What Is Natural Landscaping?

Natural landscaping is the planting or preservation of native vegetation in ways that help retain or augment natural landscape features, such as wetlands, prairies or woodlands. Natural landscaping can be applied in nearly any public green space, from parks to school grounds to municipal building lawns.

The Benefits:

Economic:
Reduced Installation And Maintenance Costs

When appropriately implemented and maintained, natural landscaping can reduce conventional landscaping maintenance costs by up to 90%.

Seed costs for natural landscaping are comparable to those for traditional landscaping and costs for sod or the installation of vegetative plugs may be comparable or slightly higher. However, natural landscapes do not require the application of chemicals, frequent mowing and replanting, or costly installation and maintenance of the irrigation systems necessary to maintain traditional landscaping.

Native perennial plants are well-suited to local environmental conditions, including summer heat and drought. Planting native plants significantly reduces or eliminates the following costs typically associated with traditional landscaping: labor, watering/irrigation, herbicides, fertilizer, fungicides, insecticides, annual replanting and mowing.

Environmental:
Reduced Pollution And Increased Habitat

Natural landscaping reduces or eliminates many of the negative environmental effects that can be associated with traditional landscaping and can provide welcome habitat for butterflies, birds and other animals.

With their deep root systems, native plants help stabilize soil, preventing erosion much more effectively than turf grass. This can be especially useful on hills, inclines, or stream banks. Since native vegetation does not require the application of chemicals, it does not contribute to watershed pollution. In fact, its root systems typically increase soil permeability, so runoff flowing through naturally landscaped areas is often absorbed and filtered into the ground. Finally, since natural landscaping requires only occasional mowing, the pollution from lawn maintenance equipment—which can account for up to five percent of smog-forming volatile organic compounds in nonattainment areas (such as northeastern Illinois)—is greatly reduced.

High quality natural communities now cover only 0.07% of Illinois, while public opinion surveys consistently rank access to natural areas as a top priority for people in their communities. Natural landscaping can provide crucial pockets of refuge and habitat for animals and can create buffers between busy, urbanized areas and high-quality natural places.
The Benefits: (continued)

Community:
*Education And Recreation*

Natural landscaping provides a number of community benefits, offering educational opportunities for residents young and old and providing a contrast to the hustle and bustle of urban areas.

Natural landscaping can demonstrate that native plants are beautiful and that the natural environment can be an accessible and enjoyable thing for people to engage with. It can help develop and strengthen community support for the preservation and acquisition of natural areas. It can also add a unique sense of place to urban areas.

Natural landscaping can also provide a welcome contrast to, or refuge from, the noise and activity of busy urban areas. A walk through prairie grasses or a rest by a rain garden can offer a respite from the stress of urban life.

Resources:

There are many resources available if you decide natural landscaping is right for your community. Try these websites to get started:

- [www.NIPC.org](http://www.NIPC.org)
- [www.ChicagoWilderness.org](http://www.ChicagoWilderness.org)
- [www.OpenLands.org](http://www.OpenLands.org)

*Sourcebook on Natural Landscaping for Local Officials*  

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