

Native Plant Ordinance for Municipal Landscapes, Town of Wilton

PURPOSE

The purpose of this ordinance is to establish minimum standards for the use of native plants in the Town of Wilton for municipal properties. A **native plant** is defined as one that lives or grows naturally in a particular region without direct or indirect human intervention. It is part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds of thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service). In order for a tree, shrub, herbaceous perennial or ornamental grass to be considered native to our region, it must be indigenous to the Northeast. The Town recognizes the necessity to maximize the use of native vegetation to protect and restore natural habitats and a healthy ecosystem.

INTENT

It is the intent of this ordinance to maximize the use of appropriate native plants on municipal properties to help mitigate the effects of habitat loss and fragmentation from development and the proliferation of non-native/exotic plantings in our town landscapes. Native plants are important for maintaining healthy ecosystems. In observing this ordinance, we acknowledge that:

- a) The native plant ordinance is consistent with the 2019 Wilton Plan of Conservation and Development.
- b) Native plants promote healthy watersheds by filtering pollutants, stabilizing banks and providing food for macroinvertebrates that in turn feed fish and other aquatic species.
- c) Native trees are more efficient at sequestering carbon than introduced species creating healthy ecosystems essential for human health.
- d) All native plants must be protected to preserve the genetic diversity that evolved in our region.
- e) Native pollinators and many wildlife species rely on the native plants for survival.
- f) Healthy pollinators and wildlife species have a role in maintaining healthy ecosystems.
- g) Use of native plants in developed landscapes will help create connected and stable plant and animal populations.
- h) We must educate residents on native plants and their importance to native pollinators and other wildlife in our ecosystem.
- i) We have a responsibility to future generations to support, maintain, and improve our natural environment.

DEFINITIONS

Straight species or wild-type native plant is a plant that occurs in a particular region. It has *not* been cultivated by human intervention. These plants have co-evolved over time to develop complex and essential relationships with pollinators, birds, and other wildlife species in a given ecological community. Every effort should be made to use straight species of native plants that are local ecotypes.

Non-native plants, also called exotic or alien plants, are not naturally found in our local area. Many are imported from Europe and Asia. They have been introduced by human intervention (intentionally or accidentally) and include agricultural crops, ornamental plants, naturalized plants (including invasive species). A naturalized plant thrives without human intervention but can never be considered 'native' since it has not evolved to provide the same benefits here as it would in its own country of origin.

While many non-native plants are benign for aggressive spread, they dominate our landscapes. As development increasingly encroaches on our wild places, our native flora is being replaced by exotic plants and lawns. Loss of native flora threatens healthy ecosystems, a balance essential for all life including our own.

Invasive plants are non-native plants record on the CT Invasive Plant List. The list includes plants prohibited by state statute, plants having potential for invasive spread, and invasive species with cultivars yet to be evaluated for invasive characteristics. Invasive plants are able to establish on many sites, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems. Planting of any plant listed on the CT Invasive Plant List is prohibited by the **Town of Wilton Ban on Invasive Plants, Oct. 24, 2017.**

Native cultivars or nativars can be hybrids (products of two or more plants intentionally selected by breeders and crossed to create certain traits), or they may be clonally-produced copies of one particular wild-type plant. While these are technically the same species as wild-types, they may represent only a fraction of the natural diversity of the species.

When plants are selectively bred for a particular trait(s) (changing flower or foliage color, weeping for or creating double flowers), the result is often cultivars that have lost what made them attractive to important pollinators and beneficial insects and may even lack the nutrition needed to sustain them.

ORDINANCE REQUIREMENTS

This ordinance will be a minimum standard and will apply to all new plantings of trees, shrubs, and other plants planted on municipal properties. It also

applies to seeds used in place of plants. The ordinance applies to any replacement plantings, including but not limited to trees, shrubs, and perennials felled by storms, disease, redevelopment/expansion, or other reasons.

Trees

Due to the high wildlife value of native trees, 100% of new and replacement tree plantings on municipal properties will be native to the Northeast. Many trees, when not harmed by storms, disease, injuries from equipment, etc., can live for hundreds of years. They should be considered permanent parts of a landscape. Many native trees support hundreds of insects, and the birds and wildlife species that consume those insects. Non-native trees do not support this diversity.

Shrubs

New and replacement shrubs will be a minimum of 85% native for municipal properties. There are a great variety of native shrubs to fit all growing conditions and aesthetic desires. Every effort should be made to select shrubs. Native shrubs also support a high number of insects and many produce berries or other fruit that are important fall and winter food for birds.

Grasses

New and replacement grass plantings will be 100% native for municipal properties. Due to the large number of seeds grasses produce and potential to spread by wind, only native grasses may be planted. Some ornamental non-native grasses that were commonly planted are believed to be detrimental to our ecosystems. Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*), for example, is an emerging invasive threat in some areas.

Groundcovers

New and replacement plants intended as groundcovers will be 100% native for municipal properties. These low-growing plants spread quickly and form a dense cover.

Herbaceous Perennials

New and replacement herbaceous perennials will be a minimum of 75% native for municipal properties. There are a great variety of native perennials to fit all growing conditions and aesthetic desires. Every effort should be made to select native perennials.

Every effort should be made to select and plant straight-species of native plants that are local ecotypes.

Care should be taken to source plants and seeds that have not been treated with neonicotinoids. These pesticides are deadly to pollinators.

There are native trees and plants for every site condition. *The Native Plant Resource Guide*, published by the Newtown Conservation Commission in association with Monroe Conservation Commission, contains comprehensive lists of native plants for different uses and includes resources and more information on native plants.

EXCEPTIONS

This ordinance does not apply to plants grown for food, lawns, green roofs, or other applications that have a clear reason to use non-native plants.

This ordinance does not apply to annual plants since they complete their life cycles within one growing season.

Existing trees and other plants will remain unaffected by this ordinance. For any trees or plants replaced for damage or any other reason, replacements must be native species as specified in ordinance requirements.

ENFORCEMENT

This ordinance shall be implemented, administered and enforced by the Town of Wilton and Town departments designated by the First Selectman.