

10 Natives for the Kansas City Region

The following are 10 common species of plants, flowers and trees that grow well in the weather conditions of our region. The plants below are attractive and garden-worthy native plants that are recognized by Powell Gardens as Plants of Merit.



Bluestar

Amsonia tabernaemontana



Star-shaped, powdery-blue flowers that bloom in clusters in spring atop generally upright stems densely clothed with feathery, soft-textured, almost thread-like leaves. The unique foliage remains green throughout summer, but changes to gold in fall. Foliage clumps grow to 3 feet tall, with stems cascading as the season progresses. Mass or group for best foliage display. Easily grown in borders, open woodland areas and native plant gardens.



Blue False Indigo

Baptisa australis



Erect stalks of blue, lupine-like flowers cover this native perennial in spring. Flowers give way to inflated black seed capsules valued for use in dried arrangements. Plants become shrubby after bloom, displaying attractive, clover-like blue-green leaves. Early Americans used the plant as a substitute for true indigo in making blue dyes. Grow as a specimen or in groups in borders, or naturalize in cottage gardens, prairie areas, meadows or native plant gardens.



Willowleaf Sunflower

Helianthus salicifolius



Easily grown in average, medium-wet, well-drained soil in full sun. Tolerant of wide range of soil conditions. If grown in part shade, plants tend to be taller and more open, produce fewer flowers and require support. Spreads over time by creeping rhizomes to form dense colonies. Divide every 3–4 years to control invasiveness and maintain vigor.



Smooth Hydrangea

Hydrangea arborescens



Flattened clusters of dull white flowers appear in early summer on this native shrub. Prompt removal of spent flower heads may promote a late summer rebloom. Oval, serrate, dark green leaves are attractive throughout the growing season. Best form in formal garden areas may be achieved by cutting back stems each year to 12 inches in late winter. If cut back, this shrub will still grow to 3–5 feet tall in a single season. Perhaps best naturalized in native plant or woodland gardens.



Spicebush

Lindera benzoin



A tough, broad, rounded native shrub that grows 6–12 feet tall. This is an attractive selection for shrub borders, open woodland gardens or along stream/pond edges. Fragrant, yellow flowers bloom along the branches in early spring before the foliage emerges. Female plants produce bright red berries in autumn. Light green leaves turn yellow in autumn. Leaves are spicily aromatic when crushed.



Cardinal Flower

Lobelia cardinalis



This native is noted for its intense red flowers, late summer bloom and ability to thrive in moist, shady locations. Densely packed two-lipped cardinal red flowers bloom in erect flowering spikes typically growing 2–4 feet tall from July to September. Good for open shady border areas, wildflower gardens, shade/woodland gardens or stream/pond margins. Flowers are attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds.



Ninebark

Physocarpus opulifolius



This tough, thicket-forming native deciduous shrub grows 5–8 feet tall with gracefully arching branches. Year-round ornamental features include spirea-like clusters of pinkish to white flowers in spring; lobed dark green leaves in summer and inflated capsule-like fruits that mature in autumn. The exfoliating reddish-brown bark, for which this plant is named, is best observed after leaf drop and throughout winter. Good for shrub borders, open woodland areas and naturalized areas.



Fringe Tree

Chionanthus virginicus



This native fringe tree is named for its outstanding airy clusters of slightly fragrant spring flowers with fringe-like, drooping, creamy white petals. Flower petals flutter gracefully in just a hint of breeze. It typically grows as a large shrub or small tree to 12–20 feet tall. Birds delight in the grape-like fruit which matures in late summer. Its wide spear-shaped leaves turn an attractive yellow in autumn. An excellent specimen plant.



Christmas Fern

Polystichum acrostichoides



The fronds are green at Christmas and each individual leaflet suggests the shape of a Christmas stocking. This native evergreen fern forms a distinctive fountain-like clump of leathery, lance-shaped fronds. Clumps typically grow to 2 feet tall and slowly spread by rhizomes to provide excellent evergreen color for shaded garden areas.



Sourgum

Nyssa sylvatica



Although native to lowlands, this stately tree does exceedingly well as a residential landscape shade tree. It matures to 30–50 feet tall with a straight deeply textured trunk and rounded crown. Handsome dark green summer foliage gives way to spectacular orange-scarlet-purple fall color. Female trees produce dark-blue oval fruits that are quite attractive to birds and wildlife. Performs well in moist low spots.

Photos courtesy of Missouri Botanical Gardens
PlantFinder/PlantsOfMerit

Each of these plant species should be readily available at your local lawn and garden store or nursery. For more information about native landscaping in the Kansas City region, please visit www.grownative.org or www.plantsofmerit.org. For information about how landscaping with natives can help improve water quality, please visit www.marc.org/Environment/Water.



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