Important Reasons to Use Native Plants

By Jim Kessler

1. **Important Facts.** Native plants are adapted to the local area and its climate. Unfortunately many of our beautiful non-native garden flowers provide little or no food for honeybees, native pollinators, songbirds, and other wildlife. Non-native plants have the potential to become invasive species - weeds that spread rapidly and often crowd out native species.

2. **Reduce Maintenance.** Local native plants need no fertilization, no pesticides, and little or no watering once they are established so they reduce maintenance cost. Native plant gardens require weeding and some maintenance. Native wildflower and grasses are very beautiful, produce a wide variety of shapes, colors, and bloom times.

3. **Increase Critical Wildlife Habitat.** Loss of native plant habitat is the main cause of local extinctions of native wildlife. Since urban development and agriculture have removed a large percentage of native plant populations from the Iowa landscape; many pollinator, songbird, and other native wildlife populations are rapidly declining. An October 1, 2014 report from the World Wildlife Fund the world's vertebrate wildlife have declined by 52% during the last 40 years. Many wildlife species will become extinct without restoration of native plant populations that provide their food and shelter. Planting native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses in yards, on acreages and farms, on corporate property, and in public spaces can reverse this decline.

4. **Help our Songbirds.** Migrating songbird populations have declined 1% annually during the last 50 years. Songbirds feed their young insect larvae which are found mostly on native plants. The result of declining native plant populations from the landscape is that many baby birds starve. Planting natives in urban yards and rain gardens increases songbird populations.

5. **Save Monarch Butterflies.** Monarch butterfly populations are declining very rapidly due to loss of milkweed populations. Planting local native milkweed species in gardens and other residential landscapes is crucial to the survival of Monarch Butterflies.

6. **Increase Vital Honeybee and Native Pollinator Populations.** The current pollinator...
crisis is important to everyone. One of every three bites that we eat requires insect pollination. 80% of our plants cannot produce seeds without insect pollination and would become extinct without pollinators. Honeybees, native bees, and other native pollinators are declining because there are not enough native wildflowers to supply the nectar they need to stay healthy. Widely used neonicotinoid pesticides are insect nerve toxins that are especially deadly to bees and other pollinators. The solution to our pollinator crisis is to plant lots of local native wildflowers and to keep them free of pesticides. Native plantings also increase populations of other beneficial insects that feed on insect pests in our yards and gardens.

**Garden for both wildlife and beauty**

Gardeners can make a significant difference for honeybees, native pollinators like the Monarch Butterfly, songbirds, and other wildlife populations by planting natives in yards and acreages. Your native plant garden or larger native planting can be part of that difference.

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**Ecological Principles of Permaculture** [5]
**Planning a Permaculture Garden** [6]
**Practical Permaculture Methods: Start Today!** [7]
**Choosing Native Plants for Pollinators in Your Area** [8]
**Planning, Planting, and Managing Your Butterfly and Pollinator Garden** [9]
**Books and Websites for Pollinator Gardens and Larger Native Plantings** [10]
**Tweet** [11]