



**NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE  
FEDERATION**

**SACRED  
GROUNDS®**

# Sacred Grounds Toolkit Engaging Your Congregation

APPENDIX



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## A. Community-Based Social Marketing: From Awareness to Action

Sacred Grounds is designed using principles of community-based social marketing to enable you to help your congregants go beyond learning about the importance of native plants to taking action by planting native plants. Learn more from [Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing](#) by Doug McKenzie-Mohr and four key elements based on [RARE: Levers of Behavior Change](#).

This program employs educational events to use the four levers of behavior change:

1. Activate the **lever of information**;
2. Faith-based messaging to activate **the lever of emotional appeals**;
3. Use of a pledge, Native Plant Pick-Up Day and free Native Plant Starter Kit to employ **choice architecture**; and
4. Volunteer leadership of the Sacred Grounds Team to **activate social influence**.

The tactics and messages described in this toolkit are based on the four levers of behavior change and informed by what National Wildlife Federation has learned by conducting focus groups with congregants. Your congregants may have similar or different ideas about the benefits of planting native plants and the barriers that they think they will encounter. Think about what participants told you in your focus groups and how you can target your tactics and messages to their interests and concerns.

### Choice Architecture: How Can You Make It Easier for Your Congregants to Plant Native Plants?

Congregants have told us that they know little about native plants, so they need specific information about where to get them and how to select the right plants for their conditions. Some congregants are worried about digging and planting the plants on their own or about the survival of the plants because deer and rabbits may eat them.

Choice architecture is changing the context to eliminate barriers and make it easy to participate. Simplify message and decisions by streamlining or providing shortcuts, provide support in planning, use commitments to bind future decisions. This Sacred Grounds program provides two things including the pledge form and the free plants on Planting Hope: Plant Pick-Up Day. Consider ideas such as delivering plants, a plant sale, having a volunteer go to congregant's yard to advise, having young people help elders with planting, make a video about how to plant.

**Messaging:** Reinforce “We’re making it easy for you” by providing tips, giving examples of what others have done, showing with a photo of what local native plants looks like, etc.



## Information: How Can You Share Information Congregants Need in Ways That Make It Come Alive?

Information can motivate people to act, but it is important to provide just enough information so that people are not overwhelmed. We have learned that congregants think of gardening only as planting vegetables and trees, not flowers or ground cover. They don't know what plants in their garden are natives. They don't know much about local streams and where water goes from their yard and neighborhood, and they don't know that native plants can improve water quality and reduce stormwater runoff.

It is helpful to explain why planting native plants is important and to offer step-by-step instructions. Sacred Grounds recommends providing information in exciting, engaging formats such as a garden tour. You can also put up a map of the area and ask each congregant to put in a pin for their home, visit a local stream, set up a gardening chat group, and invite congregants to send in photos of plants in their yards to be identified by a volunteer.

**Messaging:** Provide information about what's native and about the connection between planting natives and water quality (mention impact on fish, frogs, and children who play nearby). Give specific examples of local streams congregants are familiar with, provide information about water quality (sound bites, not too much), and show how streams are connected through the watershed (don't assume people know what a watershed is).

## Emotional & Spiritual Appeals: How Will You Tap into Emotions and Connect Them to Planting Native Plants?

People take action because they feel moved to do so, not because of information. In focus groups, congregants talked about a variety of feelings: love and gratitude for nature; peace and calm when in nature; love for parents and grandparents who taught them to garden; concern about children exposed to pollution; pride in practicing their faith; and concern for justice and equity.

You can tap into these emotions to motivate congregants to plant native plants by putting a human face on your publicity by sharing stories of congregants who plant native plants or who are inspired by a grandparent. You can take congregants on a spiritual nature walk, encourage them to dedicate plants to people they love, and say a prayer when planting native plants.

**Messaging:** Associate planting native plants with love by showing how caring for wildlife and local water bodies is something we are doing to take care of each other and care for our neighbors. Show intergenerational groups planting together and highlight messages about "who I'm planting this for"—my kids, my parents, my neighbors downstream—with a quote and a photo.

## Social Influence: How Will You Activate Peer Influence by Making Your Enthusiasm and Actions Visible?

People look to the behavior, beliefs, and expectations of others for what they should do. This is certainly true for congregants, who express in focus groups that doing things as a community is important to them. You can leverage the power of peer influence by making the participation of your congregants visible to each other. The message is "look around and see we are all doing it!"

