

News Release

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service

For Immediate Release

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Benefits of Native Plants for Wildlife

Areas that are seeded to native plants provide quality wildlife habitat. Wildlife utilizes native plants for food and shelter. Grasses, forbs, legumes, and woody species compose a balance habitat.

Native grasses such as indiagrass, little bluestem, big bluestem, and paspalums provide both food and shelter for small animals and birds. Turkeys, quail, and prairie chicken feed on their plant parts and seeds. Grass plantings attract insects which provide a high protein source for turkey and quail chicks.



Indiagrass plants

These grasses grow in clumps, as opposed to bermudagrass which forms a mat over the soil and impedes animal movement. The clump growth pattern of these warm season grasses increases the amount of bare ground for dusting spots and travel lanes. Dusting spots are places where birds take a dust bath. Dust baths serve an important function for birds by reducing external parasites, such as mites, and calming skin irritations. Rabbits, dove, quail, turkeys, and various songbirds utilize warm season grasses for nesting cover. In winter, the dormant grass plants protect wildlife from winds and insulate them at ground level.



Maximilian sunflower

Deer browse on native forbs such as black eyed susan, coneflowers, ragweed, wild sunflowers, and goldenrod. This group of plants play an important part of wildlife food diets. These plants are browsed by deer in the spring, summer, and fall when acorns are not available. Butterfly species are also attracted to forbs for their plant nectar.

Some native legumes include butterfly pea, beggarweed, and lespedeza. Legumes along with forbs provide the majority of food eaten by wildlife. Legumes are high in protein and nutrients in their plant parts and seeds.

Native plants are adapted to their environment and growing conditions. Because they have adapted, native plants provide a diversity of food and cover for wildlife.

The USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service Plant Materials Centers around the United States study and develop native plants for wildlife habitat and conservation. For further information about wildlife habitat and the benefits of native plants, contact your local USDA/NRCS County Field Office at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/ or go to <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov> .

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