



Resource Guide

Connecting Downtown Atlanta through art, nature, and community

Native plants are the unsung heroes of urban landscapes. Amidst the buzz of the city, strategically planted native plant pocket gardens & wellness walks can transform outdoor spaces into vibrant, resilient micro-habitats that support local wildlife, invite community wellness, improve air quality, and celebrate the natural beauty of Georgia's Piedmont region.

This guide will walk you through the essential steps of what to consider when you are Getting Started, designing, planting, and maintaining native plant gardens that are not only well-adapted to Atlanta's climate but also contribute to the city's revitalization, community & environmental health, while creating beautiful, educational and impactful urban green spaces, while helping to restore the natural balance in our rapidly developing metropolitan area.

MISSION: To revitalize downtown Atlanta through a network of native plant gardens that create pathways of wellness, biodiversity and community connection.

VISION: A vibrant, revitalized Downtown Atlanta with native plant gardens & wellness walks across the city. Connecting students, employees and the community with nature.

Let's connect the dots, create a path!

Getting Started

Transforming an urban space into a native pocket garden is a powerful act of ecological restoration and community revitalization. Native plant gardens offer more than just aesthetic beauty—they are living ecosystems that support local wildlife, restore biodiversity, and create a meaningful connection to nature. In urban environments like Atlanta, where concrete and development are prevalent, even small gardens can serve as critical habitats for pollinators, birds, and beneficial insects. From compact balconies to tiny backyard spaces, native plant gardens can be designed to thrive in urban conditions, providing a vibrant, low-maintenance alternative to traditional ornamental landscaping.

- Join the Downtown Native Plant Initiative to connect with our local native plant community and shared resources
- Start small and expand gradually
- Consider signage to educate, inspire and grow awareness about the importance of native plants
- Be patient with plant establishment
- Celebrate each successful planting
- Document your garden's evolution, cost savings and community engagement!

Here are some steps to consider when you are ready to get started:

1. Evaluate Your Space
2. Plan and Design
3. Site Preparation
4. Plant Selection
5. Installation
6. Care & Maintenance

Evaluate Your Space

- ☐ Determine available area for native planting
- ☐ Assess site-specific conditions:
 - Sunlight exposure
 - Soil type and quality
 - Water availability
 - Microclimates (e.g., heat from buildings, wind patterns)
 - Foot traffic and urban constraints
- ☐ Measure sunlight hours
- ☐ Test soil pH and drainage
- ☐ Check for existing vegetation
- ☐ Identify potential irrigation sources
- ☐ Evaluate space limitations

Plan and Design

- ☐ Maximize vertical space in urban environments
- ☐ Use layered planting techniques:
 - Tall plants in back
 - Medium-sized plants in middle
 - Groundcovers in front
- ☐ Create visual interest with varied plant heights
- ☐ Consider seasonal changes and year-round appeal
- ☐ Key Design Strategies
 - Group plants with similar water and sunlight needs
 - Incorporate habitat features (rocks, logs, birdbaths)
 - Plan for pollinator attraction
 - Create sight lines and maintain open spaces
 - Use native grasses for texture and movement

Site Preparation

- ☐ Site Clearing
 - Remove debris and invasive species
 - Clear existing non-native vegetation
 - Assess and improve soil conditions
 - Consider raised beds or planters for challenging urban soils

☐ **Soil Management**

- Conduct a thorough soil assessment before planting, as urban environments often have compacted or poor-quality soil. Test the pH and nutrient levels, and amend the soil with organic compost to improve its structure and fertility. Native plants are adapted to local soil conditions, but they still benefit from well-prepared, healthy soil that mimics their natural habitat.
- Conduct soil test through UGA Extension Office
- Amend soil if necessary
- Add organic matter
- Ensure proper drainage
- Consider raised beds for contaminated or poor-quality urban soils

Plant Selection

☐ **Choosing Native Plants**

- Select plants native to Atlanta region (see suggested starter list below)
- Focus on species tolerant of urban conditions
- Consider:
 - Pollution resistance
 - Drought tolerance
 - Foot traffic endurance
 - Wildlife support

☐ **Recommended Plant Varieties:** Here are a few resilient native plant species especially well adapted to our urban Atlanta landscape:

Trees	Shrubs	Grasses	Perennials
● Eastern Redbud ● Wax Myrtle ● American Fringetree	● Inkberry ● Blueberry ● Native Azalea ● American Beautyberry	● Switchgrass ● Muhly Grass ● Cherokee Sedge	● Black-eyed Susan ● Purple Coneflower ● Bee Balm

			• Milkweed
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Installation

- ☐ Planting Best Practices: Consider the following aspects when installing your garden, or seek guidance from an expert who can assist you in planting your garden.
- ☐ Best planting times: Spring or Fall
- ☐ Proper plant spacing
- ☐ Appropriate planting depth
- ☐ Apply organic mulch
- ☐ Initial deep watering

Care & Maintenance

Native plant gardens require less maintenance and lower costs than traditional landscaping, as these species are naturally adapted to local conditions. Allowing plants to go through their natural seasonal cycles creates year-round habitat value for wildlife while eliminating the need for costly watering, fertilizers, and frequent pruning. Consider educating your staff & maintenance teams so they don't assume a traditional maintenance approach to your native garden. Educational signage helps visitors understand that what might look "wilder" is intentional design that supports urban biodiversity.

Research shows native gardens reduce maintenance costs by up to 75% compared to conventional landscapes, making them cost-effective and sustainable for urban spaces.

