

Fall Into Native Planting

Start Today for Spring Blossoms

Native plants are not only a great way to add variety to your garden, but they also provide essential habitat and food to insects and birds that are adapted to our area. Native plants have adapted to Southern Ontario's soil and climate, so they are easy to maintain, drought-tolerant, and resistant to pests.

With urbanization and landscaping trends, many native plants have been lost, significantly damaging our local ecosystem. Plants that are ornamental, imported, or invasive often lack natural predators, choke out native plants, create monocultures, and fail to provide the appropriate food and habitat that the native insects and animals depend on. Planting native plants is a way to support your local ecosystem and to ensure the resilience of your local food supply.

In this guide, you'll learn the importance of fall gardening for native plants, how to choose plants that will thrive in your garden, and where you can find native seeds in Hamilton. I also provided some flower suggestions to get you started.

If you loved this small guide but still have questions, you can reach me at deanna@reconnecthamilton.ca

Happy Fall Gardening!



Deanna Hove
Regional Coordinator



WHY IS AUTUMN THE RIGHT TIME TO PLANT NATIVE SEEDS?

Planting native plants in autumn helps them get established, naturally! It's this time of year that flowers go to seed and drop their seed for new growth in the spring. By the time summer comes, the plants that were sowed in the fall will be established and more resilient to heat and other stressors. In fact, many native plants rely on the cold and damp they get from winter to trigger germination—a process called “Cold Stratification.”

In addition, planting seeds in autumn helps to avoid transplant shock as they are already adapted to the outdoor conditions.

DETERMINING YOUR SOIL TYPE

One of the best ways to guarantee your plants thrive is to plant things that grow well in the type of soil you have.

To see what kind of soil you have, there are a couple of tests you can try. One is to simply get your hands right in there! You'll be looking to see if your soil is sandy, clay, silt, or loam.

Sandy soil: Gritty, will fall through your hands easily, and won't be easily rolled into a ball.

Clay: Smooth and slippery when wet and can be rolled into a ball. If it is not as easily rolled into a ball, it may not be heavy clay.

Silt: Does not clump easily and has a bit of a soapy texture.

Loam: Well balanced with sandy soil, clay, and silt. There is also organic matter (decomposed plant and/or animal matter) present.

DETERMINING YOUR SOIL TYPE (Continued)

You can also do a mason jar test: fill a jar about one-third full with soil, add water until the jar is almost full, and add a tsp of dish soap. Shake the mixture and set it aside for 24 hours. The soil will form distinct layers: sand at the bottom, silt in the middle, and clay on top. You can measure the thickness of each layer to calculate the percentage of each layer to estimate your soil type using a [soil texture triangle](#).

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH NATIVE SEEDS WILL THRIVE IN MY BACKYARD?

In Hamilton, many areas are clay-heavy soil. Rather than fight it, the best way to have a thriving garden is to plant what grows best in the soil you have! The good news about clay soil is it has a lot of fertility. The trick is making that fertility available to a plant's roots as it is quite dense. This can entail adding organic matter to your soil (fallen leaves are great for this) or planting things that can withstand the compaction and create space at a root level for other plants.

