

# Choosing Your Trees

2024

## Overview

The United States contains many diverse ecological zones. When planting new vegetation, it is important to consider using native plants, as they are more beneficial to the local ecosystem and can result in a more successful project.

## Types of Plants

- A **native plant** is one that has a **historical relationship** with the local ecosystem **without human introduction** or cultivation. These plants promote the health of the local ecosystem in a symbiotic relationship (National Wildlife Federation).
- A **non-native plant** is one that has **external origins** to an area but **does not harm the local ecosystem**. Non-native plants can support the health of the ecosystem but are generally less beneficial to the overall ecology (Sotelo, 2022).
- An **invasive plant** is one that has **external origins** and **presents danger to the health of the local ecosystem**. These plants have a negative impact on local ecology (Sotelo, 2022).
- Invasive plants can cause **substantial damage** to local ecosystems by introducing new competition to local vegetation. An example is Kudzu in the United States south, which **grows at an extremely fast rate** while **preventing the local plants from receiving the nutrients they need** to survive (The Nature Conservancy, 2019).

## Choosing a Tree

- [Native Plant Finder](#): A website that provides various plant options centered around a given zip code. The tool provides a variety of options in **trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses** as well as **displaying what butterflies are attracted to them** (National Wildlife Federation, 2024).
- [Audubon](#): A website that also provides various plant options around a given zip code. The tool outputs a description of the plant, offering **further classification by attributes like fruit production, flowering, and animal attraction**. This is the most **user-friendly and visual-focused** program on this list. It also provides ways to connect with local resources to learn more about planting (National Audubon Society).
- [The Biota of North America Program](#): A website that, although much more difficult to navigate and utilize, provides **extensive detail on the various bio regions of the United States**, their native vegetation, and taxonomic details to consider when planting. The site also provides links to a number of external sites that are more focused on specific locations (BONAP).

## Case Studies

[Altamira Project: California](#)

- The project concerned planting and landscaping around a residence near the California coast. The use of native plants in the landscaping saw a substantial reduction in required water, maintenance, and erosion while seeing an increase in local fauna (Tree of Life Nursery).

### Native U.S. Plants in Honey and Pollen Production: Continental U.S.

- Honeybees provide an estimate 80% of food and agricultural crop pollination, making them a critical component of North American farming. Native plants are more conducive to the health and growth of bee populations (Alexander, 2021).

### References

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