When one congregant calls another on the phone to invite them to get involved, they are making their own participation visible. Other ways to make participation visible are to highlight a congregant's native plant



garden with a photo and caption in your newsletter. Put up a “thermometer” in the lobby or on the website graphing how many people have pledged. Ask all who are participating to stand and be recognized during worship service. Ask congregants to speak during worship service.

**Messaging:** Emphasize the role of Sacred Grounds Team members in your communications because you are peers of congregants. Whenever possible, use photos of members of the congregation and tell their stories in communications.

## Faith-Based Messages

Tips for using faith-based messages:

- Think about choosing one faith teaching that resonates with your community and using it consistently as a theme or “slogan”.
- Be sensitive to adjusting the sample language to your community. Which terms do you want to use - “creation,” “God,” “nature,” or “Earth?”
- Ask clergy to reinforce your message by mentioning the program and incorporating the theme of native plants and protecting water into sermons and educational opportunities.
- Consult with clergy about how to incorporate these messages below into your communication.

All of the faith-based messages we tried out in the focus groups resonated with some people and not with others. Understanding why different people liked the 5 different messages gives some insight into how to use these messages.

### **You can heal God’s creation right in your own yard by planting native plants.**

People liked this one because it was personal - it resonated with those who wanted to know what they could personally do where they have control, in their own yard. The pitfall here is that some people feel that doing something in their own yard is too little to make a difference, so it is important to include information about how many people are participating so that they realize their impact will add up to much more.

### **Native plants support wildlife, so when you plant them, you are caring for creation.**

There are a lot of people who love wildlife and are excited about birds, butterflies and pollinating bees coming to their yard. Give these people ways to share their excitement and it will influence others.

### **Love your neighbors! Planting native plants protects people downstream from pollution.**

If you are trying to reach people involved in social justice activities, this is a message to use. However, keep in mind that many people won’t understand what “protecting people downstream from pollution” means. You will need to explain further, such as “native plants hold soil that filters out pollution before it enters streams. That means that a stream that flows through your community, and then through another one, will be clean, safe, and less likely to flood.” Be concrete and specific by naming the communities downstream, who lives there, and how pollution and flooding impact these communities.



**By planting native plants, people of all faiths can work together to care for the Earth that we share.**

A lot of people like the idea of collaborating with people of other faiths to care for Earth and they are interested in doing something together. Consider collaborating with a congregation of another faith. Pope Francis calls this “our common home”.

**Planting native plants protects God’s creation for our children and future generations.**

This message appeals to people who feel a sense of responsibility for the future, such as parents and grandparents. This is time tested and works especially well with images of young children.

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You may be able to slip all these messages in at different times. For example, when you talk about how acting together is impactful, you can say "each of us can take care of our little corner of creation and that adds up." With wildlife, you can say something like, "we can demonstrate our appreciation for the miraculous diversity of the creatures on this planet by making sure birds and butterflies have the food they need." And when you talk about streams, you can say something like, "loving our neighbors requires doing what we can to protect them from pollution and flooding."



Good Shepard Lutheran Church



## B. Focus Group Materials (tied to Discovery Phase)

### Sample Invitation to Focus Group Discussion

Dear PERSONAL NAME,

Do you love living or worshipping near (include a nearby river or local park or other natural feature/area)? Do you ever wonder about what you can do to help conserve our local environment? What do you think FAITH has to do with caring for nature? **As a member of NAME OF CONGREGATION, your views are important to us.**

Our congregation has chosen to join Sacred Grounds, an effort to care for creation in cooperation with (add if relevant: in cooperation with several other congregations in our area and) the National Wildlife Federation (add in other local partners).

Before we begin, we need to get a better understanding of our members. We have questions about how you make decisions about caring for your yard, how you relate to nearby creeks and rivers, and how you think our congregation can best inspire your participation.

**You are invited to join a focus group discussion to share your views on these questions.** This confidential conversation will be held online and facilitated by (trained volunteer, or a consultant).

**Please click here to register** for a focus group. Please indicate all the times that you are available to participate. We would appreciate a response by DATE.

Your views will help our team of volunteers to shape this program so that it works for you and NAME OF CONGREGATION. Thank you!

NAMES OF TEAM MEMBERS

### Sample Reminder Note

Subject: NAME, did you miss this?

Dear NAME:

Can you help NAME OF CONGREGATION by participating in a focus group discussion? This should be really interesting, and we would really appreciate your help. Please see below and register online by DATE.

Thanks! NAME [include the previous message]





## Sample Confirmation Note



Subject: Confirming your focus group discussion

Dear NAME,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the NAME OF CONGREGATION focus group discussion about Sacred Grounds.

