

Embracing Nature with NATIVE PLANT ORDINANCES

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IN THE CONTINENTAL U.S....

- Lawns cover 40,000,000 acres in the US, including almost 50% of total green space in cities (Sachs, 2020)
- “From coast to coast, our cities and suburbs have become more similar to each other than to the very different natural habitats they’ve replaced” (Susannah Lerman, U.S. Forest Service ecologist)
- As a result, 1/3 of wildlife at risk of extinction in upcoming decades

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NATIVE PLANT ORDINANCES

- Cities and HOAs often enforce conventional landscapes: mowed lawns without weeds or unruly plants
- Most of these landscapes feature non-native plants, which greatly decrease local biodiversity
- Native Plant Ordinances can promote the use of native plants in landscaping to increase local biodiversity and reverse the wildlife crisis in the US

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NATIVE PLANTS PROMOTE...

01

Biodiversity Preservation

Native plants provide essential habitat and food sources for native wildlife, contributing to overall biodiversity conservation.

02

Water Conservation

Native plants require less water because they are well-adapted to the local climate.

03

Improved Soil Health

Native plant roots stabilize soil which decreases erosion.

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NATIVE PLANTS PROMOTE...

04

Invasive Species Management

Non-native plants may outcompete indigenous vegetation and disrupt local ecosystems.

05

Long-term Sustainability

Using native plants in landscaping promotes long-term sustainability of the region's ecosystems and natural resources.

06

Outreach Opportunities

Education about the importance of native plants, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable landscaping practices.

5

OPPOSITION TO NATIVE PLANTINGS

Concerns about aesthetics/uniformity

Communities may strive for a uniform look with manicured lawns and ornamental plants. Native plantings may not align with uniformity or the community aesthetic.

Concerns about maintenance/weed control

Without proper education, communities may be concerned with the potential of weed invasion. In reality, native plants or landscaping require less maintenance after establishment.

Perceived property value impact

Homeowners may fear property values will decrease due to the wild or unkempt look of native wildlife-friendly gardens.

Misconceptions about wildlife

Some people fear that wildlife-friendly gardens will attract pests or dangerous animals like snakes or rodents.

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“Cues to Care”

“Novel landscape designs that improve ecological quality may not be appreciated or maintained if recognizable landscape language that communicates human intention is not part of the landscape” (Nassauer, 1995, p. 161).

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“Cues to Care”

01

Clear boundaries

02

Mow edges

03

Human elements

04

Plant in drifts

Create pathways

Signage

8

1415 Victoria Street (Cottontown)



9



10

Signage



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Designing an HOA-Approved Garden

01

Know the rules

Research your HOA (or city) landscape guidelines.

02

Present ideas for approval

Present your design at a board meeting for approval.

03

Be neighborly

Maintain your yard, pull weeds, keep mulch fresh. If neighbors have questions or concerns, kindly educate them on the benefits of a pollinator garden.

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Designing an HOA-Approved Garden

04

Start small and expand slowly

Slowly introduce different plants to ease neighbors into a non-conventional garden and to help you and the community get used to a wildlife-friendly landscape.

05

Group plants

Group plants in odd numbers, create masses, and limit the number blooming at any one time.

06

Pay attention to height

Plants less than 3-4 feet are less imposing, less than 2 feet and 1-2 feet away from sidewalks.

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Designing an HOA-Approved Garden

07

Let the garden sit before expanding

Allow yourself time to become familiar with plant behavior and for neighbors to embrace the view.

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How to Respond to the “Weed Police”

01

Don't panic!

Calmly clarify if there is a citation being given and, if so, ask what law, code, or ordinance was violated.

02

Ask questions

Can you have a written copy of the violation? What law have you violated? What are the definitions included in the law/ordinance/code?

03

Educate

Contact local officials and share your story to educate them on the benefits of a native plant ordinance.

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Current City of Columbia ordinance

ARTICLE VII. - WEEDS AND DEBRIS

Sec. 8-301. - Removal required.

It shall be unlawful for the owner and/or occupant of property to fail to cut grass, weeds and other overgrowth vegetation on property when the grass, weeds and other overgrowth vegetation is of a greater height than one foot on the average, or to permit the property to serve as a breeding place for mosquitoes, as a refuge for rats and snakes, as a collecting place for trash and litter, or as a fire hazard, any one of which situations is declared to be a nuisance. It shall be the duty of the owner and occupant to cut and remove all grass, weeds and other overgrowth vegetation as often as necessary so as to comply with this section. Vacant lots shall be cut at least three times per year, as required during the growing season (April through September). Heavily wooded lots where equipment cannot maneuver on the lot because of density of the area shall be trimmed within 100 feet of street right-of-way and adjacent improved property and kept free of litter.
(Code 1979, § 9-3021)

https://library.municode.com/sc/columbia/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COOR_CH8ENHESA_ARTVIIWEDE_S8-301RERE

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Elements of a Native Plant Ordinance

01

Intent

Defines the objectives and benefits of a certain ordinance. This will guide any interpretation or flexibility in the standards.

