



MSU Tollgate Gardens

DEMO NATIVE PLANT GARDEN

The most commonly held definition of a Native Plant is one that existed before the arrival of European settlers in the mid 1800's.

But why use Native Plants?

- They are naturally adapted to the soils and weather conditions of the area, so they need little care once established.
- They provide food and cover for the native wildlife hence helping to offset the dramatic loss of habitat from rapid development
- The deep roots of Native Plants provide a path for water to seep into the ground, thereby preventing runoff and soil loss.

Tollgate's Native Plant Garden is designed to demonstrate that there are a wide variety of native plants, with a beauty of their own, that are adaptable to a casual home garden. The selection of plants in this garden focuses are those that don't look "weedy", a common misconception, even though this term might be part of their common name.

This garden which was originally planted in 2008/2009 is in full sun. The soil is moist as the site is lower and hence gets both rain water and sprinkler run-off.

Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), in the front of the picture below, grows 4' to 5' tall and 2' to 3' wide. It prefers moist soil in full sun. Its late summer flowers are fragrant and vary from white, to pink, to mauve are attractive to butterflies as a nectar source.



A good companion is Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*) which is behind the Swamp Milkweed. Although a little larger at 5' to 7' tall with a spread of 2' to 4', it blooms from mid-summer to early fall with fragrant, showy mauve pink flowers attractive to butterflies. The flowers form attractive seed heads which last into winter providing motion and structure during that normally barren time of the year.

"The question is not what you look at, but what you see."

-Henry David Thoreau



The picture above showcases the wonderful fern-like texture of Wild Senna (*Senna hebecarpa*) which typically grows 3' to 6' tall in full sun and soil that is of medium moisture. The yellow flowers bloom in July and August and give way to 4" long pea-like seeds which turn black in the fall providing a striking contrast.

Giant sunflower (*Helianthus giganteus*) provides the central peak of the native garden. A metal grid structure about 2' above ground was fabricated because it is difficult to keep this plant upright without staking to support its 6 foot height. Now it is a striking center piece particularly when in full bloom late summer to fall. The overall plant is "giant", but the blooms are small – branching panicles with deep yellow blooms provides a finer texture than many plants this large.





Planted in front of the Giant Sunflower is another bright yellow native flower known as Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*). In our native garden this plant normally tops out between 2 and 3 feet tall, although some references indicate that it can grow to 5-6 feet.

The black trellis highlighted here has an interesting history. It was fabricated from old equipment from the milking pens on the farm which transformed the Virginia Creeper (*parthenocissus quinquefolia*) to a vertical interest thus showing off the beautiful rust fall colors (although unfortunately not in this August picture).



Michigan State University has an excellent web site about native plants which can be found at: <http://nativeplants.msu.edu/>

Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) is planted in front of the black trellis. Preferring to grow in dry soils, this native perennial is a member of the mint family that typically grows to 2-4' tall. Lavender flowers that appear on square stems are attractive to butterflies and bees and have a long summer bloom period. Unlike most monardas, this plant seems to be resistant to powdery mildew but you should still give it plenty of room thereby providing adequate air circulation.



Meadowsweet (*Alba spirea*) is another native plant that you should consider for your garden. It is an upright, deciduous shrub that grows 4' tall with cone-shaped clusters (3-4" long) of tiny, white flowers that bloom in summer. It prefers full sun but needs constant moisture so that wet spot in your garden would be ideal. To promote additional blooms remove spent flower clusters.



New Jersey Tea (*Ceanothus americanus*) is an excellent plant if you want to attract hummingbirds to your garden. Luxuriant leaves and bright flowers, which bloom in July and August, makes this 2-3' durable shrub a real winner. New Jersey Tea can be planted 2-3' apart to create a low growing, drought tolerant, native hedge.



Queen of the Prairie (*Filipendula rubra*) is a native plant that is a tall, upright, clump-forming perennial that typically grows 6-8' tall and features astilbe-like, fragrant, pale pink flowers in early to mid-summer. This is a plant that is valued for both its fragrant leaves and its flowers. It would prefer full or partial sun, and a wet to moist spot in your garden.



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