This is to confirm that you will participate in the focus group on DAY, DATE, TIME.

Please click on this zoom link to participate: ZOOM LINK

The focus group discussion is scheduled to last for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

If for any reason you find you are unable to attend, please let me know so that we can invite another participant.

Again, thank you in advance for stepping up to help our team to plan this effort.

## Sacred Grounds Focus Group Questioning Route

**Subject of the Focus Group:** Barriers and benefits of planting native plants in your yard

**Purpose of the Focus Group:** To inform the development of congregation's outreach campaign to own members about participating in Sacred Grounds.

**Audience:** The results of this focus group will be used by the Congregation Green /Sacred Grounds Team which will be developing their own outreach campaign

**Evaluation Questions** (what we are looking to learn, not what we will ask):

- What barriers and benefits do congregants perceive about gardening?
- What barriers and benefits do congregants perceive about planting native plants in their yard?
- What do congregants value about our local water bodies (replace with other natural features)?
- What religious messages might motivate congregants to plant native plants?
- What do congregants take away from the WHY plant native plants presentation (if already hosted)?





## Focus Group Template Outline

Thank you for participating in this focus group. The purpose is to help CONGREGATION with Sacred Grounds, a project of the National Wildlife Federation. The program includes opportunities like todays to learn about why native plants are important and how to plant them. There will also be a presentation later this year about HOW to garden with native plants. I appreciate your patience while I go over some information about what we'll be doing here.

Your congregation wants to get a better understanding of your views before getting started. We won't answer all your questions now because the goal is to hear from you, but I'll provide a link for more information.

I hope you will feel free to say whatever you think. So that you'll be comfortable I'll explain what I'll be doing with your feedback. I'll be combining what you say with what I hear in the other focus groups and reporting the themes back to the Sacred Grounds Team.

With your permission I'd like to record this discussion just for me and my colleague to review. We won't be sharing the recording with anyone else. Is that ok? [TURN ON RECORDING]

Finally, we want to hear from everyone and get a diversity of views. So, I ask your forgiveness in advance – I may need to ask you to shorten your comments in order to move on. It's nothing personal! We'll end promptly by \_\_\_\_\_. (75 minutes)

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*Opening question is an easy factual one to make participants comfortable and give everyone a chance to speak:*

**1. First let's introduce ourselves. We'll go around and I'd like each of you to tell us your name and the last activity you participated in at CONGREGATION. It could be any kind of activity associated with your congregation.**

*Introductory question to get congregants focused on the topic and talking:*

**2. Now let's get into the topic. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word "gardening"?**

(MAKE NOTE, do they have a yard)

*Transition question to get congregants to go into more depth:*

**3. Think back to the last time you planted something. What was it? Where did you plant it? How did it go?**

- We know gardening can be challenging. What really happened?



*Key questions (limited to 3-5, with follow-up prompts to use if time permits:*

**4. My next question is going to be about what you think about planting native plants in your yard. To get us all on the same page, I'm going to give you a quick definition of native plants. Native plants are essentially indigenous to an area and adapted to local soils and weather which makes them easy to maintain. They provide essential food for native wildlife like butterflies and birds. They hold soil in place and filter pollution that would otherwise flow into streams and harm fish and frogs. Just a few examples of native plants are Goldenrod, Asters, Sunflowers, and Black-eyed Susans.**

**Now that I've described them, what do you think about planting native plants in your yard?**

- Do you have any natives in your yard?
- What questions do you have based on the description I just gave?
- What appeals to you about planting native plants? What concerns do you have?
- What do you hear from neighbors and friends about native plants?
- Native plants are easy to maintain, how does that sound to you?

**I'd like to ask you about a second step you can take after planting some native plants in your yard. That is to replace some grass/lawn with native plants. What do you think about that?**

**5. One of the goals of the program is to protect [local streams or other natural features]. Think about a local stream that you are familiar with. Which one is it? How do you feel about it?**

**6. What teachings from [your faith] come to mind when you think about your yard or garden?**

**7. I'm going to show you three messages that relate planting native plants to faith. I'd like to know which one you like best and why. 1) Native plants support wildlife, so when you plant them in your yard you are caring for creation. 2) Love your neighbors! Planting native plants protects people downstream from pollution and flooding. 3) You can care for God's creation right in your own yard by planting native plants. 4) By planting native plants, people of all faiths can work together to care for the Earth that we share. 5) Planting native plants protects God's creation for our children and future generations. 6) Climate change is impacting people and wildlife, and native plants can help us cope with the current and future changes.**

- Is this message made for people like you or someone else? If someone else, what sort of person is this message for?
- How well does this message reflect the values and traditions of most people in your congregation?
- There are several words we sometimes use to describe what we can do; heal, care, protect, conserve, steward, or safeguard. Which one do you like better and why?



