



## **Six Rivers Land Conservancy 'Nature Near You' Native Plant Certification**

### **Turn Your Garden into a Certified Wildlife Haven!**

At Six Rivers Land Conservancy, we believe that nature is essential to the health and vitality of our communities. As a private, non-profit organization, our mission is to **protect and connect the natural lands and waters that make our region a special place to live.**

We work to conserve the character and quality of our local environment—supporting clean water, wildlife, and a healthier way of life. Our efforts focus primarily on partnering with public and private landowners and municipalities through **conservation easements**, managing **nature preserves**, and providing **assistance to protect important natural areas.**

But you don't need hundreds of acres to make a difference. The **Six Rivers Nature Near You Native Plant Garden Certification** recognizes native plant enthusiasts who create beautiful, eco-friendly gardens that support local wildlife and protect our natural resources. Even if you don't have acres of land, your garden can still play a vital role in sustaining Michigan's native ecosystems- helping protect the natural beauty of our region for generations to come.

To apply visit our website and submit an online form including a photo of your garden that accurately represents the guidelines. Submit the \$40 fee with your application to receive a beautiful Six Rivers sign to proudly display in your garden!

### **Guidelines:**

To become certified through the **Six Rivers Nature Near You Native Plant Garden Certification**, your garden should support local wildlife, protect natural resources, and follow sustainable practices. Here's what you'll need to qualify:

## **Garden Requirements**

- **Location:** Reside in our service area (Genesee, Lapeer, Macomb, Oakland, or St. Clair counties)
- **Minimum Size:** 100 square feet, combined
- **Native Plants:** At least 75% Michigan native plants (preferably straight species local genotype native)
- **Seasonal Bloom:** Include nectar sources that bloom from **spring through fall**
- **Bird Food:** Provide native plants that offer **nuts, fruits, or seeds**
- **Plant Diversity:** Include **5–10 different native plant species**
- **Wildlife Benefit:** List **3 animal or insect species** that will specifically benefit from your garden

## **Sustainable Management Practice**

Choose at least **3** of the following:

- Reduce pesticide use with **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**
- **Chop and drop** plant material to feed soil naturally
- Use a **broom or electric blower** instead of gas-powered tools or hose
- Install **drip irrigation** or a **soaker hose** instead of sprinklers
- Use a **rain barrel** to capture and reuse water
- Install a **rain garden** to manage stormwater runoff
- **Limit impervious surfaces** (like concrete or pavement)
- **Mow high** and leave grass clippings on the lawn
- **Compost** garden and kitchen waste

- **Test your soil** before applying fertilizer
- **Manage or remove invasive species**
- Install **motion-sensing lights** to reduce light pollution
- Add a **bat house** to support natural pest control
- **Volunteer** at a Six Rivers Stewardship Day



### **Encouraged (But Not Required)**

- Plant **native trees or shrubs**
- Add **butterfly host plants** (which also feed birds)
  - [MI Butterfly Host Plants](#)
- Provide a **water source** such as a bird bath, saucer with pebbles, stream, or pond

## **Frequently Asked Questions/Resources**

### **Garden Requirements**

#### **What if I am shy of 100 square feet?**

If you're pretty close, it will still benefit many wildlife species. The 100 square feet can be combined from several smaller gardens.

#### **Just getting started on the native plant train? Find out what plants are native to our area!**

Just getting started?

[Getting Started Native Plants and Ecosystem Services](#)

[Southern Lower Peninsula Native Plants](#)

More advanced search options:

<https://michiganflora.net/>

<http://www.bonap.org/>

**Why 75% native?** This allows for exotic, non-invasive plant species to also be planted in your yard.

**What do you mean by straight species local genotype native?** - Let's break this down a little bit further, shall we? While straight species local genotypes are preferred, we understand that you may not know the history of some of your plants.

A **straight species** is found in the wild and reproduces via seed by natural pollination. It has not been manipulated by humans, referred to as a cultivar. When shopping for straight species, look for plants that have no quotes in the plant name or have just the botanical name with no extra names. Think of purple coneflowers. The straight species is *Echinacea purpurea*. A cultivar would look like: *Echinacea purpurea* 'One Cool Bloom'.

A **local genotype** means that the seed (plant) is sourced close to the site where it will be planted. Use local or regional seed sources with similar environmental conditions. Don't bring native seeds or plants from Florida back to Michigan – or vice versa – even when the same plant species is native to both areas. Plants have evolved for specific conditions within those areas.

