

Native Plants and the Church

Why should a church congregation care about planting native plants? You could ask why a church does anything and the answer is, it is the right thing to do. Many faith traditions emphasize the importance of caring for creation. Ornamental plants have been selectively bred or genetically modified to produce traits that appeal to our senses but in doing so have lost other traits. Often making them more difficult to nurture. Since native plants are adapted to local precipitation and soil conditions, they generally require less upkeep, therefore helping the environment and saving time, water, and money. Maintaining the church grounds requires less volunteers and allows people to help elsewhere in the community.

Suburban areas often lack diverse ecosystems, leading to habitat fragmentation. By planting native species, areas of community land can become refuges for local wildlife, enhancing biodiversity. Native plants evolved as hosts for our specialized native insects; 90% of insects that eat plants can only eat the native plants with which they evolved. According to Douglas Tallamy, author of “Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife,” our native oaks support 537 species of caterpillars, while the ginkgo tree imported from Asia supports 4. This is important because 96% of our land birds feed insects to their young. He goes on to explain that a pair of Chickadees bring up to 570 caterpillars to their nest each day. Without the native plants, we do not have the insects; without the insects we do not have the birds; and so on up the food chain. Exotic plants cannot provide the needed support. By attracting birds, butterflies, and other wildlife, native plants create a thriving natural habitat. A native plant oasis also supports pollinator populations, which are crucial for food production. This connection to nature can serve as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all life, reinforcing messages about stewardship and care for creation.

While the new FCC parking lot is functional and practical, you get a totally different experience sitting in the middle of it or sitting in the central courtyard surrounded by plants. Native plant gardens can create peaceful and contemplative spaces for prayer, meditation, and reflection. The beauty of local flora can enhance spiritual experiences for congregants. A native garden can additionally serve as a living classroom for the congregation, Firefly Preschool, and the broader community.

A native garden is a visual representation of the church's commitment to the local environment. By planting native plants, a church can contribute positively to the environment while embodying values of care, community, and sustainability.

....Greg Bohn, Member of the FCC Sheboygan East Lawn Design Team