**8. What might be some pros and cons about having the message about planting native plants come from YOUR CONGREGATION rather than another organization?**

- What do you like best about this idea of getting the Congregation involved?
- What do you think about the native plantings on the CONGREGATION grounds?

*The ending question is an “insurance question” to ensure that we have not overlooked anything important.*

**9. Now that we are coming to a close, is there anything we should have talked about but didn’t?**

- This is one of the first groups like this that we are doing. Do you have any suggestions about how we can improve?

Some questions came up about native plant gardening. You can find information about signing up and also a [fact sheet on the NWF website](#). (you can put the link in the chat or send afterwards)

Thank you so much for participating. You have been very helpful! We look forward to working with CONGREGATION on Sacred Grounds.

Credit:



IMAAM Center Mosque



## C. Sacred Grounds Action Plan Worksheet

CONGREGATION NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TEAM LEADER/S NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

TEAM MEMBERS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

TEAM'S MONTHLY MEETING TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

### Overview

#### Overall Goal

Care for creation by caring for people and wildlife by planting native plants at congregation members homes and on congregation grounds. This will help create wildlife habitat and reduce stormwater runoff from our lawns into our rivers and streams, reducing flooding and pollution. *(modify as needed)*

#### Congregation Objectives

- Develop Sacred Grounds (green) Team
- Install and care for native plant garden on congregation grounds.
- Members (and neighbors) plant native plants at home:
  - First year add starter kit of native plants to home garden.
  - Second year convert lawn to create native plant garden.
- Deepen connections with other congregations in cohort.
- Develop a three-year congregational action plan to sustain your work.

### Set Your Congregation's Goals

Please set your goal for how many members and neighbors (optional) to plant native plants at their home. We recommend that your goal be between 30-100 homes. Consider the following in setting your goal:

- Number of congregations \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of households with lawns/balconies/patios \_\_\_\_\_
  - (how will you determine this?)
- **YOUR PLEDGE GOAL:** \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have other goals you would like to accomplish, such as engaging youth or beautifying your grounds? Add them here.



## Brainstorm Ideas

Brainstorm ideas for how you will engage and excite your members. Think about past projects your congregation has undertaken. What made them successful? Discuss these questions to help you make your plan. See the Sacred Grounds Toolkit for additional ideas.

- How will you share your information to energize congregants?
- How will you tap into emotions and connect them to planting native plants?
- Seeing others participating is inspiring. How will you make your enthusiasm and actions visible to the congregation?
- How will you connect your faith's teachings and rituals with Sacred Grounds to touch members' spiritually?

What assets does your congregation have? (People and resources in your congregation and community to help implement your strategy)

- People with expertise (e.g. publicity, gardening, educating youth, etc.)
- Clergy involvement (e.g. sermon, blessing of garden)
- Other ministries or committees to engage with
- Publicity channels (newsletters, bulletin board, worship service announcements, events of other ministries)
- Other?

What barriers might you anticipate for your members to plant native plants? How can you make it easier for your congregants to plant native plants? Check your notes from the discovery phase/focus groups.

## Make Your Plan (Events & Dates)

### Calendar

Choose dates for these events in the next 12-18 months and clear them with your congregation's office and any partners or the National Wildlife Federation if you are working with us. Here is a list of possible events and a sample calendar is in Appendix D.

#### SET EVENT DATES

- Why Plant Native Plants presentation
- How to Garden with Native Plants presentation
- Native Plant Garden tour
- Spiritual Nature Walk
- Planting Hope: Native Plant Pick-Up Day
- Congregation Native Plants Garden Preparation Day
- Congregation Native Plants Garden Planting Day
- Congregation Native Plants Garden Maintenance Day(s)





## D. Sample Pledge Form

### Pledge to Plant Native Plants to Care for Creation

Please join your fellow congregation members in *caring for creation* by planting native plants at home. Native plants provide food for birds and butterflies as well as other wildlife, and they flourish easily with minimal care because they are suited to the soil and climate of our region. Native plants also store and filter the water from our yards that flows into nearby streams and rivers, thus helping to protect these waterways from pollution and flooding. These waterways are places for children to play and for us all to enjoy the beauty of nature. In addition, they sustain hundreds of species of fish, frogs, birds, butterflies, and ultimately ourselves. All life depends on clean air and water.

By planting native plants, we plant with a purpose and put the teachings of our faith into practice. By working together with people of all faiths we can care for the Earth that we all share. Our actions will preserve the beauty of life that surrounds us and protect people from pollution and flooding.

Make a pledge today to plant native plants in your yard, and we'll provide you with a free starter kit of native plants as well as the information you need to make sure the plants thrive. We're aiming to recruit (fill in your pledge goal here) homes to pledge... will yours be one of them?

### Pledge should include this information:

- First Name, Last Name
- Email Address
- Street Address, Apt, suite, etc., City, State/Territory/Province, ZIP/Postal Code
- Your congregation's name (prepopulate for neighbors)
- I pledge by (put in date [e.g. June 202X or October 202X]) to: Plant native plants in my yard or plant native plants in a container
- I would like to pick up a free starter kit of native plants from my congregation at their "Planting Hope: Native Plant Pick-Up Day" event (Yes/No)
- Have you previously planted native plants in your yard? (Yes, No, Unsure, I do not have a yard)
- How did you learn about this pledge?





## E. Promotional Materials & Communications

See Appendix A for communication and message tips including faith-based ones. Below is text you can use or adapt, and also sample flyers for promoting the events.

### Communications Checklist

As you plan your communications, keep these general tips in mind:

- ☐ Remind congregants of upcoming program events at every opportunity - services, newsletter, social media, etc. People need to hear things multiple times. Some research suggests that people need to hear something 7 times before it sinks in!
- ☐ Customize your messages! Your congregants will pay more attention to stories of their friends and neighbors than to general messages. Customize the newsletter blurbs below with your congregants' stories. Use names and photos to personalize the stories.
- ☐ Use photos! Collect and take photos of congregants who have pledged to plant native plants, people gardening at home, people with favorite native plants, etc. The most powerful message is showing peers taking action. Include pictures of local streams and rivers such as Sligo Creek, with people if possible.
- ☐ Communicate the number of people who have pledged to encourage others to come onboard. For example, "# OF PLEDGERS congregants have already pledged to plant native plants! Thank you to NAMES." This inspires people to want to join in.
- ☐ Include messages from the clergy. People see clergy as role models and will follow them. And they will be inspired by the idea that planting natives is a way of living their faith.
- ☐ Share the presentation recording for people who missed it.

### Sample Newsletter Announcements

#### For Inspirational Presentation

Title: Sacred Grounds: Using the Power of Native Plants to Help People and Wildlife

Add: Presentation Date & Time

Add: Zoom Link (if virtual)

What brings you joy? This year (your congregation's name) is participating in an exciting new program to encourage congregants to plant native plants at home. The purpose of Sacred Grounds is to help people and wildlife by planting native plants on our congregation grounds and at members' homes. Native plants protect people and wildlife because they are suited to the soil and weather (e.g. rainfall) of (your state). They provide food and homes for local wildlife and help the soil to filter water which protects our local streams from pollution and flooding. Join us for an educational and inspirational presentation about the power of native plants, and how you can plant them at home in your yard or in containers for a balcony or porch.





## For Pledge to Plant Native Plants

Below is an example of how to include a story from one of your own congregants in your communications.

Join Jane in Pledging to Plant Native Plants at Home this Spring!

One of Jane's favorite things to do is walk with her family by the Patapsco River. But something has changed there. Years ago, Jane used to drink right from the river. But after the flooding in Ellicott City, the water became polluted, and it is no longer clean enough to drink. Now Jane is excited to be able to do something to help clean up our local rivers by pledging to plant native plants at home. This year (YOUR CONGREGATION) is one of nine congregations participating in Sacred Grounds - a program to connect faith and the environment by planting native plants at congregation grounds and members' homes. Native plants, which are suited to the soil and rainfall of Maryland, help the soil to filter pollution and slow the flow of water into streams and rivers. We will be giving out free plants and helping you with information and advice so your plants will thrive. Our goal is for XXX (fill in your goal) congregants to participate. Please join Jane and the members of our Green Team in this exciting project. Pledge now to plant native plants this spring. (ADD YOUR LINK or if working with National Wildlife Federation use this one [www.nwf.org/NativePlantPledge](http://www.nwf.org/NativePlantPledge)).

## Planting Hope: Native Plant Pick-Up Day

Title: Planting Hope: Native Plant Pick-Up Day

DATE, TIME, LOCATIONS

Just in time for Mother's Day (or Earth Day or faith holiday) and the spring planting season, we're giving away at least three native plants to each home that pledges to plant them!

