



Natives for Reclamation of Oil & Gas Sites

Ernst Conservation Seeds has long recognized the importance of developing regionally appropriate (ecotypic) native seed for the most ecologically sound application. While the general use of native forbs, grasses and shrubs is paramount in the development of today's responsible landscapes, ecotypic native seed selection ensures optimum benefit by placing back into the environment species whose genetics have adapted to the specific climate and soil type of their respective regions. They also serve to protect the biodiversity and ecological heritage of their region. Following are some common examples of landscapes in which natives have a home on Long Island.

The Long Island Native Plant Initiative (LINPI), in collaboration with Ernst Conservation Seeds, has developed commercial production of the four major native, warm season grasses; i.e., Indiangrass, Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem and Switchgrass, with Long Island ecotypes. LINPI has worked arduously to establish sufficient foundation seed that Ernst Conservation Seeds has produced in marketable quantities. These grasses, in conjunction with regionally produced forbs, are fundamental in native landscapes.

Pollinator habitats help to increase both native bee populations and diversity by providing food and nectar when the economic crop is not already in bloom. Pollinator habitats are generally composed of a variety of native wildflowers and, sometimes, native grasses. A well-designed pollinator habitat will have at least two species in bloom that provide a food source for the majority of the growing season. Nesting areas are also an important consideration when developing a seed mix. Seed mixes should be formulated to suit a site's particular environmental conditions, such as having tolerance to moist soils or shade. The best habitats for native pollinators are provided by plants native to the ecosystem from which they come.

Early successional habitat is typically characterized by the presence of grasses and forbs, as well as the establishment of shrubs and brambles. One of the essential components of early successional habitat for many wildlife species is native warm-season grasses. This type of structure and cover is essential for a variety of wildlife species. Residential and commercial development, as well natural succession to forest are frequent causes of decline in this habitat. This decline negatively affects wildlife dependent upon this type of structure and cover. Common wildlife species that use early successional habitat include eastern cottontail, wild turkey, northern bobwhite, white-tailed deer, bobolink, eastern meadowlark, various sparrows, wrens and even raptors.

Sustainable landscapes range from small, private projects designed by concerned homeowners, to large scale SITES, LID or LEED certified projects involving multiple municipal and commercial concerns. At their heart, sustainable landscapes share certain features, some of which are the reduction of storm water run-off swales, rain gardens and green roofs and walls; reduction of water use through water-wise garden designs; bio-filtering of wastes through constructed wetlands; creation of wildlife habitat in urban areas and energy-efficient landscape design via shade trees and creation of wind breaks. Using natives on these sites only makes sense, as they require less frequent watering, need little or no fertilizers or pest control, reduce levels of carbon and other chemicals and provide a needed habitat for pollinators, upland wildlife and songbirds.

