

## Town of Canton, Connecticut

### Native Plant Program for Municipal Landscapes, Town of Canton

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this program is to establish minimum standards for the use of native plants in the Town of Canton for municipal properties where practicable. A **native plant** is defined as one that lives or grows naturally in a particular region without direct or indirect human intervention. It is part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds of thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem, (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service). In order for a tree, shrub, herbaceous perennial or ornamental grass to be considered native to our region, it must be indigenous to the Northeast. The Town recognizes the necessity to maximize the use of native vegetation to protect and restore natural habitats and a healthy ecosystem.

#### INTENT

The intent of this program is to maximize the use of appropriate native plants on municipal properties to help mitigate the effects of habitat loss and fragmentation from development and the proliferation of non-native/exotic plantings in our town landscapes. Native plants are important for maintaining healthy ecosystems. In observing this policy, we acknowledge that:

- a) The native plant program is consistent with the 2014-2024 Canton Plan of Conservation and Development.
- b) Native plants promote healthy watersheds by filtering pollutants, stabilizing banks and providing food for macroinvertebrates that in turn feed fish and other aquatic species
- c) Native trees are more efficient at sequestering carbon than introduced species, creating healthy ecosystems essential for human health.
- d) It is important to protect all native plants to reserve the genetic diversity that evolved in our region.
- e) Native pollinators and many wildlife species rely on the native plants for survival.
- f) Healthy pollinators and wildlife species have a role in maintaining healthy ecosystems.
- g) Use of native plants in developed landscapes will help create connected and stable plant and animal populations.
- h) Endeavor to educate residents on native plants and their importance to native pollinators and other wildlife in our ecosystem.
- i) Have a responsibility to future generations to support, maintain, and improve our natural environment.

#### DEFINITIONS

**Straight species or wild-type native plant** is a plant that occurs naturally in a particular region. It has not been cultivated by human intervention. These plants have co-evolved over time to develop complex and essential relationships with pollinators, birds, and other wildlife species in a given ecological community. Every effort should be made to use straight species of native plants that are local ecotypes. **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 agricultural crops, ornamental plants, 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 own country of origin.

While many non-native plants are benign for aggressive spread, they dominate our landscapes. As development increasingly encroaches on our wild places, our native flora is being replaced by exotic plants and lawns. Loss of native flora threatens healthy ecosystems, a balance essential for all life, including our own.

**Invasive plants** are non-native plants recorded on the CT Invasive Plant List. 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. Invasive plants are able to establish on many sites, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting native plant communities or ecosystems. Planting of any plant listed on the CT Invasive Plant List is prohibited in business and industrial zones by the Town of Canton, under Section 7.1.C. of the Zoning Regulations, item 7. In the Farmington River Overlay District, under Section 6.3.E., “Uses Permitted by Zoning Permit,” item 2.c., when any work is done, invasive plants must be removed.

**Native cultivars or nativars** can be hybrids, (products of two or more plants intentionally selected by breeders and crossed to create certain traits), or they may be clonally-produced copies of one particular wild-type plant. While these are technically the same species as wild-types, they may represent only a fraction of the natural diversity of the species.

When plants are selectively bred for a particular trait(s), (changing flower or foliage color, weeping form or creating double flowers), the result is often cultivars that have lost what made them attractive to important pollinators and beneficial insects and may even lack the nutrition needed to sustain them.

## **PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS**

This program will be a minimum standard and will apply to all new plantings of trees, shrubs and other plants planted on municipal properties where practicable. It also applies to seeds used in place of plants. The program applies to any replacement plantings, including but not limited to trees, shrubs, and perennials felled by storms, disease, redevelopment/expansion, or other reasons where practicable.

### **Trees**

Due to the high wildlife value of native trees, new and replacement tree plantings on municipal properties will be native to the Northeast. Many trees, when not damaged by storms, disease, injuries from equipment, etc., can live for hundreds of years. They should be considered permanent parts of a landscape. Many native trees support hundreds of insects and the birds and wildlife species that consume those insects. Non-native trees do not support this diversity as much as native trees do.

### **Shrubs**

New and replacement shrubs will be a minimum of 85% native for municipal properties. There are a great variety of native shrubs to fit all growing conditions and aesthetic desires. Every effort should be made to select native shrubs. Native shrubs also support a high number of insects and many produce berries or other fruit that are important fall and winter food for birds.

### **Grasses**

New and replacement grass plantings will be 100% native for municipal properties. Due to the large number of seeds grasses produce and potential to spread by wind, only native grasses may be planted. Some ornamental non-native grasses that were commonly planted are believed to be detrimental to our ecosystems. Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*,) for example, is an emerging invasive threat in some areas.

### **Groundcovers**

New and replacement plants intended as groundcovers will be 100% native for municipal properties. These low-growing plants spread quickly and form a dense cover.

### **Herbaceous Perennials**

New and replacement herbaceous perennials will be a minimum of 75% native for municipal properties. There are a great variety of native perennials to fit all growing conditions and aesthetic desires. Every effort should be made to select native perennials.

Every effort should be made to select and plant straight-species of native plants that are local ecotypes.

Care should be taken to source plants and seeds that have not been treated with neonicotinoids. These pesticides are deadly to pollinators.

There are native trees and plants for every site condition. These websites list options for Connecticut: [National Wildlife Federation Native Plant Finder, https://www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder/](https://www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder/); Native Plant list for CT at <https://www.plantnative.org/rpl-nes.htm>; AND ADD OTHER LISTS OF CT NATIVES.

### **EXCEPTIONS**

This program does not apply to plants grown for food, lawns, green roofs, or other applications that have a clear reason to use non-native plants.

This program does not apply to annual plants since they complete their life cycle within one growing season.

Existing trees and other plants will remain unaffected by this program. For any trees or plants replaced for damage or any other reason, replacements must be native species as specified in program requirements where practicable.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

This policy shall be implemented and administered by Town departments, which will be held in compliance with it, by the Director of Public Works