Join us, and neighbors at churches, mosques, and synagogues participating in Sacred Grounds, by planting native plants at your home. These native plants will help provide food for birds, butterflies, and pollinating bees, reduce stormwater runoff, and thus improve the quality and quantity of water heading from our homes to local streams. Let's help our families continue to safely enjoy [add name of a local waterways.]

Fill out this form to reserve your plants: (add pledge link) at (name of congregation).

ADD YOUR OWN FAITH TEACHING HERE

Thank you for helping people and wildlife!



## For Presentation on How to Plant Native Plants

Title: Using the Power of Native Plants to Care for Earth at Home:

Creating Joy and Beauty with Wildlife Habitat

Add: DATE and Time

LINK TO REGISTER FOR WEBINAR

Many congregants of YOUR CONGREGATION find joy, peace, and inspiration outdoors. By planting native plants, we can take part in conserving nature / Earth / creation [add your own faith language] nurtures us. Join us virtually from [TIME] on [DAY] to learn from experts about how you can create wildlife habitat and protect our local streams (or other natural features) by planting native plants.

We will share tips on the following:

- What are the best native plants for my yard?
- Where can I buy them?
- How will they help with preventing flooding and pollution into our local streams?
- Designing a garden with native plants
- Other features to help birds and butterflies thrive at our homes
- Local municipal financial aid application/rebate information
- How to be an ambassador for wildlife
- And any other questions you may have!

Register and receive the Zoom link here: (attach link)

Planting native plants conserves nature/God's creation for our children and future generations.  
[Add your faith teaching here.]

## Planting Native Plants Videos to Share

Sacred Grounds videos, short and compelling, can help inspire people to join in planting native plants or you can use it to encourage congregants to join your Sacred Grounds team:

Washington DC metro area: <https://youtu.be/wDNj2H5OhSg> and [www.nwf.org/sacredgrounds](http://www.nwf.org/sacredgrounds)

Great Lakes region: <https://vimeo.com/363949752>

Silver Spring (MD) United Methodist Church made a video about planting natives which was sent to all pledgers: [Click here to see their video.](#)



## Newsletter Article

Christ Congregational Church used this newsletter article to keep encouraging members to plant native plants.

### SACRED GROUNDS- CARING FOR CREATION

We are getting closer to our goal of 25 families that will plant native plants and potentially become Certified Wildlife Habitats. Thank you to those CCC Community members who have pledged in the last week: Chuck Mason. We need at least 5 more individuals to pledge – won't you join us? Remember there will be a workshop in April to teach you how and where to plant natives AND on May 9 we will be distributing FREE Native Plants to those families who have pledged!

*Question – I don't live in Silver Spring, or Montgomery County or the state of Maryland – can I participate?* Of course, anyone who plants native plants in their yard is helping their local watershed and the environment.

Link to pledge to plant native plants by June 15: (will be shared later)

Link to apply for National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat:

<https://www.nwf.org/certifiedwildlifehabitat>

Link to apply for Montgomery County's RainScapes rebate:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DEP/property-care/rainscapes/index.html>

## For Native Plant Garden Tour

Join us on a tour of native plant gardens near our congregation. By planting native plants at home, we can care for creation/nature/Earth, helping our neighbors – both the people and the wildlife. Native plants help prevent flooding and provide food for local wildlife. On DATE, TIME. local native plant expert NAME OF EXPERT will show us examples of the beauty of native plants in local neighborhood gardens.

Together, by caring for creation, we can ensure our children have a clean and safe community well into the future. [ADD YOUR OWN FAITH TEACHING HERE]

See our sample flyer.





## Sample Email Reminder

Takoma Park Presbyterian Church sent this note to congregation members who pledged as a reminder to pick up their plants (remember to replace with your congregation's information and pledge link):

Hello Native Plant Pledge Participants -

Thank you for [joining our pledge](#) and signing up to plant native plants this Mother's Day to celebrate Mother Earth!

For those who signed up, we will be distributing native **plants this Sunday May 9th from 1:00-3:00 pm** outside [the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church \(TPPC\)](#).

The good news is that we were overwhelmed by the response and hope we can do this again sometime soon. Because of the tremendous response and to include as many participants as possible, we will only be able to provide three very healthy native plants to each participant at this event.

The other good news is that as all Master Gardeners know, THREE is the magic number to plant together so this is the start of a great patch!

