

Easy-Care Native Plants



Many gardeners are looking to use native plants. These lists consist of native plants that are relatively low maintenance. They were selected because they have few insect and disease problems and adapt to a range of cultural conditions. There is no such thing as no maintenance, only lower maintenance. As always, plant selection for any garden should include matching the needs of the plant to the environment of the garden.

Ornamental Grasses/Sedges			
Scientific Name Common Name	Height of Foliage (In Flower)	Cultural Notes	Remarks
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i> Blue Grama	8-12" (up to 2')	Full sun; tolerant of heat, drought, and poor soils	Flowers can be used in fresh and dried arrangements
<i>Carex sp.</i> Sedges	(depends on species)	Sun or shade; wet to dry soils, depending on species	Good options are <i>C. albicans</i> , <i>C. shortiana</i> , <i>C. radiata</i> , <i>C. rosea</i> , <i>C. pennsylvanica</i> , <i>C. blanda</i>
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> Little Bluestem	3' (3')	Full sun; tolerant of most soils, except those that are wet	Beautiful in all seasons; spreads readily by seed, good for naturalizing
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i> Prairie Dropseed	2-3' (3-4')	Full sun; heat, and drought tolerant	Flowers are said to smell like buttered popcorn

Wildflowers and Perennials			
Scientific Name Common Name	Height	Cultural Notes	Remarks
<i>Asclepius tuberosa</i> Butterfly Weed	1-2'	Full sun; mesic to dry soil; clay tolerant	Beautiful orange flower clusters last throughout the summer. Used by monarch butterflies
<i>Baptisia australis</i> False Indigo	3-4'	Full sun to partial shade; moist, well-drained soil; drought tolerant	Taproot makes it difficult to transplant; seed pods can be used in dried arrangements
<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i> Lance-Leaved Coreopsis	1-2'	Full sun; well-drained soil; tolerates drought and infertile soil	Often self-sows; plants become floppy if over-fertilized
<i>Echinacea pallida</i> Pale Purple Coneflower	2-3'	Full sun; mesic to dry; drought tolerant	Less showy flowers than <i>E. purpurea</i> , blooms June-July, good for hummingbirds and butterflies
<i>Echinacea purpurea</i> Purple Coneflower	2-4'	Part-full sun; well-drained soil; drought tolerant	Flowers over a long period in July-Sept

Wildflowers and Perennials			
Scientific Name Common Name	Height	Cultural Notes	Remarks
<i>Geum triflorum</i> Prairie Smoke	6-12"	Full sun; well-drained soil	Best growth in cool temperatures; attractive seed heads
<i>Ratibida pinnata</i> Yellow Coneflower	3-5'	Full-partial sun; Mesic soil	Tolerates road salt and drought; great for pollinators and birds, but is deer resistant
<i>Penstemon digitalis</i> Foxglove Beardtongue	4'	Full-part sun; medium to medium-dry soil	Attracts many kinds of bees; easy to grow from seed
<i>Aqualegia canadense</i> Wild Columbine	1-2'	All light conditions; medium to dry soils	Early spring bloom provides nectar for many bees and hummingbirds; can reseed but does not take over.
<i>Asarum canadense</i> Wild Ginger	6"	Shade; mesic to wet	Spring ephemeral flower in April-May, but leaves persist all summer. Ground cover; fuzzy, kidney-shaped leaves
<i>Polygonatum biflorum</i> Solomon's Seal	1-2'	Part sun to full shade; moist, well-drained soils	Good for hummingbirds and butterflies; will form small clusters via rhizomes; false Solomon's seal is similar and also a good option.
Ferns (various spp.)	varies	Mostly shade; species can vary from dry to wet	Good choices include lady fern, interrupted fern, and cinnamon fern. Some, like ostrich fern, can be aggressive.

Trees and Shrubs			
Scientific Name Common Name	Height	Cultural Notes	Remarks
<i>Quercus sp.</i> Oaks	50'+	Many species to choose from, and each tolerates a different habitat	Oaks support a wide variety of pollinators
<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i> American Hornbeam (aka Musclewood or Blue Beech)	20-30'	Prefers wet, well-drained soils	Beautiful spring and fall color, plus winter interest; slow growing
<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i> Tuliptree	70-90'	All light conditions; moist, well-drained soils	Large, yellow, tulip-shaped flowers in late spring, golden-yellow color in the fall

Trees and Shrubs			
Scientific Name Common Name	Height	Cultural Notes	Remarks
<i>Corylus americana</i> American Hazelnut	5-8'	Full-part sun; moist, well-drained soils	4 season interest; beneficial to birds; can form thickets
<i>Cornus sericea</i> Red Osier Dogwood	7-9'	Full-part sun; moist-wet soils	Off-white flowers in late May give way to white fruit in the summer, reddish-purple leaves in the fall, and red stems provide winter interest.
<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i> Common Ninebark	6-9'	Full sun; moist to wet sites; tolerates dryness; pH adaptable	White flowers in late spring; great for birds
<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i> Common Witch Hazel	15-20'	Part shade; mesic to wet	Oddly shaped flowers appear in late fall or early winter

References

University of Illinois Extension - Illinois Pollinators: pollinators.illinois.edu

The Morton Arboretum: mortonarb.org

Banner Photo: Prairie Smoke, *Geum triflorum*, by Erin Garrett, Illinois Extension.

Author

[Jamie Viebach](#), Horticulture Educator, University of Illinois Extension.

Modified March 2025



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

extension.illinois.edu