### **Where do I find native plants?**

The number of Michigan native plant growers has been consistently growing. Some local garden centers may carry plants grown by our native plant growers. There are also a variety of native plant sales held by non-profits that work with local native plant growers.

Washtenaw County Water Resources Commission has assembled a list of native plant nurseries. [Find Native Plants](#)

Native Plant Guild is a statewide resource: <https://www.nativeplantguild.com/>

### **How do I achieve spring to fall blooms?**

Michigan State University has resources for overlapping bloom throughout the season:

[Native flowering plants that attract beneficial insects chart](#)

[Attracting Beneficial Insects with Native Flowering Plants](#)

### **Bird Food**

Native plants equal bird food. It may come in the form of nuts, fruits, seeds, insects and often more than one of these. Michigan Audubon is a great resource for anything bird and plants, including a list of native plant growers.

[Michigan Native Plants for Bird-Friendly Landscapes](#)

[Top Performing Plants for Birds](#)

### **Why diversity?**

In a nutshell, each plant is attractive to different species. The more plant diversity you offer, the more species you can support.

## How do I know which species will benefit from my garden?

Each plant may offer different benefits to different species and different resources offer different information. For instance, specific butterflies, like monarchs, rely on specific host plants, like milkweed, to hatch their young. While milkweed is a host for monarchs, it's also a great nectar source for bees. We suggest reviewing several reliable resources to learn more about the plant species you add in your garden and what wildlife species will benefit. It's also a great time to start an observation journal and spend time in your native garden by seeing first hand the wildlife that come to visit!

## **SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

### **Use 3 of the following Sustainable Management Practices**

#### **What is IPM, Integrated Pest Management?**

IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to **manage pest damage** by the most **economical means** and with the **least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment**.

[Integrated Pest Management Principles](#)

#### **What is 'chop and drop'?**

In spring, you can cut back your standing perennial stems to 8"-24" once your daytime temperature is reliably above 50 degrees. This could be mid-April to mid-May in our area. Leave the stems where they fall in your garden or place them alongside the plant. There could be existing insects within those stems. Additionally, new native bees will be seeking out the hollow stems to lay their eggs in. You may even observe them near you as you are cutting the stems. Leave spent leaves in place. If you have a disease or pest issue, use IPM. Plant material will break down and feed your soil.

#### **Why use a broom or electric blower instead of a gas blower or garden hose to clear a surface?**

Gas blowers create air and noise pollution while blowing around particulate matter that can be dangerous to inhale. The louder, stronger gas blowers can dislodge insects from their homes, even desiccating them, leading to death. The noise may make your yard inhospitable to nesting birds. Electric blowers decrease the air pollution a bit, while using a broom on sidewalks and driveways will eliminate the air and noise pollution while providing the added benefit of a good workout. The use of a garden hose to clear plant material off impervious surfaces is wasting resources.

### **Drip irrigation or soaker hose?**

Overhead sprinklers put the water in the air, where it is prone to evaporation. Drip irrigation and soaker hoses allow the water to stay at the soil level and is a much more efficient way to water plants if you use supplemental watering. One of the benefits of native plants is that they will survive rainfall when using the right plant, right place method.

### **Where can I source a rain barrel?**

There are many commercially made rain barrels available through retail outlets. You may also make or purchase one made from repurposed barrels that have been adapted. You may find rain barrel resources through your municipalities, watershed council, garden club, etc.

**Rain Barrel DIY:** Washington State University and City of Bellingham, WA

[Rain Barrel Guide](#)

### **What is a rain garden and how do I make one?**

A rain garden is a space that manages surface storm water. Typically, this comes from downspouts, sump pumps or impervious surfaces. The garden will temporarily hold water to allow it to infiltrate the ground. This helps to clean water and prevents contaminants from washing into storm drains and emptying into local creeks and rivers. The garden is planted with native plants that will tolerate the wet and dry periods while providing habitat for our local fauna.

[Washtenaw County Free Recorded Master Rain Gardener Class](#)

### **How can I limit impervious surfaces?**

If you are adding a patio, sidewalk, or other area, you can look at using permeable materials that would allow the water to infiltrate the ground rather than having it run off.

