

Why Natives?

Plant Materials Technical Note



Natural patch of native buffalo grass, Shelly Maher, E. "Kika" de la Garza PMC

Native plants are plants that have evolved naturally in their environment. They were well established in their region for hundreds of years before any human intervention. Ecosystems are specifically evolved around the native plants of that area. These native plants provide a diverse, balanced environment that maintains a healthy ecosystem. They help conserve water, protect soil from erosion and provide habitat for the birds, butterflies and other wildlife that coevolved with these native plants. And as Lady Bird Johnson said, native plants "give us a sense of where we are in this great land of ours."

President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 13112 in order to help promote the use of native species and the restoration of native habitats in Federal projects (Clinton 1999; Harper-Lore and Wilson 1999; Forman et al. 2003). Native plants and seed are needed for publically funded ecosystem restoration programs, highway right-of-way plantings, mitigation of oil, gas and other energy production activities, and for improvement of wildlife habitat on private and public lands. The consequence of not having native plants and seed available for these uses is often the unwanted or unintentional use of non-native, aggressive plants. Native plants are intrinsic to the overall resilience and stability of a region and are a critical component of the numerous food and energy cycles that maintain its biological diversity. Native plants help maintain a regions important genetic resources and the ecosystems that are a part of that regions biological heritage.

So, why do people use non-native plants? Non-native plants are often easier to establish than natives, making them useful for livestock forage, erosion control and highway right-of-ways. Seeds of non-natives are also usually less expensive and more readily available than natives. However, as Dr. Tim Fulbright of Texas A&M-Kingsville points out, “aggressive, non-native plants reduce plant species diversity, displace and prevent re-establishment of native species and lower soil nitrogen and carbon sequestration”.



Honeybee on roundhead prairie clover, Shelly Maher, E. “Kika” de la Garza PMC



Black eyed Susan, Shelly Maher, E. “Kika” de la Garza PMC

Native plants are valued for their long-term economic, ecological, genetic and aesthetic benefits in addition to the growing belief that they have intrinsic value in and of themselves. Native plants provide the essential elements for ecosystem health. They are the key to maintaining the critical associations with soil mycorrhizae, native invertebrates, beneficial insects, and pollinators of flowers and important crops.

SO THE QUESTION IS – WHY NOT NATIVES???

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Queen caterpillar on climbing milkweed, Shelly Maher, E. “Kika” de la Garza PMC

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