02

Applicability

Defines when a property owner is subject to the standards. Includes threshold activities and exemptions.

03

Landscape Standards

Defines which landscapes and vegetation are allowed as well as how landscapes are designed and managed.

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Elements of a Native Plant Ordinance (cont.)

04

Plant lists

Define terms in the ordinance. Refer to a regionally appropriate list that identifies native plants and noxious plants.

05

Specifications and Procedures

Specify how plants are installed and maintained. Create procedures for inspection, management, and enforcement.

06

Enforcement and Penalties

Procedures for inspection, management, and enforcement. What happens when the ordinance is violated.

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BEGINNING THE PROCESS

Research and Educate

Research existing laws around native planting and ordinances. Educate yourself and others on the native plants and species in the local ecosystem as well as the benefits that having a native plant ordinance brings to the community.

Engage stakeholders and community

Created education and outreach opportunities to gauge interest of communities and address concerns.

Draft and revise an ordinance

Create guidelines based on native plants and ecosystem to outline purpose, intent, and definitions to present to local municipalities.

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SUCCESSSES

Green Bay, Wisconsin

Passed ordinance with guidelines regarding what is unruly and what plants should be used to increase biodiversity.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Exempted natural landscapes from the "Public Nuisance" property code.

Austin, Texas

Members of the National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat program gained exemption of Wildlife Habitat Projects from the city's Tall Grass Ordinances.

Maryland

Janet and Jeff Crouch defended their wildlife-friendly garden from the HOA which ultimately led to a state law requiring HOAs to permit environmentally-friendly gardening.

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Who wants to work on a Native Plant Ordinance for Columbia?

For model ordinances, see:

Mid-America Regional Council. (2020). *Model Ordinances for Tree Protection, Weed Management, and Native Plant Encouragement*. <https://www.marc.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Model-green-infrastructure-ordinances.pdf>

Plante, R. (2023). Wild Ones native planting ordinance. Wild Ones Natural Landscapers. <https://wildones.org/wp-content/images/Wild-Ones-Sample-Native-Plant-Ord.docx>

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Center for Neighborhood Technology & Evans, G. (2020). Model ordinances for tree protection, weed management, and native plant encouragement. Mid-America Regional Council. <https://www.marc.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Model-green-infrastructure-ordinances.pdf>

Lawson, N. (2022). Outwitting weed laws. *American Gardener*, September/October, 30–35. https://www.humanegardener.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Outwitting-Weed-Laws_American-Gardener-magazine.pdf

Miller, S. R. (2021). Guide to passing wildlife-friendly property maintenance ordinances. <https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Mayors-Monarch-Pledge/NWF-Landscaping-Guide>

National Wildlife Federation. (2021, May 26). New guide: Passing wildlife-friendly property maintenance ordinances. *The National Wildlife Federation Blog*. <https://blog.nwf.org/2021/05/new-guide-passing-wildlife-friendly-property-maintenance-ordinances/>

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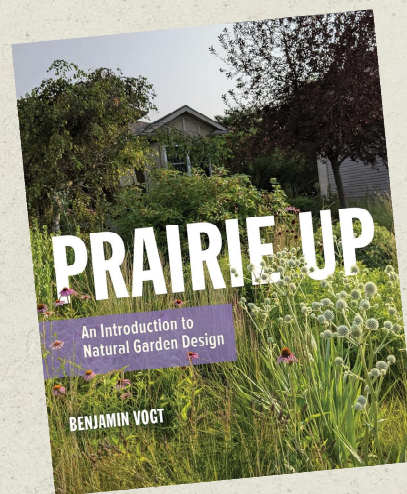
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- Vogt, B. (2017, April 27). How to design an HOA-Approved pollinator garden. Houzz. Retrieved February 6, 2024, from <https://www.houzz.com/magazine/stsetivw-vs~82221720>

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Recommended resource

Vogt, B. (2023). *Prairie up: An introduction to natural garden design*. 3 Fields Books/ University of Illinois Press.



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