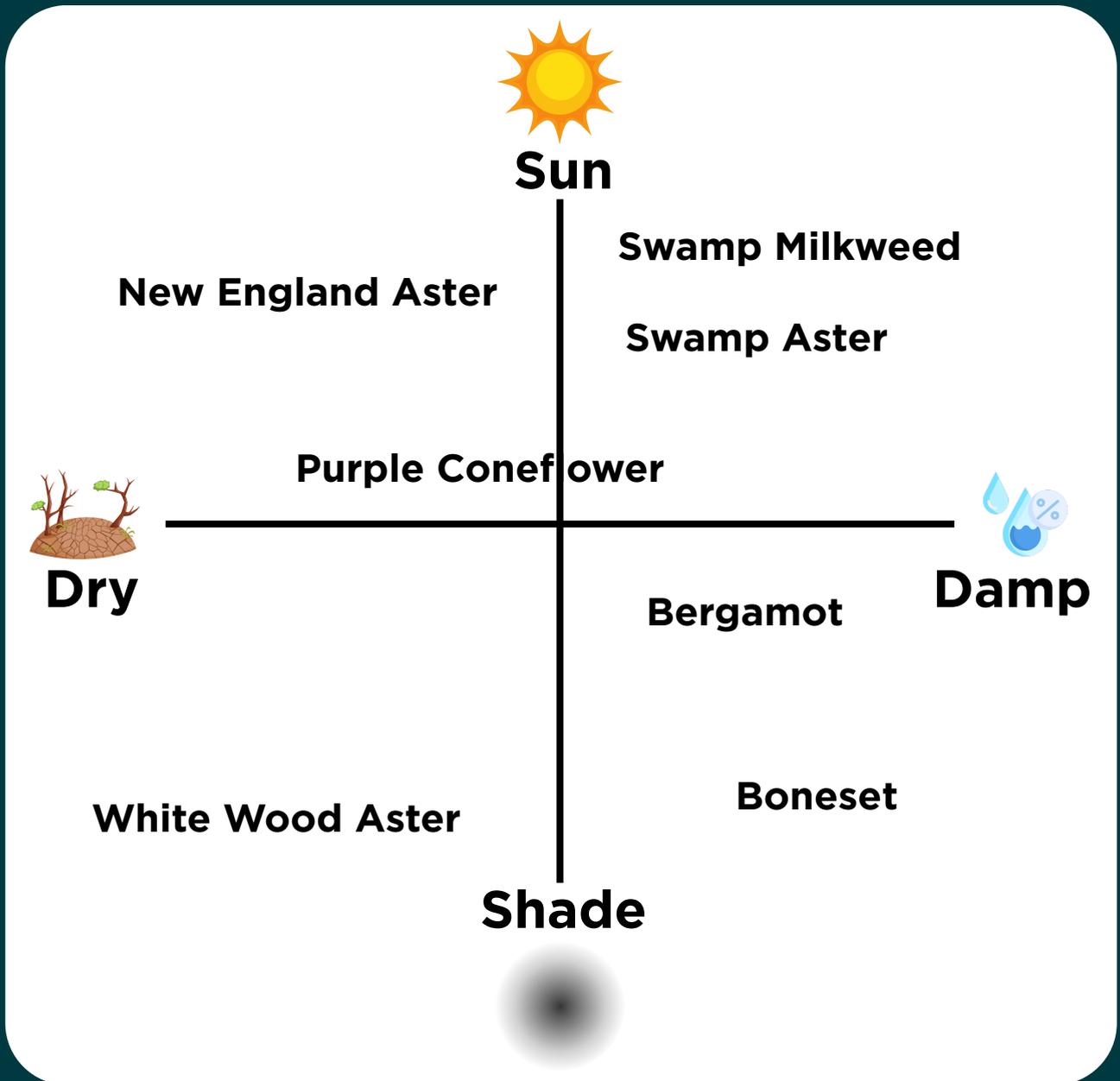
There are many options to choose from, but here are a few flowers to get started with—these are all on the easier end to germinate.

New England Aster - dry, sunny
Bergamot - damp, sun/part shade
Swamp Aster - damp, part sun
Swamp Milkweed - damp, sun
Coneflower - dry/medium, shade
Boneset - damp, shade
White Wood Aster - dry, shade

To see a more extensive list of what can thrive in clay soils, [take a look here!](#) If you have another soil type, you can look up what native plants will grow best in your garden.

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH NATIVE SEEDS WILL THRIVE IN MY BACKYARD? (Continued)

Here are some general guidelines you can use when planning your garden, based on the space you have available:



WHERE CAN I BUY NATIVE SEEDS?

When you're buying native plants or seeds, it's best to get them from a local supplier to make sure they are best suited to your area—a wildflower mix from another province might not be suited to where you live! Here are some local suppliers that you can check out:

- [A Local Seed Library](#)
- [Kayanase Greenhouse](#)
- [Ontario Native Plants](#)
- [City of Hamilton Tree Giveaway Program](#)
- [Bee Kissed Seeds](#)
- [Carolinian Canada](#)

FURTHER READING:

1. [Why Native Plants Matter](#)
2. [The Benefits of Fall Gardening and a Guide to Planting Native Species in the Autumn Months](#)
3. [Soil-Texture Jar Test](#)

