

# Natural Landscaping Tips & Tricks

## **Planning Ahead!!**

- What is your objective? Aesthetics; windscreen; attract wildlife; replicate a natural area; reduce maintenance or pesticide use?
- LOOK at what you've got now. Diagram what you want to achieve.
- Identify wet areas, dry areas, sunny areas, shady, etc.
- If soil is compacted clay, consider tilling in compost or mulch.
- Choose plants which will FIT in your site when mature.
- Buy from reputable suppliers, i.e. those which grow from local sources and don't remove plants from the wild.
- Talk to your neighbors!

## **Designing Your Plantings**

- Think RANDOM!
- Use rounded or curved borders; avoid straight lines.
- Intermix groupings and scattered plantings.
- Place taller plants in back or against fencelines.
- Think of all seasons; choose things that bloom at different times, produce fruit at different times.
- Look at foliage colors and textures as well as flower colors.
- Add naturalistic hardscaping (boulders, driftwood, stumps) for visual interest
- Beware aggressive spreaders or self-seeders – native mints, sunflower species, and some grasses fall into this category.

## **Preparing Your Site**

- Remove existing vegetation from areas to be planted unless it is part of your plan to incorporate into new plantings. It's not always necessary to remove sod – you can cover with layers of wet newspaper and plants plugs directly into existing sod.
- Lightly till soil in planting beds to loosen and aerate.
- IF NECESSARY, add compost or mulch to condition soil - NO FERTILIZER!

## **Planting & Maintenance**

- Plant trees and shrubs in April, early May or in early fall; woodland wildflowers in April or early May; prairie plants in May or June; wetland plants in April or May.
- Water everything well and continue to water for first few weeks, if necessary
- Mulching with straw (or leaves for woodland plants) will cut down on competition from weeds and reduce drying of the soil.
- Young trees may need watering for a longer period if summer is hot and dry.
- After first year of establishment, most native plants need little care.
- If your community allows open burning, consider burning off dormant vegetation in late fall or early spring – most Illinois native plants thrive with fire.
- If you can't burn, mow or cut back dormant vegetation to expose soil surface to sunlight.
- ENJOY and SHOW OFF TO YOUR NEIGHBORS!!