



“Garden as if life depended on it!”

-Dr. Doug Tallamy



With respect to	Traditional gardeners may think...	Habitat gardeners think....
Value of plants	I plant what is pretty, satisfies my HOA and impresses my neighbors.	Plants are at the base of every terrestrial ecosystem. They evolved to be adapted to local conditions and wildlife. What is pretty is not the same for everyone.
Plant sources	Plants have to come from horticulturists and breeders.	Nature gives away natives. Growers are starting to bring some popular natives to market.
Plant choices	I buy what the nursery is selling.	I plant what grows naturally near where I live.
Weeds	No weed is a good weed. I have to spray with concentrated herbicide to kill seeds and roots. I have to till soil to control weeds.	I pull weeds by hand to reduce disturbance, in which weeds thrive. I use free mulch and native ground covers, and I don't fertilize, which gives advantage to weeds. Many weeds self-limit anyway. Common herbicides work on leaves, not roots or seeds, so I never spray the ground.
Sustainability/ Permaculture	I have to buy annuals every year.	Natives produce fertile seed and persist by roots. They have to. Cultivated annuals are usually hybrids with great qualities this year, but they will not come back next year and don't do much for wildlife.
Pests and infestations	First I panic. Then I Google or ask Facebook. Then I go buy chemicals and kill them.	Why not just monitor the situation? It's probably temporary. Plants, especially natives, have "immune" systems. Animals, especially spiders and birds, will probably eat my pest anyway.
Flowers	I like my plants to bloom predictably.	Blooming is seasonal. Native plants bloom based on environmental cues to maximize reproduction, including timing of pollinators, cues that can be diminished in cultivars and nativars.
Soil	Each plant species needs a perfect mix of minerals in potting soil that is sterile and does not compact.	A perfect mix may be needed for maximum wholesale production and profit. But soil that is already in my yard is probably good enough already. Plus, my soil has a built-in microbiome of beneficial microbes.
Fertilizer	I fertilize when the label says to, whether my plants need it or not.	Fertilizing gives weeds an advantage over other plants. Most runs off anyway and contributes to eutrophication of waterways.
Watering	I water if it hasn't rained in a couple of days.	I water only if plants are at risk. Overwatering gives false message to plants not to grow deeper roots and gives weeds an unfair advantage.
Animal life	I panic if I see a bug on my plants. I kill spiders and snakes.	I like my garden abuzz with activity. Spiders are built-in pest control. Many non-venomous snakes eat venomous snakes. That knowledge outweighs any anxiety.
Bees	I saw a honeybee visit my plants once. It was awesome. Yay me.	Native plants support the most important pollinators, which are native bees (most are solitary, live in soil and don't sting), not honeybees (which are a crop)
Diversity	I like lots of the same thing.	Diversity reduces susceptibility to pathogens, invasives, ecosystem fragility.
Exotics and hybrids	I want all these cool new varieties in my garden.	Our worst invasive plants were introduced as cool exotics. But even the most benign exotics are "lazy" and provide no ecosystem services.
Habitat corridor	I don't think of my garden as habitat. It's not wild enough.	Our region is in an important Louisiana flyway, with food for stopovers and ability for populations to intermingle. Without natives, gardens are just big ecological holes in nature's fabric.
Neatness	I like my garden neat and well maintained. Native gardens look messy and wild.	I like my garden neat and well maintained too. Good maintenance still applies to native gardens. Clean edges and weeding are needed for any garden. But I wait until after winter to trim dead material because birds and insects need this material for food and shelter.
Design	I consider height, final size, color, texture, and flowering times in my landscape plan.	Me too!

Control	I have to do (and buy) everything, or my garden will die.	I'll keep an eye on things and not intervene unless necessary.
Mowing the lawn	I love to cut my grass. It looks so neat when I'm done and it feels like a duty I have fulfilled.	I like a bit of lawn as a play area, but I don't want to spend too much of my weekend on a loud, polluting machine.
Choice of turf	I like a neat lawn of one species (monoculture) that stays that way with Weed and Feed.	Whatever grows is fine, as long as it's not bully Bermuda grass. Weed and Feed runs off. What a waste. And it reduces diversity by killing off desirable plants.
Genetics	What does genetics have to do with gardening?	Many non-native plants in nurseries are sterile clones that are vulnerable to the same threats. Cross-pollination among diverse individuals increases genetic diversity, nature's insurance policy.
Animal life	I don't like having rats, ants and wasps in my garden.	I don't have many problems with those weedy animals because I don't let fallen birdseed accumulate and because my diverse birds and spiders control rodents and wasps. But I do use wasp and ant killers in a targeted way if needed.
All or none	But I don't want to replace all my plants.	You don't have to. Just add something native to your existing landscape. None of us are purists. We all have some non-native plants in our gardens, but we never plant, share or buy invasive non-natives.
Naturalized non-natives	My non-native plants do attract some wildlife.	Some introduced plants have become naturalized over time. Not a bad thing, but more diverse plants support much more diverse wildlife.
Timing	I like instant gratification. Insta-gardens can be installed on a weekend or by a landscaping crew in a few hours.	I think patience is a virtue. Native gardens "Sleep, Creep then Leap". It takes about three years for natives to really fill in. Natives are busy growing roots and making friends the first year. They are in for the long haul. Besides, watching the changes brings me so much joy!
Microbes	Fungi, bacteria and worms are pathogens that will kill my plants.	The vast majority of fungi, bacteria and worms are beneficial or harmless. Natives have had ways to deal with microbes for millennia.
Property value	Having a traditional lawn and flower beds improves property values	Research has shown that a home with a native landscape adds property value.
Why	My garden is pretty and makes me happy to see it grow.	My garden is pretty and makes me happy to see it grow. But I want my property to be a part of something bigger. I am proud that my property contributes to the Homegrown National Park.

Gardening practices can make a difference!

Good

Add one or two natives to your existing landscape
 Fertilize less
 Swat or crush before getting out the pesticide spray
 Don't add more impervious surfaces like pavement
 Ask your nursery for natives
 Don't buy bagged cypress mulch
 Add nectar plants for bees
 Plant milkweed for monarchs

Better

Add a lot of natives and replace some of the wimps
 Fertilize with compost
 Spot manage infestations, maybe with soap first
 Consider pervious paths like stone or recycled concrete
 Welcome cuttings and seeds
 Get free municipal mulch. No truck? Bring bins
 Add native plants for native bees and diverse birds
 Plant native, disease-free milkweed for monarchs

Best

Plan your design around hardy natives
 Compost your own waste
 Use pesticide only to control persistent problems
 Use stepping stones with ground covers to stabilize soil
 Offer cuttings and seeds
 Mulch with your own oak leaves and pine straw
 Add nectar and larval food plants for insects and birds
 Plant diverse native plants for many butterfly species