The Amazing Benefits of Native Plants

 You may have heard the enthusiastic push to plant native plants, but what’s so special about natives?  Why are native plants beneficial? Well, I’m glad you asked!

The most important reason to plant native plants is that they support our local food webs.  Native plants have evolved with our native wildlife over thousands of years, and the two have come to know each other very well.

Native plants offer nectar and pollen for pollinators, and provide seeds and fruits for birds and other wildlife. Many native plants are also host plants - plants on which butterflies lay their eggs, and which provide a food source for the emerging caterpillars.  90% of the insects that eat plants can develop and reproduce only on the plants with which they evolved. If a momma butterfly can’t find the native plant she needs, she can’t lay her eggs successfully, and thus no babies – no caterpillars! – the basis for many a food chain.

Native plants are naturally adapted to the climate, rainfall, and soils of our region. Their roots extend deeper into the soil than the roots of many non-native plants (including turfgrass), which means natives are more drought resistant, and absorb more water. When planted in the appropriate site conditions (remember “Right plant, right place!”), native plants require less (if any) fertilizers, less (if any) pesticides, less water and less maintenance than non-native plants.  The less input plants require, the more sustainable your garden, and the better for the environment.

Native plants attract natural enemies. Natural enemies are beneficial insects such as lady beetles, lacewings, and wasps, that provide natural pest control through predation or parasitism.  Instead of using pesticides, watch nature in action by planting native plants - asters, coneflowers, Culver’s root, goldenrods, ironweed, mountain mints and rattlesnake master (to name a few) - and watch those beneficial insects go!

Native plants are unique to our geographic region, and create a distinct sense of place.  When we plant natives, we celebrate our geographic heritage, and honor the horticultural history of the great US of A.

And in addition to all of the above, native plants are simply beautiful!