Overall, this weekend **TPPC and four other congregations will distribute over 1000 native plants to help protect our valuable Sligo Creek watershed!**

Many thanks to the **Caring for Creation Sligo Creek Project organizers and sponsors** who are making this possible.

Thank you for joining us in making a difference - we encourage you to keep adding native plants, consider putting in a [raingarden or other means to reduce your run-off](#), and [certify your yard as wildlife friendly](#).

For more information on how to take action see links below or contact the TPPC Green Team (add name/contact info).

Takoma Park Presbyterian Church is an [Earth Care Congregation](#).

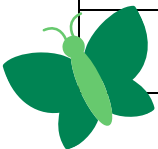


## F. Planting Hope Pick-Up Day Checklist

Date	Task	Your Notes
<b>In Advance</b>		
1 Month	Recruit volunteers	
Begin 2 weeks before Pick-Up Day	Send out 2-3 reminders to pledgers to pick up plants (list will be provided by NWF from pledge website)	
	Think about the atmosphere you want to create. Pick location. Arrange for set-up (tables, chairs, easels for posters, cardboard to mount posters, clipboards, pens)	
	Prepare any materials from your congregation such as welcome poster, prayer for inclusion in kit	
	Write a thank you email and newsletter article to thank pledgers and volunteers	
Location & time TBD	Collect plants and materials (TBD)	
	Assemble or pick up bags of materials	
THURSDAY before	Print list of pledgers (you will receive from NWF)	
Night before or morning of Pick-Up Day	Add 3-6 plants to the compostable bags	



Date	Task	Your Notes
<b>Pick-Up Day</b>		
	Orient volunteers	
	Assign tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up tables and posters and other (if you have it)</li><li>• Check-in pledgers, collect contact details</li><li>• Plant distributors: organize bags of plants by sun or shade or partial (sign-up sheet is organized this way)</li><li>• Greeters to talk to people about plants</li><li>• Expert to answer gardening questions</li><li>• Photographer</li></ul>	
	Review talking points so everyone can speak about purpose of Sacred Grounds and native plants	
<b>After Pick-Up Day</b>		
	Collect photos (send to NWF)	
	Send thank you email to all participants & volunteers	
	Submit newsletter article to congregation with photo; add to congregation website	
	Distribute evaluation survey	





# G. Native Plant Pick-Up Day Volunteer Orientation

## Process

Here is what's going to happen. People will come up to the table and be checked in. If they have not pledged in advance, you will collect their contact info. They will be given a bag with plants and information. Greeters will talk to people waiting in line or after they pick up their plants.

## Community-Building

We want everyone to feel welcome and happy. Please greet everyone in a friendly way. If people are standing in line, talk with them. Don't rush the process. If it takes a few minutes, and they interact with you, that's great!

## Education

We want everyone to know why we are doing this. Greeters are responsible for making sure everyone learns about the purpose of the day.

*Welcome! Thank you for coming! Can I tell you about why our congregation is doing this?*

*We're seeing a lot more heavy rains because of climate change. Rain that falls on the street and on lawns carries pollution into streams in our neighborhoods, and beyond. [Adapt explanation to your region.]*

*Native plants – the plants that are suited to this region - have deeper roots that hold the soil in place and slow the flow of the stormwater, reducing erosion and pollution. Plus, they are the ones that our native insects and birds depend on for food to raise their young (right now is their nesting season).*

*So planting these native plants is good for people and wildlife. Do you have any questions?*

## Frequently Asked Questions

- How many plants am I getting?
  - 3-6 of one kind
- I didn't sign up. Can I still get a plant?
  - Yes, we have some extras. Please sign in with your contact information and sign the pledge.
- How do I plant it?
  - You're going to receive a sheet with instructions in the bag with the plants. Basically, you just dig a hole, place the plant in it, and water.
- What kind of plant is this?
  - There is an identification tag in your bag with the name of the plant and any requirements for its care.





- Does it need sun or shade?
  - You should know which is which when handing them out. Some can take partial sun or shade.
- Is this perennial or annual?
  - These are perennials, they will come back each year.
- Are they deer resistant?
  - No plants are fully deer resistant although these are considered better than most; if deer are hungry, they will eat most anything.
- Can you help me figure out what else to plant?
  - There's a member of our congregation here who knows a lot about native plants. May I introduce you to them? Also see the additional resources on the back of the plant flier in your bag
- What are native plants?
  - Native plants are ones that have evolved in our region. They are suited to our soils and rain patterns and support our local wildlife. Some you might know are Black Eyed Susans (our state flower), Asters, Oak Trees... There are many plants we have imported from other regions. Although they grow here, they mostly don't have the same benefits to nature.
- Isn't the plastic bag you are giving me harmful to the earth?
  - These are compostable bags that will deteriorate quickly and without leaching harmful chemicals.
- Is our congregation the only one doing this? How can so few plants make a difference?
  - We're doing this with other local congregations, so the numbers really add up. This is the Sacred Grounds program initiated by the National Wildlife Federation with lots of other partners. And many others in our region love native plants and there is a real movement to change how we landscape our homes.



