



## NATIVE GARDENING: *Small Steps, Big Impact*

**Y**ou may be familiar with the fact that bees are in decline because their ecosystems are threatened. Perhaps your child has been learning in school about how certain plants help monarchs and other butterflies. Maybe you hope that using fewer annual plants and more plants that come back every year will alleviate some of the work (and expense) that you put into your garden.

Is the answer to create a native or pollinator garden? What does that mean? Is it possible in your small yard? Can you really make a difference? How do you get started?

Whatever your motivation or level of knowledge, welcome to a powerful new approach to environmental conservation: the idea that each of us can meaningfully nurture ecosystems by planting native plants that support the insects, birds, and other creatures that evolved together and support each other.

Together, our efforts create a “Homegrown National Park,” in the words of Doug Tallamy, a best-selling author and expert who is at the forefront of the native plant movement. Tallamy evangelizes planting native—even in a tiny yard—as a way to collectively rebuild the broad ecological networks that support biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

Creating a native garden does not need to be a drastic, all-at-once, all-or-none process, which feels overwhelming. You don’t have to start from scratch. When I moved into my house in Sparta, there were some established beds with a mix of perennials that flowered all season. I was hesitant to change anything because it looked great and I didn’t “know what I was doing.”

As I became aware of how important native plants are to the creatures I love and the food that sustains us, I started using native plants to fill gaps in existing beds. As I learned more, I added new beds in which I only plant natives. Stealing this space from the lawn wound up being extra eco-friendly since the typical American lawn doesn’t support pollinators or other species and is often treated with toxic fertilizers and pesticides.

Now my rule is that I only plant natives, other than the limited vegetables

and fruit I have room to grow – which benefit from my pollinator-supporting natives. No pollinators would mean no cucumbers, no blueberries, no tomatoes, no peaches. And pollinators aren’t just bees—they include hummingbirds, bats, beetles, flies, moths, wasps, and so on.

I’ve only just begun to remove existing non-native plants, but plan to keep some old favorites like peonies, hellebores, and lilacs. Even Tallamy says that if you aim for 70-80 percent native, you make a difference—if you love peonies, keep some peonies. But I enjoy researching natives to plant instead.

Gardening is a constant learning process, and after 14 years I finally understand that I may never “know what I’m doing.” That’s what makes it interesting, but in the meantime I know I’m supporting the ecosystem that supports us all.

### SOME EASY EFFORTS YOU CAN MAKE IN YOUR OWN YARD

- Tuck some native perennials into your current beds. There are many online resources that will give you native plant lists depending on your space: sun vs. shade, moisture level, soil type, etc. You can keep it simple—there are many natives that are quite adaptable regardless of your conditions. Just tuck some in and see which ones thrive.
- Steal some space from your lawn and create new or bigger beds for natives.
- Stop using fertilizers or pesticides, as well as gas-powered tools, which worsen climate change, destroy habitat, and cause noise and air pollution.
- Don’t cut back perennials in the fall; their seeds feed birds (and create free new plants!) while stems provide nests for pollinators.
- Leave the leaves—leaf litter also shelters pollinators, while rebuilding the health of your soil. If you don’t want to leave them all over, you can mow over them to mulch them and then rake them onto your beds or under trees. This is the natural way to improve your soil.

## SPARTA SPEAKS 2022: *Walks & Talks*



**June 18, 2022:** Join us at 10:00am at **Hilltop Hanover Farm** in Yorktown for a free tour of this historic property and the chance to learn about (and buy) the native plants they grow in their nursery.



**July 12, 2022:** **Mark Sarazen**, Ossining Artist presents “**Beekeeping: A Love Story**,” about the perils and pleasures of keeping bees. This program is in person and family friendly.



**September 13, 2022:** **Dr. Brent Glass**, Executive Director of the Sing Sing Prison Museum will give us a **progress update on the Sing Sing Prison Museum**. Via Zoom.

### MAKE TIME FOR THE SPARTA TOUR

Reservations at [www.jugtavern.org](http://www.jugtavern.org)

April 24, May 15, July 24, August 21, September 25, and October 16

*See You at the Fair!*

Look for us on **Saturday, June 11th** at the **Ossining Village Fair**