



## Neighborhood Friendly Landscapes

### *Avoiding Weed Wars: Strategies for Success*



As water quality and habitat loss become more compelling issues, people are being drawn to the idea of a more natural approach to landscaping. Natural or naturalistic landscapes, also referred to as habitat gardens, have recently been met with resistance, mainly as a result of miscommunication and misinformation. Despite good intentions, conflicts within a neighborhood, with cities, or homeowner associations may occur, but need not be inevitable.

Naturalistic landscapes can take many forms—from the rather wild and unkempt to a more traditional, more manicured design. What is important, however, is being mindful of the ordinances, deed restrictions, laws or policies of the location in which the landscape exists or will be created.

Laws are changing; cities and homeowner associations are beginning to be more sensitive to environmental issues, but many still rely on outdated concepts and laws. Use legal recourse as a last resort. Choosing an antagonistic approach is not the best way to win support or approval, but promoting a spirit of cooperation and good will is.



Following are some ideas for implementing strategies that foster communication and education and can help avoid confrontation before, during, and after the installation of the natural landscape.

### **Be Proactive**

Understand landscape ordinances and deed restrictions before you begin. Before creating the naturalistic landscape, read copies of local landscape ordinances or deed restriction and become familiar with the process of applying for a variance or permit should these be necessary.



These are readily available from city parks department, homeowner association offices or property management company offices. Also, understand the appeal process as well. Sometimes this may be as simple as a phone call.

Learn about “natural” landscapes both by definition and function.

Being able to communicate what is or will be accomplished with the landscape will help to explain the “why” questions. This will also provide an excellent opportunity to win support and possible converts.

Find opportunities to inform others by word and example.

Participate at homeowner association or community association meetings, welcome questions from neighbors and create a landscape that others will want to use as an example.



## Tips

- **Make a gradual change.**  
This could be as simple as including some well placed native plants in the border.
- **Communicate with neighbors.**  
Let them know what the plans will be and keep dialogue positive. Welcoming neighborhood children to hear information about the landscape can generate excitement that will be transmitted to the adults.
- **Create borders or setbacks.**  
A neat and tidy edge will create the appearance of order, even if it’s ordered chaos! A setback will also prevent plant material from hanging over curbs and sidewalks.
- **Practice tolerance.**  
Recognize and acknowledge neighbors’ choice in plant material.

- **Think “plant communities”.**  
Choosing a variety of plants found in naturally occurring areas such as wetlands or shaded forest and incorporating them in groups create planting zones with the same light and moisture requirements.
- **Plant in masses for visual impact.**  
Native plants are sometimes not as showy as traditional landscape plants. Planting them in masses offers eye-catching interest.
- **Add structural interest.**  
Including garden structures, bird baths or even sculpture will add a personal signature to the landscape.
- **PRACTICE PROPER MAINTENANCE** Above all follow good maintenance practices. Allowing the natural landscape to have a “vacant lot” look will not create a climate of understanding or acceptance.

Keep in mind that the ultimate goal whenever choosing to have a natural landscape area. By setting an example through good communication, information and proper maintenance practices, “weed wars” can be avoided.

## Resources

- **Landscaping with Native Plants**  
(4<sup>th</sup> Edition) 2004  
[www.epa.gov/greenacres](http://www.epa.gov/greenacres)
- **The Landscaping Revolution**  
Wasowski, Andy. 2000. Chicago, Illinois: Contemporary Books



*Texas NEMO is an educational program of Texas A&M University, Texas Sea Grant and the Texas AgriLife Extension service, and is an official partner of the National NEMO Network. In addition to support from TAMU, NEMO is funded by grants from the EPA, TCEQ and GBEP. PREPARED IN COOPERATION WITH the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The preparation of this document was financed through grants from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality*