

# Native Plants

## Native Plants

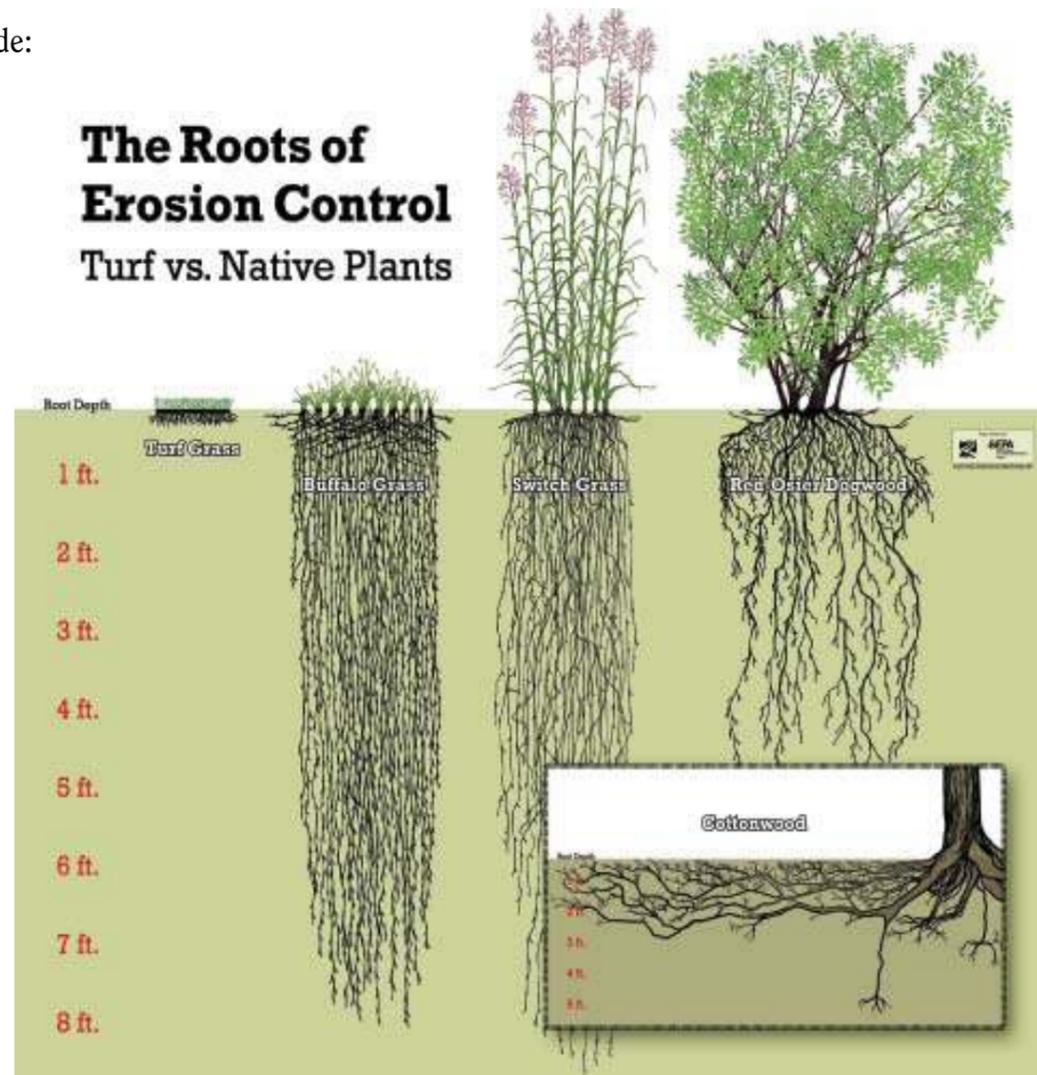
Native plants are plants that have evolved over thousands of years in a particular region. They have adapted to the geography, hydrology, and climate of that region. Native plants occur in communities which means they have evolved together with other plants. In the Red River Valley, plants are generally referred to as native if they were here before the arrival of European settlers. In this area, native plants evolved under a wide variety of conditions including heat, cold, drought, insects, floods, snow and sometimes even grazing by bison.

## Benefits of Native Plants

There are many reasons to use native plants. Some of them include:

- Native plants have deeper root structures which protect the streambank from erosion.
- Native plants can filter out sediments and pollutants before they reach our waterways.
- Native plants may reduce flooding by slowing runoff
- Native plant landscapes are naturally resistant to pests and disease which reduces the need for pesticides or fertilizers making the turf healthier for people and pets and increases water quality.
- Native plant landscapes need less water which saves money and resources.
- Native plants require less maintenance once established which reduces time spent mowing, raking, watering, and using gasoline-powered equipment.
- Native plants provide the best food and habitat for native wildlife which increases opportunities for wildlife viewing.
- Native plants survive better than many ornamental plants.
- Native plants reduce problems with weed species.
- Native plants provide a true upper Midwest aesthetic.
- Native plants prevent the establishment and spread of exotics (non-native plants).
- Native plants can provide an attractive year-round landscape.

Some of the plants that we now find in the valley are illustrated in the graphic on the wall of the Info Center. Notice the difference in the size of the roots. Compare the size of the turf grass roots to the other plants. If you were going to use plant roots to help bind and hold soil, which plant would you not use? Yet, along the banks of the Red River, one of the most commonly found plants is blue grass which is a type of turf grass. A major problem with the banks of the Red River is erosion and slumping caused or exaggerated by the removal of native plants which had root structures that helped hold the soil in place.



## Establishing Native Plants

Develop a plan based upon research—Trying to grow any plant, especially natives, will not be successful if soil type, sun exposure and drainage conditions are incorrect.

Check local government regulations before starting—Local weed ordinances or mowing requirements may conflict with your plans.

Proper ground preparation—Use competent advice on weed control techniques before planting natives. Mowing, hand pulling and selective use of herbicides may be effective techniques.

Management—Low maintenance does not mean no maintenance. Depending upon the plants, have a plan in place for weed control, deer damage, controlled burns and mowing.

Patience—Establishment of a viable native plant site takes time, usually many years.