

# The Benefits of Naturalizing The Golf Course Landscape

For many people, answering the question "Why Naturalize?" when posed by critical employees, committees, or neighbors can be an unsettling prospect. Successfully communicating the many benefits of a naturalization project can make or break support for establishing wildflower or prairie areas, naturalized pond or stream shorelines, and rougher golf course roughs. Here, we share our best answers to this most pressing question, as well as tips for planning habitat improvements and educating people about your stewardship efforts.

## The Environmental Benefits of Naturalization

- + Maintains a diversity of plants and animals.
- + Protects ecosystems and ecological communities.
- + Improves water quality.
- + Maintains the gene pool of particular plant and animal species, promoting hardiness, disease resistance, and adaptability.
- + Minimizes erosion.
- + Supports an aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty.
- + Creates positive, progressive, and constructive attitudes about the natural world.
- + Promotes stewardship of the environment and contributes to the conservation of local wildlife species.

## Additional Benefits of Lake And Pond Naturalization

- + Maintains the food chain for a variety of wildlife species.
- + Enhances "structural diversity" of plants along the pond margin. Plants of varying heights and types increase wildlife diversity.
- + Provides improved habitat for amphibians, such as salamanders and frogs, especially in ponds that do not contain fish.
- + Provides shelter for fish and freshwater invertebrates.
- + Supplies food for aquatic organisms.
- + Provides waterfowl and wading birds places to feed and rest.
- + Stabilizes shorelines and reduces erosion.
- + when combined with a designated "buffer zone" in which no chemicals are applied.
- + Improves water quality as plants take up excess nutrients and produce oxygen to aerate the water.

## Financial and Labor Savings

- + Lowers maintenance costs and reduces the need for high-intensity or time-consuming maintenance.
- + Reduces equipment wear and tear.
- + Reduces the need for gasoline, pesticides, fertilizers, and water.
- + Enables staff to concentrate where it really counts—highly visible areas or, for golf courses, the playing surfaces.

## Additional Benefits

- + Increases wildlife sightings.
- + Adds distinctive contrast and natural beauty to your landscape.
- + Provides places for nature study and enjoyment.

## Audubon International 2002

To find out more about the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses or request a membership application, call (518) 767-9051, extension 12 or email: [acss@audubonintl.org](mailto:acss@audubonintl.org) or visit [www.audubonintl.org](http://www.audubonintl.org)

## Tips for Naturalizing

1. Make a plan. Assess existing conditions, create a conceptual design, and outline your plan for establishing and maintaining the area.
2. Choose your location carefully. Be considerate of visual appeal, traffic patterns, and any neighbor concerns.
3. Inform people about your plans. This is especially important if the naturalization project will alter the view of nearby homeowners.
4. Select native plants that will thrive under the specific growing conditions of your site.
5. Prepare the site and mulch, water, and weed as needed during establishment. This will greatly increase the likelihood of successful naturalization.
6. Hang in there during grow in. Naturalized areas may need to mature for a season before looking great. Don't expect or promise immediate color or wildlife use.