

Policy on the Use of Native Plants on Town-Owned Property

October 2023

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish minimum standards for the use of Native Plants on municipal properties in the Town of Ridgefield, CT. A **Native Plant** is defined hereinbelow.

The Town recognizes the necessity to maximize the use of Native Plants to protect and restore natural habitats in our area. **Non-native Plants** (defined hereinbelow) do not provide the same level of food and habitat that Native Plants provide to native fauna (i.e. insects, birds, and mammals). As development increasingly encroaches on land in the Town, native flora has been destroyed, often replaced by Non-native Plants. The uncontrolled proliferation of Non-native Plant species has become a significant ecological hazard, altering the structure and function of the Town's natural environment. Establishing a minimum standard to use Native Plants in Town-owned properties in Ridgefield, CT, is a critical first step to reverse this trend by providing an example of Native Plant alternatives to Non-Native Plants thereby improving ecosystem health and biodiversity. In furtherance of this policy, the Ridgefield Conservation Commission will take a leadership role to provide education regarding Native Plants and their benefit to the environment.

REQUIREMENT

Henceforth, subject to the Exceptions listed hereinbelow, all new plantings of trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials, and ground cover plantings and any replacement plantings, including but not limited to trees, shrubs, and perennials felled by storms, disease, redevelopment/expansion, or other reasons will solely incorporate Native Plants. The policy also applies to seeds used in place of plants.

Every effort must be made to use straight species of Native Plants from Ecoregion 59 (Level III).

Cultivars of Native Plants may be used on a case-by-case basis after consultation with the Ridgefield Tree Warden and with notice to the Ridgefield Conservation Commission.

To assist the municipal departments with their plantings, a list of exemplary Native Plants, sorted by use case, will be maintained by the Ridgefield Conservation Commission in consultation with the Tree Committee and will be updated and published on an annual basis.

To support the objective of using Native Plants on Town-owned property in Ridgefield, this policy also sets forth the town's aspiration to remove Non-native Plants that are also identified as **Invasive Plants** from Town properties over time. It also will encourage private landowners not to use Invasive Plants on their properties.

EXCEPTIONS

This policy does not apply to:

- Annuals, bulbs, corms, or plants grown for food, lawns (including athletic fields and golf courses), or green roofs, or other applications that have a clear reason to use Non-native Plants.
- Ballard Park in its entirety.
- Clusters of certain trees in East Ridge Middle School, Veterans Park School, Ridgefield Community Center, Richardson Park, and Ridgefield Recreation Center. A listing of these plants are on file with the Ridgefield Conservation Commission.

ENFORCEMENT

This policy shall be implemented, administered and Town departments will be held in compliance with it by the Office of the First Selectman.

DEFINITIONS

- A **cultivar** is a subspecies classification describing plant varieties that are produced through selective breeding.
- **Ecoregions** (or ecological regions) are areas where ecosystems (and the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources) are generally similar.
- **Invasive plants** are Non-native Plants listed on 1) the Connecticut Invasive Plant List, both invasive and potentially invasive, as determined by the Connecticut Invasive Plants Council in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes §22a-381a through §22a-381d; and 2) the New York State invasive plant list, as stipulated in 6 NYCRR Part 575.¹
- **Native plants** are those that existed in the Northeastern and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States prior to the arrival of European settlers.
- **Non-native Plants** are trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials, and ground cover plantings that are not Native Plants. (Many have been imported from Europe and/or Asia.)

¹ NY State invasive plants are included here given our recognition that any plantings in Ridgefield will inevitably spread beyond our town border into NY and vice versa.