### **What is the benefit of mowing the lawn high and leaving clippings on the lawn?**

Mowing high encourages deep roots and denser, healthy turf which helps prevent soil erosion. Leaving your clippings allows nutrients to return to the soil which means you may be able to reduce your nitrogen application. It does not encourage thatch. [Guide to Mowing Lawn Turf](#)

### **How do I start to compost?**

Composting can be done right in your own yard. It is very easy and affordable to set up a system that works for you. [Soils and Composting](#)

### **Where do I get a soil test? And why would I want one?**

Before adding fertilizer, you need to know what your soil already has and if it even needs fertilizer. Your plants may be experiencing what may appear as a nutrient deficiency, when it may in fact be too much of a nutrient. A soil test will tell you about texture, pH, nutrient levels, soil organic matter as well as a personalized recommendation for fertilizer needs and any pH modifications. Don't guess, soil test! A low-cost test kit is available through MSU Extension. [MSU Soil Test](#)

### **What are invasive species and how do I manage them?**

An invasive species is a **non-native species that also causes harm** to the economy, environment or to humans. Each species has different management methods.

[Michigan Invasive Species Program](#) [Michigan Invasive Species Coalition](#) [Michigan-MISIN](#)

### **Why would I want to use motion sensing lights?**

Plants and animals rely on day and night cycles. Light pollution can adversely affect their natural rhythms – movement, mating, sleeping, feeding, migration, etc. Consider using **red** or **yellow** lights that are **motion sensing** or adding a motion sensor to an existing light. This allows you the security of light that is used only when there is movement. [Light pollution harms wildlife and ecosystems](#)

“A recent study estimated that as many as 1 billion birds die each year in the United States from building collisions.” – Ohio Lights Out

### **Why would you want bats in your yard?**

Bats can eat 600 – 1,000 mosquitos in an hour. Your native plant garden will attract insects that will also be food for bats. Reducing your insecticide use will benefit bats. Tips for habitat management and building a bat house can be found here: [Landowner's Guide: Bats](#)

Bat Conservation International bat houses with videos and additional info: [Bat Gardens & Houses](#)

### **How can I volunteer for a Six Rivers Land Conservancy Stewardship Day?**

We offer seasonal stewardship days and would love to have you join us! Join us individually, with a friend or let us set up a special day for your work or social group. Follow us on Facebook and find our stewardship days under ‘events’ or learn more here: [Six Rivers Calendar of Events](#)

## **ENCOURAGED, NOT REQUIRED**

### **What trees and shrubs should I plant?**

It all boils down to the right plant, right place. Having a soil test done (see above) will help you to choose shrubs and trees that will do well in your soil. You will also want to consider the mature size, light, soil moisture, etc. This is just a few to get you started: [Choosing Native Trees & Shrubs](#)

### **How do I find out what larval host plants would be a good choice?**

You can research the butterfly or moth you'd like to attract and plant their larval host plants. If you'd like to attract monarchs, you'll need milkweeds. If you'd like spicebush swallowtails, plant a spicebush or sassafras. You can find larval host plants under each species on Butterflies and Moths of North America (BAMONA). Search under species profile then regional checklist. In the left column, drill down the region information to your county to view the list of verified species in your area. Select a species for larval host plant information. [Butterflies & Moths of North America](#)

You can also look at the National Wildlife Federation's Native Plant Finder. Enter your ZIP Code to find the top larval host plants for your area that will attract the most lepidoptera species for your area. [Native Plants Finder](#)

Remember that caterpillars and other insects are critical for birds to feed their nestlings.

### **Water Source**

Water is life. Even if you don't have a body of water on your property, you can offer water year-round for wildlife. During the warm season, rough or aggregate bird baths allow birds and insects to access water. Having a ground level bird bath allows other species to access it as well. During the cold winter months, a heated bird bath provides water while having it close to the ground makes it accessible to more than just birds. A shallow pebble filled dish of water allows insects to land and access water during the growing season. [Habitat Essentials](#).



# Additional Resources

[MSU Native Plant and Ecosystem Services](#)

[BAMONA – Butterflies and Moths of North America](#)

[Go Beyond Beauty Program](#)

[University of Michigan Herbarium](#): The go-to resource for Michigan native plants

[Cornell University Lab of Ornithology – All About Birds](#)

[Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#)

[Ohio Lights Out](#): Light concerns for migrating birds

[Florida Wildlife Lighting Program](#)

[Purdue University: Does night lighting harm trees?](#)

[iScience: Consequences of nighttime light pollution for monarch butterflies](#)

[University Cincinnati: Light pollution can disorient monarch butterflies](#)