

What's the Difference in a Native Plant and a Wildflower?

All though we tend to use these terms interchangeably, there is a difference.

All native plants are wildflowers but not all wildflowers are native plants, Native plants are defined as "A plant that is a part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem. Note: The word native should always be used with a geographic qualifier (that is, native to New England [for example]). Only plants found in this country before European settlement are considered to be native to the United States." (From the USDA website.) A more general meaning would also include cultivars or hybrids of those native plants. Studies are being conducted to see if cultivars benefit the native flora and fauna as much as the true natives. Early results show that it depends on how cultivated the plant has been. Using plants that are native to your area or region is always best. Wildflowers are more of a naturalized plant. They have been introduced after European settlement started in the US. "A non-native plant does not need human help to reproduce and maintain itself over time in an area where it is not native." Queen Ann's lace is an example.

Natives are tough as nails plants. Because they have adapted to the local soil and weather conditions and are resistant to common pests and diseases, they are much easier to maintain. And many are drought tolerant, meaning less watering. These traits also make them ideal for organic gardening. They are beneficial as either host or nectar plants for many of our butterflies and moths. They encourage pollinators and birds to our gardens.

When planting natives, just like non-natives -"plant the right plant in the right place". There are native plants for any condition; sun, shade, dry or wet, and anything in between. Full sun plants could be those found growing in open fields or prairies. Shade lovers would be found in woodland settings. If your site is dry and exposed you could choose some of the more drought tolerant plants. Damp, boggy areas are suited to the wetland plants. Guaranteed, some native plants can look weedy or be an aggressive grower. Not all natives are ideal in flowerbeds, but could work for naturalized areas or prairies.

Native plants include trees, shrubs, perennials, ferns, vines, and grasses. In the last 10 year, the native plant movement is like a snowball rolling downhill, gaining in popularity. As a result, native plants are becoming more readily available. There are several local growers specializing in native plants. You can even find a few at your big box stores, on occasion.

Lissa Morrison, former nursery owner, former Lead Horticulturist at BGO, etc. has compiled a list of well-behaved native plants. You can download them by going to BGOzarks.org. They are listed under "learn" heading.

Let's hope what I have chosen for giveaway plants are listed.

GIVE-AWAY PLANTS

Tall Bellflower- *Campanula americana*, reaches from three to five feet in height, its blue-violet blooms providing a bright late-summer accent to savanna or woodland plantings. an upright annual or biennial that is native to moist open woods, moist meadows, streambanks and ditches in shady areas of eastern North America from New York and southern Ontario to Minnesota south to Florida, Alabama, Arkansas and Oklahoma. (June-August).

BLACK COHOSH-*Actaea racemosa* or *Cimicifuga racemosa*), a member of the buttercup family, is a perennial plant native to North America. occurs in rocky woods in the Ozark region of the State. It typically grows to a total height (foliage plus flowering spikes) of 4-6', but under optimum conditions can reach 8'. Small, numerous, creamy white, fragrant flowers appear in late summer to early fall in long, terminal racemes resembling fluffy spires (typically 1-2' long) rising well above the foliage on wiry stems. Astilbe-like, deeply cut, tripinnate foliage is an attractive deep green.

GRAYHEADED CONEFLOWER- *Ratibida pinnata*, typically occurs in dry woods, prairies and along railroad tracks and roads. A somewhat rough-looking plant that features pinnately divided leaves (to 5" long) on stiff stems growing 3-5' tall.

YELLOW CONEFLOWER- *Echinacea paradoxa*, is the only species in the genus *Echinacea* to have yellow flowers instead of the usual purple flowers (this being the paradox suggested by the species name). It primarily occurs on glades and prairies in the Ozark regions of Missouri and Arkansas. Features large, daisy-like flowers with drooping yellow to orange-yellow petals (ray flowers) and very large, coppery-brown to chocolate-brown central cones. Best flower display is mid-June to mid-July, sometimes with sporadic continued bloom throughout the summer

SAND LOVE GRASS-This is a warm grass plant, is noticeable for its purplish stem and tends to arch gracefully. This grass has a high tolerance for calcified, sandy soil and likes sunny conditions. These factors make it an excellent plant to stabilize sandier areas prone to erosion, like upland lake and river banks. Sand Love Grass readily reseeds itself and grows quickly in ideal conditions. It is also important to native bees as it provides nesting materials and structures for them in all seasons.

WILD BERGAMOT-*Monarda fistulosa*, also commonly called Bee Balm or Horse-Mint, has a lovely lavender blossom and distinctively aromatic foliage. It is a familiar component of prairie and savanna communities on all but the wettest of soils. Wild Bergamot is a favorite of butterflies, bees and hummingbirds.

CELANDINE POPPY- Also known as Wood Poppy, this attractive woodland plant will grow well in zones 4-8 in with little to no care in rich woodland soils. It can tolerate drier, sunnier sites with some care. A welcome, well-deserved sight in April after a long winter. After seeds drop out of its large, hairy pods, Celandine Poppy will go dormant.

PURPLE CONEFLOWER- *Echinacea purpurea* is a drought-tolerant perennial that is also deer resistant. The flowers are a golden red to purple and may release a slight fragrance in strong sunlight. They are much-loved by bees and is a host plant for the Ottoe Skipper. Blooms appear June-September and some Purple Coneflowers may re-bloom in the fall. *Echinacea purpurea* matures to 4' in height. The preference is full or partial sun, and moist to medium conditions.

SPOTTED BEE BALM- prefers sandy soils and full to part sun, is more drought tolerant of drought and sun than many other *Monarda* species. This plant is usually found in sand prairies, hill prairies, and Oak savannas. It is an eccentric beauty in form and color with complex blossoms topping 2' stems in hues of pinkish-purple, green, beige, and maroon. These blossoms attract honeybees, bumblebees, and many butterflies.