Oseh Shalom Synagogue



## H. Creating & Maintaining Your Congregation's Native Plant Garden

National Wildlife Federation's website Garden for Wildlife website (<https://www.nwf.org/garden>) is full of information with additional information added regularly.

### Design & Budget for Your Native Plant Garden

Start by finding experts who can help you. Master Gardeners, University Extension Offices, and native plant societies may help you identify state or local information. Some local governments will provide financial and technical assistance in installing conservation landscaping including rain gardens and xeriscaping. Work with an expert to choose a site on your congregation grounds and develop a planting design. There are a few sites on the web with free designs but be sure they are local to your area. If you hire a landscape architect, be sure they specialize in native plants!

Once you have selected your design, you can make a budget for your garden. Consider the cost of these expenses and get approval from your congregation for your budget.

- Plants (costs will vary with size and species)
- To prepare the ground if you have existing lawn, you will need 8-12 inches of wooden chips, which can be ordered free from ChipDrop.com or find a local arborist who often has chips from trees they have taken down.
- Gardening tools such as shovels, trowels, wheelbarrow (you may be able to borrow from your members) including garden gloves for volunteers helping with planting and maintaining garden.
- Hose and automatic sprinkler – you **must** have access to water for the first two years, while the plants are getting established.
- Note that after the first year, when your garden is established, you may need mulch. You will need 1-2 inches of mulch, not more.



Credit:



## How to Prepare Soil for Planting a Native Plant Garden

If you are converting lawn/turf to native plants, you must remove the grass including its roots first. This preparation will begin 2-6 months ahead. We recommend the smothering the grass with 8-12 inches of wooden chips as it is the cheapest and least labor intensive.

- Cut whatever's growing there very short.
- Leave this in place for months (depends on your climate and season) to kill what's underneath and it creates good compost.
- You don't remove the chips but plant through it as much will have turned into compost so there's not more than a couple inches around plants.
- You do not need or want to use additional compost most of the time. Native plants should be suited to your soil conditions. Adding compost can help the non-native plants outcompete the native ones.

Be careful if you're working near trees. You don't want to deprive the tree roots of moisture for too long, and the methods suggested here will tend to change the water table in the exact area, which can be a stressor to large old trees, particularly oaks.

Alternatives to using chips include digging out the grass and roots with a shovel or using a sod remover tiller. Hiring landscaping companies to use the sod remover tiller is effective but can be costly.

## Planting Your Congregation's Native Plant Garden

This is a fun community building project! Organize a planting day for your congregants.

- Ground should be ready for planting – (see above)
- Watering the ground the day before or morning of can help with shoveling
- Generally, need no more than 10-15 people for a small plot of 200-400 square feet
- Appoint someone to explain process, make assignments so everyone has role, some jobs are hard work so be prepared to take turns
- Have garden tools on hand including shovels, trowels, wheelbarrow, garden gloves, water buckets, garden hose
- Place mulch near garden for easier access
- Consider how many volunteers you need for the size of the plot, rake ground flat, water plants in containers, dig holes with trowels or shovels depending on the size of the plants, wet the holes, release roots with a gardening knife or break apart with your hands, plant the plants and cover with ground and mulch, watering (if carrying buckets, you will need more people for a bucket brigade), cover the entire garden with mulch
- Refreshment table with plenty of water (volunteers will appreciate this)
- Monitor the rain and water within one week. In spring and summer, you will need to repeat watering weekly or more depending on the weather (rain and heat). Established native plants are resilient but new plants need to be watered throughout the first two years, especially in periods of drought.



## Garden Maintenance Day

You should plan 3-4 maintenance days for early spring, summer, and fall. It is particularly important to keep on top of removing any invasive plants that will take over the native plants and ruin your hard work.

- Enlist a native plant expert from the master gardener's community or elsewhere to help identify what is native and what is invasive.
- Instruct all weeders on which are native vs. invasive plants.
- How much weeding is needed will depend on weather conditions – check the garden at least monthly.

Remember you need to continue to monitor the weather and water the plants if necessary.

Credit: Allegra Marcell

