



*Promoting conservation, research and utilization of native plants and plant habitats of Texas through education, outreach and example.*

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## **Working with your Homeowners' Association (HOA)**

Ideally a Homeowners' Association (HOA) exists to represent the community while protecting the property owners' interests. Ultimately your property's value is increased because of the enforcement of the agreed upon rules and regulations (deed restrictions). This sounds beneficial until you find yourself at odds with how they are interpreted and enforced when you incorporate native plants.

In part, the deed restrictions covering the home's exterior includes general maintenance to prevent overgrown lawns, "weeds" and unkept exteriors. Traditionally, HOAs prefer the manicured green turf grass and appointed evergreen ornamentals. Changing the perspective of what constitutes an ideal landscape can have its challenges.

Let's begin with an understanding by what we mean by a wildscape. A **wildscape** is a way of designing your home's landscape to attract and benefit birds and pollinators by providing the required food, water, and shelter.

**Beware / Be aware of your bylaws.** There may be requirements covering what types of trees, plants, and shrubs that are allowed to be planted in your landscape. There are many alternatives in the native plant world that prove to be better substitutes for these typical landscaper choices.

**Educate yourself.** Ask your local NPSOT Chapter for ideas on better choices. Or better yet, sign up for a [Native Landscape Certification Program](#) (NLCP) class to learn more. Classes focus on the characteristics and plants of the region in which they are taught.

**Partner with your Providers.** The [NICE Native Plant Partners](#) program (in some areas known as Operation NICE!) is a collaboration between the Native Plant Society of Texas and local nurseries around the state to offer natives that are right for the local environment.

As a Society, our members naturally appreciate native plants. With this knowledge we transform our lawns and gardens into wildscapes moving away from formal and structured designs with nonnative ornamental plants. However, all too often our NPSOT members find their HOA doesn't see this as a landscape in keeping with the community's deed restrictions and by-laws.

As a native plant advocate, you can unite with others in your community and help them understand the benefits that come from using native plants for landscaping.

**Partner with your HOA** Consider becoming a member of your community's board and work within the system. You might be able to convince the HOA to incorporate native plants in the common areas. The HOA would be more likely to allow native plants within the neighborhood, once they know the advantages.

- **Economical.** Everyone can benefit from decreasing the amount of money, time, utilities, and chemical products dedicated to maintaining non-native plants.
- **Resource Responsible.** Native plants are adapted to local growing conditions. Unless the existing soil was scraped away by a developer, the soil does not need to be amended. A quality compost is always welcomed.
- **Sustainable.** Once established, native plants will more easily survive our extreme weather conditions. Xeriscapes utilize native plants found in arid regions that get little rain or restricted irrigation. Rain gardens are effective for areas where drainage from a roof, driveway, or street is an issue. They are a cost-effective way to reduce runoff allowing the ground to soak up the rainfall. Since they drain in a matter of hours they prevent mosquitos from breeding. Less water usage saves money and resources.
- **Environmentally Friendly.** Native plants increase biodiversity, conserve natural resources like water, reduce chemical pollution, and slow stormwater run-off. When fertilizer is reduced, there is less harmful nitrogen and phosphorus run-off that adversely affects water quality. Removing pesticides from the equation allows for a natural balance in the web of life. The food chain depends heavily on insects. Birds feed their young caterpillars and other insects. Beneficial insects consume harmful insects as well. Native plants readily rebound from insect predation and don't need pesticides as nonnative plants might.
- **Less Pollution.** Reducing the exposure to pesticides and fertilizer runoff is healthier for everyone. Emissions from gas powered lawn equipment is likely to be reduced when turf grass is reduced or eliminated.

## Know the Law of the Land

- ★ The only species that have true legal protection are those listed as [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#) by the state or federal government (TPWD.texas.gov). There is probably little chance that any of those species would be found in your landscape. But we shouldn't wait until native plants do become threatened because of all the threats they face: climate change, habitat destruction, development, etc.
- ★ The Texas legislature unanimously passed the "xeriscaping law" in 2013 to assure that Texans living under HOAs can install drought-resistant landscaping or water-conserving turf. The 2013 statute has been codified at Texas Property Code section 202.007. <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/PR/htm/PR.202.htm>

- ★ At your local level, determine if your city is promoting **water-wise landscaping**. If so, share their guidelines with your HOA. Ask why your neighborhood shouldn't be doing its part to save water and reduce chemical use.

**Share your vision in pictures.** Let others see what you are talking about. Show photographs of how beautiful a native landscape can be with examples especially from areas nearby that have incorporated wildscaping.

**Connect the dots.** Pollinators need native plants! If you want to see more bees, butterflies, birds, dragonflies, and beneficial insects, give them what they want...native plants! Promote wildscape practices to bring nature home. Many native plants are vital as the host and nectar source for most insects. Bird watchers well understand that the insects on plants attract birds looking for the source of food to feed their young. Those that enjoy water sports and fishing may have experienced fertilizer runoff causing algae blooms that kill fish and other aquatic life. Nonnative aquatic plants have clogged waterways making them almost useless.

**Be proactive.** Now that your HOA sees the benefits of incorporating native plants, don't hope and wait for your Board to act; write the guidelines yourself. Make it easy for them to approve the changes in your deed restrictions rather than have them create new rules from scratch.

