Native or Cultivar?

Canopy Collingwood's native perennial plant subsidy will cover native plants, soil/compost and mulch for your naturalized garden or pollinator planting.

Wildlife friendly spaces and pollinator gardens are an essential part of a sustainable community. Even in towns and cities, natural spaces on residential properties help the local fauna by providing suitable habitat, nutritional resources and nesting materials. Planting a range of species, which are native to your area, also helps the biodiversity of the region which directly impacts the health of the local ecosystems. There are many different types of plants available at garden centres, this guide is meant to differentiate between native, cultivar and non-native plants.

What are native plants and why are they important?

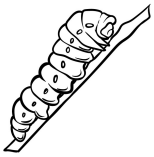
Native plants are plant species that occur naturally in a particular region, ecosystem, or habitat without human intervention. They have evolved naturally with local environments, climates and wildlife over thousands of years and are the most resilience to changes in these environments.

Many of these plants are **keystone species**, meaning they serve a critical role to the food web and are needed for many wildlife species to complete their life cycles. Native bees, butterflies and other insects have developed beneficial mutual relationships with native plants and require them for nutritional needs, nesting and larval host environments.
A "**host plant"** is a specific plant that feeds the young caterpillars of approximately 90% of butterflies and moths.
A "**pollen specialist"** refers to bees that will only collect pollen from one plant family or a single plant species.

Almost all terrestrial birds feed their nestlings insects, usually caterpillars (butterfly/moth larvae). Without native plants hosting these insects, terrestrial birds would not have enough food to rear their offspring.

Mature native plants require less water than lawns and their robust roots contribute to:
- Improved soil capacity to store water;
- Reduced rainwater runoff and flooding;
- Carbon sequestering in the soil, building richer and more nutritious soil over time;
- Reduced need for fertilizers and pesticides, as the roots can access deeper soil nutrients to stay healthy.

It takes over 6000 caterpillars to raise one brood of chickadees



Native Oaks are a Keystone Species and support over 500 different caterpillar species

Ginkgos, a landscape tree from Asia, host only 3 species of caterpillars

What is the difference?

As we covered in the previous page, **Native plants** are plant species indigenous to a geographical region and have evolved with other species such as soil microbes, insects, birds and mammals to develop symbiotic relationships. They are pollinated by insects, and produce seed to pass on genetics to the next generation of plants.

Cultivars are plants that have been artificially bred for particular characteristics such as shape, size, colour or scent. Nativars are cultivars of native plant species: they are the artificial selections from the natural variation found in native species for traits such as atypical colour, forms or sizes. These altered plant species are propagated by tissue culture, not from seed, so every cultivar has the same genetic make-up which limits plants ability to adapt to changing climates. These plants no longer participate in a natural reproduction pattern that would maintain genetic diversity, such as native species do through open pollination. Cultivars are hybrids that have been highly manipulated to produce more "showy" flowers, but often they have been altered just enough that bees fail to recognize the scents, shapes or colours they are familiar with. Double bloom flowers are not bee-friendly because their thick petals make it difficult to access nectar. Additionally, in many hybrids, the lovely scents, nectar and pollen may be missing altogether.

Exotic or non-native plants are plants that originated from other regions of the world. They are not native to Ontario and often have no ecological benefit. Non-native plants also have the potential to become an "invasive species", growing out of control without their natural population control measures in place (such as natural barriers to dispersal or the animals that would normally consume them)!

Native Plants:

These straight species will have a Common Name as well as a Species Name

Black-eyed Susan - Rudbeckia hirta

New England Aster - Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

Cultivars:

These hybrid or selected species will have a Species Name with the Cultivar name in 'single quotations' They may or may not have hybrid or cultivar on the plant tag.

Rudbeckia hirta 'Cherry Brandy'

Aster 'Woods Pink'

Exotic Species

These non-native species will have a Common Name as well as a Species Name.

Common Peony - Paeonia officinalis, native to Eurasia

Hosta is native to Asia, and has many cultivars

Invasive species are non-native plants that impact native biodiversity. Plants such as Periwinkle, Lily of the Valley, Silver Grass, Burning Bush, Japanese Honeysuckle Vine are just a few of the exotic species that have turned invasive in Ontario - some are even still sold in nurseries! These plants should not be planted in any residential garden as they can escape into natural areas and over-take the native flora, threatening the stability of food webs and putting our ecosystems in a state of stress.

Check out our other PDF's for a list of Ontario Native Plants and Local Native Plant nurseries!

Visit www.pollinatecollingwood.ca for more educational information!

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