

Policy on the Use of Native Plants on Town-Owned Property
September 2022

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish minimum standards for the use of native plants on municipal properties in the Town of Ridgefield. A **native plant** is defined for purposes of this policy as one that is indigenous to the northeastern United States.

The Town recognizes the necessity to maximize the use of native vegetation to protect and restore natural habitats. Non-native plants do not provide the same level of food and habitat that our native plants provide to native fauna (insects, birds, and mammals). As development increasingly encroaches on our wild places, native flora has been destroyed, often being replaced by non-native plantings in our yards and gardens. Many of these non-native plants have since been classified as invasive, meaning non-native plants whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. Non-native invasive plants have an unfair advantage over the native plants that our insects, birds, and mammals rely on for survival. Because they did not evolve here, invasive plants have no natural enemies to keep them in check, allowing them to expand out of control. They sprout earlier in the spring and develop leaves before native plants do, outcompeting them for sunlight and soil nutrients.

The uncontrolled proliferation of non-native, invasive species has become a significant ecological hazard in our area, altering the structure and function of our natural environment. Establishing a minimum standard to use native plants in town-owned properties in Ridgefield is a critical first step in reversing this trend and improving ecosystem health in our community.

REQUIREMENT

Henceforth, 100% of new and replacement trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials, and ground cover plantings on municipal properties will be native to the Northeast. The policy also applies to any replacement plantings, including but not limited to trees, shrubs, and perennials felled by storms, disease, redevelopment/expansion, or other reasons. The policy also applies to seeds used in place of plants.

While not an absolute requirement, every effort should be made to use straight species of native plants from Ecoregion 59 (Level III). Plant cultivars that have been developed for specific functions such as disease resistance and drought tolerance may be used on a case-by-case basis with the approval of the Ridgefield Conservation Commission.

A list of native plants, sorted by use case, will be maintained by the Ridgefield Conservation Commission in consultation with the Tree Committee and will be updated on an annual basis.

To support the objective of using native plants on town-owned property in Ridgefield, this policy also sets forth the town's aspiration to remove invasive plants from town properties over time. Invasive plants are those included on:

- the Connecticut Invasive Plant List, both invasive and potentially invasive, as determined by the Connecticut Invasive Plants Council in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes §22a-381a through §22a-381d; and

- the New York State invasive plant list, as stipulated in 6 NYCRR Part 575. [Note: NY State invasives are included here given our recognition that any plantings in Ridgefield will inevitably spread beyond our town border into NY and vice versa.]

EXCEPTIONS

This policy does not apply to annuals, or plants grown for food, lawns, or green roofs, or other application that have a clear reason to use non-native plants. An exception to this policy will also be made for the formal gardens of Ballard Park.

ENFORCEMENT

This policy shall be implemented, administered and Town departments will be held in compliance with it by the Office of the First Selectman

DEFINITIONS

- A **cultivar** is a subspecies classification describing plant varieties which are produced through artificial selection.
- **Ecoregions** (ecological regions) are areas where ecosystems (and the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources) are generally similar. Ecoregions of New England are mapped here: http://ecologicalregions.info/data/vt/new_eng_front.pdf
- An **ecotype** is a distinct form or race of a plant species occupying a particular habitat and adapted to specific environmental conditions of that habitat.
- **Invasive plants** are non-native plants whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. Invasive plants are able to establish on many sites, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems. In Connecticut, non-native plants considered invasive are those listed on the Connecticut Invasive Plant List, as determined by the Connecticut Invasive Plants Council in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes §22a-381a through §22a-381d. 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. The New York State invasive plant list is stipulated in 6 NYCRR Part 575.
- **Native plants** are those that live or grow naturally in a particular region (in this case, the northeastern United States) without direct or indirect human intervention. Over the course of evolutionary time, these plants have adapted to physical conditions and co-evolved with the other species in the system, becoming part of the balance of nature in that region. Through this co-evolution, native plants develop complex and essential relationships with pollinators, birds, and other wildlife species in a given ecological community.
- **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 ornamental plants, and 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 benefit here as it would in its country of origin. While many non-native plants are not considered invasive, they dominate our landscapes, replacing our native flora and reducing availability of food and habitat for native fauna.