



# Communication Toolkit for Louisiana Native Gardeners



## DOES YOUR YARD STAND OUT?

Neighbors who maintain close-cropped lawns and use chemicals to control weeds and pests may not understand why you've chosen to take a different approach. When neighbors and others are unaware of native gardening practices, they may incorrectly label habitat conservation efforts as neglect.

## BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR...

Established rules help guide us in having a happy place to live, so that we can enjoy our neighborhood together. You may apply ecological rules to your gardening practices, but as a good neighbor, you'll also want to subscribe to community-established expectations. There are usually avenues to be involved if you think they need updating.

First, do your due diligence by making sure you abide by local rules. When you can check the box below, conversations with neighbors should have the support of local leadership.

"I've checked local ordinances and know that I am within the required regulations."

## Louisiana Native Gardens Benefit Wildlife and Bring People Together



Sharing the joys of native gardening with neighbors can create lasting relationships with nature and each other

Exposure to nature contributes to positive mental health. Happy wildlife means happy people.

Birds and insects rely on dried leaves and twigs for wintering nest material.

Mowing less frequently helps pollinators and saves people time and fuel.

Native gardens that follow local ordinances avoid conflict and are beautiful.

Bird parents feed thousands of caterpillars to their young. Native gardens mean caterpillar gardens.

Native plants can thrive without harmful chemicals, avoiding the risk of exposure to pets and children playing outside.

Habitat ponds create natural pest control when frogs and insects eat other insects.

The roots of native plants have adapted to climatic changes over millennia, which means less watering during droughts.

# FINDING COMMON GROUND

Neighborhoods are all about relationships, and sometimes it takes effort to cultivate good ones. Although we might know how to effectively communicate, it's easy to lose sight of our goals in the moment. Before you resort to a defensive or passive-aggressive strategy, try some of the tips below to enhance your relationships with neighbors.



## Be Curious

Ask questions, and actually listen to the responses! By developing a genuine curiosity in your neighbor's interests and lifestyle, you'll quickly build mutual trust and respect.

- "I notice you've been working on \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me more about that project!"
- "I think native plants can be very beautiful. Do you have a favorite one?"



## Avoid Assumptions

It is easy to jump to conclusions about why your neighbor said what they said, but it's better to first ask clarifying questions to gain a better understanding of their intention.

- "Can you tell me more about your reactions to my native garden?"
- "I want to share my intentions for a natural habitat. Can we chat sometime soon?"



## Put Your Ego on Hold

Speak as an equal attempting to share knowledge as opposed to a superior with the only way of doing things. Your neighbor's preference for a manicured lawn is perhaps just as strong as your preference for a native one.

- "I like that I spend less time mowing and more time on \_\_\_\_\_. Can I show you?"
- "I choose plants that provide cover and food for birds, butterflies and other wildlife."



## Stay Positive

Criticism can cause defensiveness, which shuts everyone down and prevents active listening. If you find yourself in this situation, propose a time-out and continue the conversation when you've cooled off.

- "I care about this garden because \_\_\_\_\_, and I'd love your support."
- "I think we've reached a stand-still for now. Can we come back to this conversation?"



## Request Feedback

A simple "Did I hear that right?" can show that you are actively listening. Avoid information overload by being aware of cues that your neighbor has lost interest.

- "I hear that you don't like my garden's \_\_\_\_\_. I wonder if we can find a middle ground."
- "I'd love to show you around the garden. I especially love the \_\_\_\_\_ this time of year."



## Recognize Shared Goals

A common direction, such as a peaceful, beautiful neighborhood, can focus future interactions and be a guidepost when disagreements about your garden arise.

- "I want fewer mosquitos and to avoid using chemicals whenever possible. Do you agree?"
- "I bet we both work on projects that enhance the beauty and function of our properties."

