

April 2007: 30 Days of Green

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

April is National Garden Month® — When you garden, you GROW!

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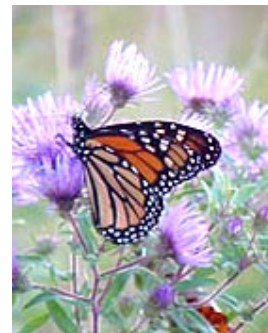
April 28

Native Wisdom



Native plants co-evolved with native insects and provide important food sources for pollinators.

[>>Printer-friendly pdf](#)



background

Every ecosystem includes plant species that originated in that region and that have adapted to thrive in the existing environmental conditions. These plants are called natives, and are key elements within the web of their particular plant community. They also fulfill vital habitat needs for native animals.

These days, many ecosystems have mixed native and imported species. For as long as humans have explored and created settlements in new lands, they have taken plants with them on their journeys. These transplants are known as exotic plants. Some exotic plants that are grown as ornamentals require more care than natives because they evolved in a place that provided different moisture levels or soil nutrients. They may also have trouble with insect and disease pests because they lack natural resistance.

On the other hand, if an exotic plant is introduced to a new location where conditions are similar to its native habitat, the plant can readily adapt to the environment and thrive. In fact, in the absence of the creatures that ordinarily feast on it, plants that compete with it, and microbes that infect it with disease, an exotic plant can become an invasive pest in another ecosystem. A classic example is the kudzu vine in the southeastern United States. The vine was imported from Asia to the United States where it was planted to help prevent soil erosion. Its fast growth rate — up to a foot a day — and dense growth habit is kept in check in Asia by native insects and fungi, but since these natural foes do not exist in the United States, kudzu has covered millions of acres, blanketing native trees and shrubs and killing them by blocking their exposure to sunlight.

Learn more about the plants that are native in your area. How are these species specially adapted to the environment? Are they important for the survival of birds, insects, and other animals? For more information, find your local native plants society through the [North American Native Plant Society Web site](#).

Research exotic plants considered invasive in your area. Why and how were they introduced into the ecosystem? What are some of the reasons they are able to push out native plants? Brainstorm ideas for how your class can help bring their growth under control.

Visit the [Kidsgardening.org](#) Web site for more projects and curriculum connections:

activity

Plant a Native Garden for Pollinators

Native plants are an important food source for common pollinators like bees, butterflies, beetles, and hummingbirds. A native garden provides nourishment for these species and creates an outdoor laboratory where students can observe relationships among elements in the ecosystem.

Begin by investigating the native plant and animal species in the area surrounding the school. Was the land originally a prairie, a forest, or a wetland? What kinds of native pollinators existed there?



Native Beauty

Exploring Wild and Native Plants

Next, find a location for your garden. Assess your site's conditions (soil, sunlight, available water) and choose native plants that will thrive there and attract pollinators.

Draw up a landscape design for the space. Strive for a natural appearance rather than a tightly manicured landscape. You may need to incorporate other habitat elements such as rocks, logs, or ponds to entice pollinators to the space.

Seek out donations of materials and supplies. Recruit volunteers from the community to help with installation.

Finally, once the garden is installed, schedule time to observe the new garden and keep a log of all the pollinators (and other creatures) who come to visit. Track activity year round so that you can witness full life cycles of native plants and animals.

Find ways to communicate the importance of native gardens to the community and encourage others to install plantings for pollinators.

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