

I'm thinking about trying some native plants in my home garden. Do you have any advice?



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There are many benefits to growing Montana native plants in our home landscapes. Montana native plants are those that have evolved in Montana and occur naturally here. That means they are adapted to the conditions found in our state. Some native plants are great for “xeric” landscaping where drought-tolerant plants are used, meaning they can help reduce water usage. They can also be good wildlife habitat. Even in our densely populated residential areas, birds, small mammals, and pollinators can benefit from the resources that native plants provide. Growing native plants is also fun and helps us learn about Montana plants and ecosystems. Start incorporating a few native plants in your home landscaping and see where it takes you.

Not every native plant will grow in every area of Montana, and it is important to follow the rule of “right plant, right place” just as with any garden plant. For example, plants of Montana’s dry regions are some of my favorites. I have attempted to grow plants like prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia polyacantha*) and yucca (*Yucca glauca*) in my home garden, only to have them slowly decline and die in my relatively “wet” Bozeman garden. Avoid these types of mistakes by matching

your plant selections with your site characteristics such as moisture, light availability, and exposure to wind.

Ornamental grasses are gaining popularity in home gardens and there are some native plants that work well for this use. My favorite native plants in my home garden are perennial bunchgrasses. Some of these plants are available at local garden centers and nurseries, such as Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), green needlegrass (*Stipa viridula*), and little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). These plants have decorative seedheads as the spring and summer progresses and are a nice backdrop to more colorful wildflowers.

If you want to start gardening with native plants, good sources of plant material like seeds and potted plants are available at many nurseries. If you are just starting to grow native plants or are a new gardener, trying a few potted plants might be easiest at first. Native plants that can be relatively easy to grow from seed are Lewis’s blue flax (*Linum lewisii*), upright prairie coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera*), and blanketflower (*Gaillardia artistata*). For many species fall is a great time to plant from seed.

There are some great resources to find more information about this topic. Try visiting with your local Extension office for information specific to your area. Another idea is to get inspiration by visiting native plant gardens in your area. Online resources include

the Montana Native Plant Society with detailed information, recommended species lists, and sources of plant material: <https://www.mtnativeplants.org/Native%20Plant%20Landscaping/>. Another source of information is The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mt/water/resources/nrcs144p2_057454/. ■



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