

Native Landscaping in Minnesota

Using Indigenous Plants from Local Growers

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Minnesota is lucky to have an abundance of nurseries, greenhouses, and garden centers run by people who are passionate about Minnesota Grown shrubs, trees, and flowers. Our [Directory](#) alone boasts 174 local suppliers!

Rob Woodworth of GrowHaus, a newly opened garden center specializing in plants native to Minnesota, shared his expertise on native landscapes and how you can use native plants in your landscape. For information on non-native landscaping and lawn care, visit the [University of Minnesota's Extension site](#).

Minnesota Grown (MG): Could you tell us how GrowHaus got started?

Rob Woodworth (RW): GrowHaus is the inevitable creation of 36 years of experience in the Northern Green Industry. Our founder, Heidi Heiland, has been designing, installing, and maintaining landscapes in the region since she was 17 years old. In 1979, we became an incorporated business and started to extend our reach into the community. For the last three decades, we (Heidi's Lifestyle Gardens) operated as a service-oriented firm—initially focusing on high-touch horticultural landscapes and then eventually transitioning into more regenerative projects like habitat restoration, edible/medicinal landscaping and horticultural therapy.



In 2014, we reached a turning point where we could no longer house all the plant materials needed for our installs and had to begin placing new clients on a waiting list. The natural solution seemed to be an infrastructural upgrade. We also recognized the ripe opportunity to create a destination for our brand—in fact, we had been talking about doing retail for years. We saw an unanswered need: a garden center that blends the themes of ecology, aesthetics and education. We wanted to create a place where homeowners and homesteaders alike could come to be inspired in renewing their connection to the Earth. So in 2015 we set out to write a business plan and start sowing the seeds that would eventually become GrowHaus.

In February of this year, we finalized the purchase of the former Lawn King Nursery and began renovating the grounds, greenhouses and retail space. In no more than two months, we were starting annuals and open for business. Our five-acre footprint is home to a large tree and shrub nursery as well as six greenhouses filled with unique annuals, edibles, herbs, natives, and perennials. In addition to premier plant materials, we offer landscaping materials like organic fertilizers, amendments, compost tea, mulch, soil, sod, and pavers. We also sell a wide variety of home and garden goods like seeds,

tools, containers, garden art, preservation supplies, books, and gifts. All of these products are complementary to the full-spectrum gardening and landscaping services provided by Heidi's Lifestyle Gardens, though they operate as separate entities. With our forces combined, we are capable of synergizing even the largest projects.

MG: What is GrowHaus' landscape philosophy?

RW: We exist to cultivate healthy connections between People and Planet. Founded with a vision to green the earth, GrowHaus is a destination for environmental solutions that beautify your home and align with your values. We offer our customers unique plants and products, educational opportunities, and sustainable services to empower their communities in leading the way towards living lightly on the land.



MG: What is the process of working with GrowHaus for consultation, design, and installation of a home landscape?

RW: The first step of the process would be setting up an on-site consultation with one of our three award-winning designers. This consultation is interactive and consists of walking through the area that needs attention. The designer will take notes as they discuss goals and visions with the client. Additionally, the designer can provide imagery of plants that we would recommend for the site in question. Better yet, our clients can now peruse our nursery with a designer to assist in generating a plant list to utilize for their project.



The next step is to create a base map design accompanied by a price estimate. Equipped with photos and detailed notes, our designer goes back to the office and generates a list of plants and materials needed to complete your project. Depending on client needs, there are two options for developing a base map. We can either create a quick bubble drawing of the project, or take some more time to develop a formal design that is drawn true to scale. Our scaled drawings include color, texture, and plant spacing and can even be rendered in a three-dimensional format.

Once we've reached a design that our client is happy with, we schedule time for our project crew to visit the site. Unless we're dealing with larger projects, our installation team can manage most landscape renovations in one day.

MG: Where are your plants sourced?

RW: Whenever possible, we prefer to grow our own plant material. Many of our annual edibles and herbs we start from seed. We also propagate perennials from cuttings and overwinter excess tubers to be used again in the spring. However, providing a wide variety of plants for our retail customers while also storing enough material for our landscaping division means that we must rely upon dedicated wholesale growers to supplement our plant stock.

Sourcing plant materials is a task we treat with very careful consideration. We consider it our duty to provide plants that are not only healthy and beautiful but also ecologically grown, responsibly shipped and appropriate to our climate. Over the years, we've partnered with a great team of local nurseries who we believe provide exceptional plant materials. Some of our preferred local nurseries for sourcing MN natives are Glacial Ridge, Outback, Landscape Alternatives, Prairie Restoration and MN Native Landscapes.



MG: How are native plants defined? What makes them different from using other non-native plants found in Minnesota garden centers?

RW: In their most simple definition, “natives” are plants indigenous to a given area in geologic time. More broadly, they are any plant that has developed, occurred naturally or existed for many years in a particular area. Typically, we think of native plants as hardy perennials with extensive root systems and persistent stems. Whether they are grasses, trees or flowers, natives are well-adapted to the climates and soils of the environments they call home and consequently are prolific growers that provide many ecosystem services.

It's not really our business to say which plants *belong* in your garden—if you're in love with subtropical flowers and obscure, out-of-zone annuals, then by all means, go for it. We're all for diversity. Though, introducing alien plants can start to have an adverse effect on our food webs. Instead, we can empower ourselves with indigenous wisdom when we pay attention to the patterns found in nature. Native plantings will provide a more vital ecosystem because the interrelated species in that environment are in-tune and balanced with one another.

MG: What are the benefits of landscaping with native plants?

RW: Because of their evolutionary adaptations, native plants offer far more benefits than non-natives. With proper site selection, native plants are self-sustaining once established and require very little maintenance. They don't require supplemental watering or feeding and thus save gardeners quite a bit of time and resources—not to mention the reduction of chemical runoff. When we look simply at the inputs required for growth, natives are a clear sustainable

choice.

Beyond sustainability, native plants have the capacity to be *regenerative* as well—that is, they contribute more to the system than they extract. Found naturally in our biome, native plants support local wildlife by providing food and habitat for beneficial insects, pollinators and native birds. Their deep, expansive roots hold soil to reduce erosion while absorbing and filtering storm water and before it enters our rivers and lakes. In short, natives are low-maintenance, zone-hardy, soil-building wildlife attractors that will come back year after year. What’s not to like?

MG: Do you have any tips for our readers who want to add native plants to their yards?

RW: Despite their relative ease, native gardens aren’t without quirks. One of the most common concerns with native landscapes is that they have a tendency to be what some might call “messy.” Unbridled growth is a natural result of using plants that excel in their selected environment. With careful planning and design you can avoid the unkempt look and build a beautiful garden that is both robust and well-balanced. Here are some tips to help you accomplish the native landscape you’ve been looking for:

Location: Your very first consideration should be the site you are working with. What is the soil type? How much sunlight does it receive? How much rain can it expect throughout the season? These questions will help you determine the right plants for the right place.



Structure: When designing a garden, it is prudent to think of year-round structure. For winter interest, we recommend utilizing native conifers, perennials with interesting bark or shrubs that will retain their color and berries throughout the cold months. Perennials can make a bold statement while also providing habitat throughout the year.

Guilds: In designing a native garden, it’s best to take notes from native landscapes. We hardly ever see monocultures in nature. Plants have differing shapes, sizes and root profiles to allow them to live in harmony. When selecting species for your native garden, think of plants that will fill different spaces and provide different functions—fruit/seed, blooms, nitrogen fixation, mineral accumulation, groundcover, etc.

Groupings: When installing your native garden, make sure to place plants in groupings—this doesn’t negate the benefits of plant guilds. Contrary to scattered plantings, clusters will appear more organized, will enhance the visual impact and also be more appealing to pollinators. Additionally, planting en masse will reduce installation time and allow for easier maintenance routines.

MG: How about lawns? Are there native grasses that are comparable to the typical turf lawn?

RW: Western culture has clung to the image of turf grass for too long. We equate a manicured lawn to a healthy landscape. This couldn't be farther from the truth. Typically, lawns are comprised of alien species that require excessive watering and fertilization without providing any food or habitat. In essence, non-native turf grass lawns are culturally sterile landscapes that do more harm than good, ecologically speaking. While there isn't a direct native replacement for the Kentucky Bluegrass that we're used to, there are promising options for those looking to create a healthy, productive lawn.



Buffalo grass is a low-growing, sod-forming grass that is native to the prairies of North America. It is very resilient and handles environmental pressures well. It can be mowed to resemble the traditional turf lawn but will only grow 4-6 inches in length if left untouched.

We've also had great success with implementing "low-mow" lawns using a mix of different groundcover species. Combining a variety of fescues with white dutch clover and prunella creates a great mix with which to over-seed your existing turf. This low-mow combination doesn't require as much water or maintenance and once established, will provide season-long blooms to feed pollinators and provide habitat. The mosaic of colors and textures is absolutely stunning.

We may have to "unlearn" what we've been taught about traditional turf lawns to appreciate a lawn that functions as an ecosystem, but the benefit will undoubtedly be worth it.

Thanks to Rob Woodworth and GrowHaus for sharing their expertise and pictures!

