

## Going native

Landscaping with indigenous plants helps property managers streamline maintenance and reduce costs

By Markisan Naso

**T**he term “native landscaping” may sound alien, but it’s actually just a technical way of describing landscaping with plants familiar to your area. Native landscaping is an excellent method of reducing the need for non-renewable resources, improving air and water quality, and saving you time and money.

Native plants are more resilient than non-native plants because they have already adapted to local environmental conditions. Once established, these indigenous grasses and flowers function much like a natural system—they sustain themselves, said Peter Muroski, president of Native Landscape, Inc., a landscaping company in Pawling, N.Y.

This means property managers don’t have to devote as much time and money to maintenance around their buildings. A native landscape does not need to be mowed like a conventional lawn and seldom requires fertilizing, weeding, pruning or watering, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Native plants are naturally more resistant to pest problems than non-native plants as well, cutting out the need for costly pesticides.

“Most people think you need to use pesticides. But if you let the natural process happen, native plants balance the eco-system and control pests,” Muroski said.

Eliminating pesticide use also minimizes the harm to people and

to eco-systems from improper use or overuse of chemicals. It helps to maintain the water quality at your properties as well, by preventing pollutants from infecting streams, rivers, lakes and bays. In addition, native landscaping improves air quality by cutting down on the amount of toxins and air pollutants released into the air by gas, battery or electric powered maintenance equipment like lawn mowers and weed trimmers.

### GREENING YOUR GROUNDS

Creating and managing native landscaping projects varies according to your site conditions and your goals. Here are some general steps for native landscaping based on information from the EPA ([www.epa.gov/greenacres](http://www.epa.gov/greenacres)) and Minnesota’s

Department of Natural Resources ([www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)):

- 1) **Identify plants native to your area**—A quick search for “native landscaping” on the Internet will yield a variety of results, mostly area specific. *Chicagowilderness.org*, for instance, lists native plants in the Midwest. Along with the Internet, many field guides are also available. It is also helpful to visit natural areas to see how native plants grow in a community setting.
- 2) **Understand local government regulations**—Regulations may affect the location of natural landscaping on the site and the types of plants used. You need to know local weed ordinances and fire regulations.



<p>3) <b>Know your site</b>—A number of factors determine the kind of preparation needed for native landscaping, like whether or not you need to remove existing plants on your property, the amount of sun exposure available, soil type and the effects of neighboring natural vegetation.</p> <p>4) <b>Determine your budget</b>—Native landscaping is a long-term investment that can be done in phases. It is important to plan the project according to how much money and time you have now and in the future.</p> <p>5) <b>Select native plants</b>—Buy nursery-propagated plants or seeds of local origin, which can be purchased at many retail nurseries or through mail-order catalogs. When choos-</p>	<p>ing species, ask vendors for guides on each plant's site requirements, bloom color and bloom time. It is important to choose native plants that will grow well at your site.</p> <p>6) <b>Prepare and plant the site</b>—Make sure existing vegetation is weed free and there aren't any plants that will compete with native species. Before planting, seek advice on how to properly control and eliminate undesirable plants. Also, make sure you have proper planting equipment.</p> <p>7) <b>Manage the site</b>—Native plants do require some maintenance for the first few growing seasons. It takes time for them to get established. Make sure you know what kind of early care is needed for your native plants. It is also</p>	<p>important to monitor your site for weeds. There are many methods of weed control, so choose the best one for your property.</p> <p>Introducing native plants to landscaping is a smart, cost-effective and eco-friendly project that any property manager can do. Whether you are interested in installing a small flower patch or something more elaborate, native landscaping will help reduce maintenance costs, and create a healthy and more beautiful property. □</p> <p><i>For more information on how to get started with native landscaping visit <a href="http://www.plantnative.org">www.plantnative.org</a>.</i></p> <p>Markisan Naso is the associate editor for <i>JPM</i>. Questions regarding this article should be sent to <a href="mailto:mnaso@irem.org">mnaso@irem.org</a>.</p>
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