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## Birmingham-Bloomfield Eagle (MI)

### MIMICKING NATURE

#### Re-create natural habitats with native plants

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Michigan's natural landscape is vast and varied. Lush woodlands tower over succulent ferns, delicate white trillium and purple wild geranium; daisy-like yellow coneflowers, miniature wild strawberries and blue wild lupine dot prairies; and various pond lilies, sedges and rushes soften shorelines.

"Designing a native landscape is basically just planting what you find in nature and mimicking it - plants found in Michigan's native forests, prairies and wetlands, along the shorelines, and so on," said Ryan Youngblood, owner of Artistic Landscape in Rochester.

With Michigan's ecologically vast landscape, native gardens can take on a variety of looks depending on the area in which they're being planted: The natural beauty of wetlands, prairies and woodlands - and the beneficial insects, birds and wildlife in those environments - can be restored by creating a native garden.

"Some people say native landscapes look weedy; but when you understand what you have growing, you can really appreciate the raw sense of a garden, and it really can be beautiful in its own way - it's more of a relaxed environment," said Kurt Schaus, a landscape designer at Artistic Landscape.

"There are a lot of different native perennials - whether arrowhead or pitcher-plants on shorelines, prairie flowers and woodland flowers ... woody forest landscapes.

Trillium is a great plant - it just lights up the forest floor," said Schaus, who often uses native shrubs, such as flowering dogwood and fragrant viburnum, for background screening in more formal landscapes.

While many people prefer more formal gardens, said Youngblood, native plants can easily be incorporated into the design.

"You can still get the look of a formal garden if you plant them in a certain order or fashion. You'll just have a little less structure, but it won't look like a weed garden," said Sara Kwiatkowski, manager of Saxton's Landscaping and Outdoor Services in Farmington Hills. "You don't have to go gung-ho 100 percent. A nice way to introduce native plants is to intersperse them into a more structured garden." While some native plants may be difficult to locate, Schaus said, they are becoming more readily available as the native gardening trend makes its way east from California.

"Some are hard to find, but we're starting to see a trend where native plants are coming back on the market. ... I really just love a lot of the native plants - jack-in-the-pulpit is one of my favorites, and butterfly flower has cute, little orange flowers.

Then, there's all the trees and ferns," said Kwiatkowski, adding iris versicolor, joe pie weed, and native grasses and sedges to her list of favorite easy-to-find native plants.

It's greener to go native The growing trend of "going green" has spurred an interest in re-creating natural habitats to promote a healthier environment for both people and wildlife.

"To understand why native landscaping makes sense, we have to understand why everyday landscaping doesn't. Most Americans spend a lot of time and money adding water, fertilizers and pesticides to their yards to make them grow better ... so that we can then get out there and spend time and money mowing it down," said Jacob **Corvidae**, green programs manager for **Warm** Training Center in Detroit.

"Basically, native plants are already adapted to our climate, water and weather, so once they're established - usually after about a year - they're super-low maintenance as long as they get the right amount of sunlight, and the proper spacing and location," Kwiatkowski said. "They tend to root a lot better and deeper, and by establishing long, deep roots, they will disperse water better, which is really good as far as run-off is concerned." Even better is that with longer roots, native plants don't need as much water, can withstand dry spells and adapt more readily to the environment. "Native plants are a lot easier to grow and maintain; they'll adapt more readily than nursery stock," said Schaus, who noted that while native plants may need to be fertilized and watered regularly at first, once they are established, they need very little maintenance.

"The nice thing is once the plants are established, you can just watch them grow and enjoy it. They really don't need to be watered; they really don't need fertilizer; they really don't need much maintenance - they just come back every year," Kwiatkowski said.

Native plants also attract more butterflies, birds, beneficial insects and the like, which in turn, contributes to a more diverse ecosystem in our communities.

"Native landscapes create little minihabitats, and let's say it supports a certain type of worm and that worm attracts a certain bird, butterflies and insects - by planting the native plants, you create a whole natural habitat and will attract butterflies and birds, beneficial insects and animals," said Kwiatkowski. "If you think about it, you can have a full four seasons of native plants - just like the native Michigan landscape." On top of all that, said **Corvidae**, native plants can actually help improve the environment. "And to really push the borders, some native plants, including Indian grass and native sunflowers, not only look beautiful, but also can remove toxins from the soil.

For example, if an older home had chipping lead paint that got in the soil, these natives can actually help remove the lead," said **Corvidae**, who recommends the Michigan Native Plant Producers Association, [www.mnppa.org](http://www.mnppa.org), as an excellent resource on native plants.

Visit [www.artisticlandscapeassociates.com](http://www.artisticlandscapeassociates.com), [www.saxtonlandscaping.com](http://www.saxtonlandscaping.com) and [www.warmtraining.org](http://www.warmtraining.org) for more information about Artistic Landscape, Saxton's Landscaping and **WARM** Training Center, respectively.

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