


# Ecologically Friendly Maintenance for Native Plants




Monarch butterfly sipping nectar from Stiff Goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*).

The right kind of maintenance is important if you want to maximize the ecosystem benefits of your native plants. **As they grow, allow native plants to spread and fill in gaps to create a resource-rich habitat for birds, bees, and other wildlife.** For best results, practice these eight principles of ecologically friendly maintenance.




**Principle 1**  
**Do not use fungicides or insecticides.** These products kill “good” and “bad” fungi, insects, and soil microorganisms.




**Principle 2**  
**Limit herbicide use to weed control** and apply it carefully. Always follow label directions on herbicide products.



**Principle 3**  
**Give a hand to native plants by pulling weeds at least three times** during the growing season. For a new planting, you may need to weed more often.



**Principle 4**  
**Avoid fertilizers – native plants usually don’t need it.** If used, limit to natural fertilizers such as compost. Commercial products may contain harmful salts.



**Principle 5**  
**Conserve water by only watering new plantings.** In a year or two, healthy native plants will have strong roots and be able to tolerate periods of drought.



**Principle 6**  
**Choose the best weather, time of year, and right location for planting.** Follow the instructions from the native plant grower for sun exposure and soil type.



**Principle 7**  
**Provide soft landings under trees** to support one or more life stages of insects. Soft landings include keystone native plants, dead stalks, and leaf litter.



**Principle 8**  
**Practice “messy” gardening** by leaving at least some dead plant material in place to protect soil and provide habitat for native insects, birds, and other wildlife.



Shooting Star, *Dodecatheon meadia*

### A Word about Mulch

Adding mulch to a native planting may be useful in the first year to reduce erosion, deter weeds, and hold soil moisture. However, make sure to **use a natural mulch such as non-dyed wood mulch or leaf litter.**

Mulching plants **once at installation should be enough** because the plants will have less need as they grow and will produce their own mulch as they drop leaves at the end of the growing season.



Splashes of orange (Butterfly Milkweed) and spikes of purple (Blazingstar) dominate this native plant garden in mid-summer.

### Let the Flora Flourish

If site conditions are right, native plants will multiply vegetatively (by roots and stems) and by seed. Let this happen to maximize wildlife habitat and water quality benefits!