plants in your garden to showcase the beautiful diversity of the St. Lawrence lowlands.

A native plant garden can be as formal or as naturalistic as you would like. There are beautiful plants available in colours to suit all palettes. Native plants add interest as the garden is in a constant state of flux, with new plants blooming as others fade back over the course of the season.

For those of us who prefer time spent enjoying the garden rather than spending the weekend weeding, native plant gardens offer a low-maintenance solution. Native plants are robust and resilient, weed resistant, and do not require watering or fertilization. Most importantly, native plants are perfectly suited to our climate and have evolved in parallel with local pollinators.

Our food supply is dependent on the unseen work of pollinators. Although we most often think of honeybees (an imported, managed species) as being largely responsible for pollination of our food crops, important pollinators in our area also include various species of native bees, butterflies, moths, and beetles. However, pollinator species worldwide are under threat of collapse due to pressures from loss of habitat, pesticides, parasites, and climate change. As citizens of Dorval, we can help to support local populations by planting pollinator-friendly gardens.

Planting for pollinators:

If you are interested in planting for pollinators, there are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

- Include plants that have different blooming periods. In particular, ensure that your garden includes flowers that bloom in the autumn when other food sources are scarce. Asters and goldenrod blossom right into October, keeping the garden bright and cheerful late in the season.
- Include a rainbow of colours to appeal to different pollinators. Bees are particularly attracted to blue, violet, and yellow flowers. Butterflies are primarily attracted to bright colours like orange, pink, and red.
- Include flowers of different shapes: some pollinators require flowers that are wide open and shaped like a landing pad. Varieties of bees with longer tongues prefer tubular flowers.
- Plant flowers in massed clumps so that they are easier for pollinators to find.
- Include host plants for butterfly larvae, like milkweed and pearly everlasting.

- Native plants that are especially attractive to pollinators include: bee balm, black-eyed Susan, boneset, milkweed, giant hyssop, penstemon, and yarrow.

Benefits of native plants:

Native plants can easily be incorporated into existing landscaping and are especially appreciated in areas where non-natives struggle to grow.

- In acidic soil under conifers, try bunchberry or starry false Solomon's seal.
- For shady areas, try Canadian ginger or Canadian anemone
- For areas under trees, plant a forest garden featuring spring ephemerals. These flowers will blossom and bring early spring colour before the trees leaf out and block the sunlight. These early harbingers of spring include bloodroot, bellwort, foam flower, mitella, and trillium (naturally found under maple trees).
- For a wet patch, perhaps under a downspout, try blue flag iris (the official flower of Quebec), gentian, or marsh marigold. Sweetgrass is a particularly interesting addition to the rain garden. Although it isn't much to look at, it releases an intriguing scent due to the presence of coumarin – a compound also found in vanilla, cinnamon, and tonka beans. If space allows inclusion of small bushes, you may also consider planting a button bush, myrica balm, or bog rosemary.
- If you are fortunate enough to have space available in a sunny area of the garden, suitable plants include pale-leaved sunflower, evening primrose, and obedient plant.

Additional resources

Further information

- The Dorval Library has many books available on the subject of native plants. The books written by Lorraine Johnson and the Xerxes Society are particularly informative.
- The North American Native Plant Society (nanps.org)
- Flora Quebeca (floraquebeca.qc.ca)
- Pollinator Partnership Canada: planting guide for the St. Lawrence Lowlands

Where to find plants and seeds

- Pépinière Rustique
- Pépinière Aiglon Indigo – wide variety but delivery fees can be expensive so team up with a friend to share costs
- Pépinière Jasmin
- Wildflower Farm
- Jardin Buzz
- Jardins Michel Corbeil
- Solidago Farm
- Akène
- The NANPS seed exchange
- Your friends and neighbours

Additional information

Note that most native seeds should be planted in the fall as they need a period of cold to trigger germination. They can be directly seeded in the ground or in pots left outdoors for the winter. Consult the seed packets for further information.

If you are considering purchasing a pre-mixed assortment of wildflower seeds, be sure to purchase from a reputable local supplier. The bagged mixes available in big box stores do not usually contain seeds local to our area.