Watering Strategies

- During the first growing season, provide consistent moisture to help establish root systems. Most native plants require deep, infrequent watering rather than frequent shallow watering. Water deeply (about 1-2 inches per week) and less frequently to encourage deep root growth.
- Once established (typically after the first year), most native plants will be drought-tolerant and require minimal supplemental watering, especially those native to your specific region's climate.

Mulching Techniques

- Apply a 2-3 inch layer of organic mulch around plants, keeping the mulch a few inches away from plant stems to prevent moisture-related diseases. Use native bark, leaf litter, or locally sourced organic mulch that mimics natural forest floor conditions.
- Mulching helps retain soil moisture, regulate temperature, suppress weeds, and slowly add nutrients to the soil as it breaks down.

Pruning and Maintenance

- Minimize pruning for most native plants. Unlike ornamental gardens, native plant gardens should be allowed to grow more naturally.
- Remove dead or diseased plant material in late winter or early spring before new growth begins.
- Allow seed heads and dried vegetation to remain through winter, as they provide food and habitat for wildlife and add winter interest to the garden.

Fertilization

- Native plants typically require minimal fertilization. Over-fertilizing can lead to excessive growth and reduced plant resilience.
- If needed, use slow-release, organic fertilizers sparingly and only if a soil test indicates specific nutrient deficiencies.

Pest and Disease Management

- Embrace a hands-off approach to pest management. Native plants have natural resistance to local pests and diseases.
- Encourage beneficial insects by maintaining diverse plantings and avoiding chemical pesticides.
- If pest issues arise, use targeted, organic methods like hand-picking insects or using insecticidal soaps.

Seasonal Considerations

- Observe your plants through different seasons and learn their natural growth cycles.
- Leave plants standing through winter to provide habitat for wildlife and allow natural seed dispersal.
- Plan for gradual replanting or expansion, understanding that native plant gardens evolve and change over time.

Specific Urban Challenges

- Consider microclimates created by buildings, concrete, and urban heat islands.
- Choose native plants that are particularly resilient to urban stress, such as those tolerant of compacted soil, limited water, and temperature fluctuations.
- Group plants with similar water and sunlight requirements to create more efficient maintenance zones.

Monitoring and Adaptation

- Keep a garden journal to track plant performance, bloom times, and wildlife interactions.
- Be patient and willing to experiment. Native plant gardens take time to establish and reach their full ecological potential.
- Learn from local native plant societies, botanical gardens, and extension offices for region-specific advice.

Involvement Opportunities: Contact ADID or Kindred Lane

info@kindredlane.com

More details to come

- Community Steward Program
- Adopt-A-Planter
- Nominate a Leader
- Organize a wellness walk
- Schedule a volunteer Impact Day
- Sponsor a Native Garden Site

Why Native Plants Matter

Native plants are the ecological backbone of our local landscapes, serving as critical support systems for biodiversity, wildlife, and environmental resilience. Unlike ornamental or exotic species, native plants have evolved alongside local wildlife over thousands of years, creating intricate relationships that sustain entire ecosystems. By providing food, shelter, and breeding habitats for pollinators, birds, and beneficial insects, these plants play a fundamental role in maintaining the delicate balance of our natural world. Choosing to plant native species is more than a gardening choice—it's an ecological commitment that helps restore and protect local

habitats, reduces the need for water and chemical interventions, and celebrates the unique botanical heritage of a specific region.

Supporting Local Wildlife

Native plants are critical for sustaining local ecosystems by:

- Providing essential food and habitat for local birds, pollinators, and insects
- Supporting the entire local food web from the ground up
- Offering critical resources like:
 - Nectar sources for butterflies and hummingbirds
 - Seed and fruit production for birds
 - Larval host plants for butterfly and moth species

Biodiversity Enhancement

- Native plants help restore and maintain local biodiversity
- They create interconnected habitats that support a wide range of species
- Each native plant can support multiple wildlife species

Urban Ecosystem Restoration

- Help mitigate habitat loss in urban environments
- Create green corridors that connect fragmented natural spaces
- Improve air quality by filtering pollutants
- Support stormwater management through efficient water usage

Climate Resilience

- Adapted to local climate conditions (Atlanta's USDA Zones 7b and 8a)
- Drought-tolerant and requiring less water than non-native alternatives
- Help reduce urban heat island effect
- Provide natural cooling through strategic planting

Low-Maintenance Landscaping

- Naturally adapted to local soil conditions
- Require minimal fertilization

- Resistant to local pests and diseases
- Reduce need for chemical interventions
- Once established, need less water and care

Urban Revitalization

- Transform unused urban spaces into vibrant, living landscapes
- Create opportunities for community engagement
- Provide educational opportunities about local ecosystems
- Enhance urban aesthetics with diverse, seasonal plantings

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Increase access to green spaces
- Provide visual beauty through diverse textures and colors
- Create spaces for relaxation and connection with nature
- Support community building through shared gardening experiences

Digging Deeper: Resources

Local Organizations

- Georgia Native Plant Society www.gnps.org
- Trees Atlanta
- Birds Georgia www.birdsgeorgia.org
- UGA Extension Office <https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices/fulton>
- Park Pride <https://parkpride.org/>
- Beech Hollow Farms <https://beechhollowfarms.com/>

Design, Planting & Consultation

- Rivercane Solutions
- Kindred Lane www.kindredlane.com
- We Are The ARK <https://wearetheark.org>

Native Plant Resources:

- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center <https://www.wildflower.org/about/overview>

- Native Plant Trust <https://www.nativeplanttrust.org/>
- National Wildlife Federation <https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife>