

# Ecology Education Plots in Neglected Urban Spaces

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## SYNOPSIS

We are establishing long-term ecology education and student research plots in neglected spaces on our small campus. Our pilot plots will be in small dirt patches bounded by curbs in a parking lot. Currently, the plots are an eyesore and require unnecessary maintenance. We will use plants native to Indiana that can withstand the harsh conditions of that microclimate. Once the plots are established, they will provide opportunities to study ecological succession, sustainable gardening practices and various areas of botany, as well as provide opportunities for biological education in public areas. Eventually, we hope to see the project expand to include small gardens of herbs and vegetables to be used in our campus cafe.

## Five Attributes for a Parking Lot Plant

**Urban Tolerant:** the adjective used to describe a plant that does well if planted in urban areas such as busy sidewalks and streets where exposed to winter salting, noise, traffic and heat reflection.

**Salt Resistant:** Plants that are resistant to winter salting. Many plant species are sensitive if planted close to sidewalk or streets that are salted in the winter.

**Drought Resistant:** A prolonged shortage of rainfall which can be very dangerous to some plant species.

**Soil tolerant:** Able to survive in varying soil types

**Sun tolerant:** Can withstand large amounts of sun as well as heat.

## Ten Suggested Plants for Urban Landscape

(see images below)

- Black-eyed Susan *Rudbeckia hirta*
- Pale-Purple Coneflower *Echinacea pallida*
- Nodding Onion *Allium cernuum*
- Blue star willow *Amsonia a tabernaemontana*
- Butterfly weed *Asclepias tuberos*
- Autumn goldenrod *Solidago sphacelata*
- Hairy foxglove *Penstemon hirsutus*
- Big bluestem *Andropogon gerardii*
- Sideoats gramma *Bouteloua curtipendula*
- New Jersey Tea *Ceanothus americanus*

## Internet Resources

<http://www.wildflower.org>

<http://www.inpaws.org/native-plants/>

<http://www.fishers.in.us/documentcenter/view/480>

## Why Landscape with Native Plants?

Gardeners have a unique opportunity to address the biodiversity crisis. By adding even a few native plants to the landscape we:

- add to the resources that support wildlife
  - build landscape corridors in our communities to counter habitat fragmentation
  - help stormwater percolate safely into the soil rather than running superheated into rivers and streams
  - garden more sustainably, with less watering and fertilizing
  - create gardens that honor Indiana's rich natural heritage
- make gardening easier, because native plants are not finicky  
(<http://www.inpaws.org/landscaping/>)