**Advocate within the lines.** Prevent misunderstandings by becoming aware of your community's bylaws and rules. It's a good idea to know if there are specific buttons that you can avoid pushing! Be aware if your HOA requires a **landscaping plan** to be submitted for approval before beginning work on your yard. Your HOA wants the reassurance that you will have a reasonable landscape design that can be maintained. Hand drawn plans may suffice. If not, there are readily available programs that will get the job done without having to spend a lot of money hiring a landscape architect. PowerPoint can be used to get idea across very well.

**Demonstrate!** That is to say, turn your yard into a **demonstration garden!** Many will appreciate what you are talking about when they can see and experience your home wildscape landscape.

**Spell it out.** Displaying a **yard sign** that explains the rationale for your native landscape helps to educate the community. You could identify your plants with [individual signs](#).

**Plant with purpose.** Of course, the first thing to include in your landscape is **native plants**. By definition, a native plant is a species that evolved

# Native Pollinator Garden



*Support wildlife. Plant natives.*

Native plants  
provide food and habitat  
for birds, butterflies, bees,  
and other wildlife.



*The Clear Lake Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas focuses on promoting the benefits of native plants. We continue to strive for a diversified membership, and we stand for inclusivity through education, outreach, and example.*

and occurs naturally, with no human intervention, in a particular ecoregion or environment. The Native Plant Society of Texas provides a [plant list by ecoregion](#).

Use a **variety** of plants to provide seasonal color and to attract an array of wildlife. Every season of your garden displays what is beneficial to the wildlife.

Your beds should look **intentional**. Attracting wildlife doesn't mean it should look wild and out of control. Border choices add to the aesthetics. Be mindful of aggressive growing plants as they require additional efforts to control.

Incorporate the **elements** of a wildscape landscape. Wildlife is attracted to the plants because of the **food** they provide. The plants themselves provide nectar, seeds, and leaves. The pollinators they attract are food for others in the web of life. Choose plant species that grow to variable heights to provide **cover and habitat** options for many creatures. A birdbath or small pond provides a source of **water**.

Keep the curb appeal high by maintaining a kept look. Dedicate a certain area away from direct viewing to keep dead limbs or snags on your property so wildlife has a place to hide and raise their young.

## **Busted! Now what?**

**Follow procedure.** Ignoring the HOA's communications and the standing rules of procedure is never advised. HOAs use the fees you pay to maintain legal representation. Legal counsel can be called upon to enforce the agreement you signed. If allowed to escalate you may find that individuals are a poor match when taking on a legal firm. Attorney fees add up quickly!

**Compromise.** Keep it real. If you know the rules and act contrary, expect a negative response. Compromise where reasonable. Once a violation has been issued, deal with it respectfully. Make the effort to understand what tripped the response. Determine what it will take to correct and avoid repeating the violation. If there is a fine, either pay it or go through the accepted appeal process.

## **Appeal Process**

**Be prepared.** This is an opportunity to **advocate** for native plants and **educate** your HOA and community. Help your neighbors to be good neighbors and good stewards like you. Reference the [NLCP Level 4, Stewardship of Native Plant Communities](#).

**Weeding Out Misunderstandings.** Clarify that there are NO "weeds" in your landscape. Provide a list of your native plants. Again, reference the many resources that identify these plants as natives and their benefits to your ecoregion. Actually, native plants suppress weed growth!

**Credibility.** Your certificates of competency from taking NPSOT's [Native Landscaping Certification Program \(NLCP\)](#) are worth noting. Having your yard certified gives credible weight to your efforts.

MonarchWatch.org has a process to register your yard as a Monarch Waystation. Be sure to register your habitat(s). [1. Monarch Watch](#) [2. Xerces Society Pollinator Habitat Yard](#) [3. Certified Wildlife Habitat® with the National Wildlife](#), and encourage others to follow in your footsteps!

**Resources.** Utilize NPSOT's list of [native plants in your region](#) to validate your choices. Other websites can be a resource to confirm the plant's beneficial aspects to local wildlife: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, USDA Plants Database, Texan by Nature, and so many more. Just search for Texas native plants. Some may have educational materials you can request and share.

**Bring it home.** The example of NPSOT member Faye Tess now of the Highland Lakes Chapter positively affected the whole of Texas. Through her efforts, we have an official [Texas Native Plant Week](#) to recognize the role of native plants in conservation and to provide incentive for schools to teach children about the importance of native plants. In 2009 the [Texas Legislature](#) designated the third week in October as Texas Native Plant Week. Celebrate Texas history from the success of a NPSOT member with activities in your area.

**Strength in numbers.** Create unity within your community with the purpose of benefiting your environment. A [Community Garden](#) is a great way to bring everyone together. Reach out to other conservation organizations in your area. Apply for NPSOT's [Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas](#) garden grant to support the project.

Together we can improve each community's ecoregion to be healthier and sustainable by utilizing native plants. You can signal to the uninitiated that you can have a wildlife habitat in your landscape while having it look intentional and managed. You can positively influence your community's laws and HOA's deed restrictions through education and example. [NPSOT](#) has the resources to help.

**Questions? Contact [state@npsot.org](mailto:state@npsot.org)**