

Think Habitat, Not Grass

Immediate Cost Savings

Ridgefield pre-restoration lawn cutting and maintenance expenses: **\$7,500** (2005 cost)

Restoration cost of planting 4.5 acres of prairie (\$2,730) and 300 shrubs (\$1,520):
\$4,250

Year 1 (2006) maintenance costs: \$420

Cost share assistance received from Indiana DNR & Hamilton County SWCD: \$3,100

Net Cost Year 1: **\$1,570** (less than the annual mowing cost)

The project paid for itself in the first year.

Lower Ongoing Maintenance Costs

Non-native plants (lawn grass) generally require a great deal of water, fertilizer and human labor to maintain. Native plants have evolved in our area so they are better adapted to our soils and weather. In addition, their deep root systems allow them to grow well on poor soils and do not require fertilizers or watering.

Ridgefield estimated annual cost if mowed/treated: **\$9,000** (based on 2006 – 2011 actual cost of mowing other areas).

Year 1 (2006) - weed control, mow: \$420
Year 2 (2007) - weed control, seed, year-end mow: \$920
Year 3 (2008) - weed control, seed, year-end mow: \$690
Year 4 (2009) - weed control, year-end mow: \$320
Year 5 (2010) - weed control, year-end mow, cut/remove grass around pond: \$970

Since Ridgefield no longer maintains the turf grass, Ridgefield saves \$8,000+ a year in maintenance expenses.

Filter Pollutants: Unlike the shallow root systems of non-native turf grass, the extensive, deep root systems of the native plants help filter out chemicals and pollutants before they reach our retention pond.

The Ridgefield retention pond is much healthier, and does not become stagnant as in the past.

Nuisance Geese Control: Buffer strips around retention ponds are effective in reducing nuisance geese.

Geese are no longer an issue around the Ridgefield retention pond.

Prevent Erosion: The extensive root system of native plants allows them to absorb and store great amounts of water which plays an important function in preventing flooding and erosion.

Erosion is no longer an issue at the retention pond.

Algae Control: The native plants do not need to be fertilized and absorb many of the chemicals that encourage algae growth.

Algae does not grow on the pond as in the past which has reduced the need for chemical treatments further reducing our expenses. (cost savings \$400 a year).

Native Plants Attract Wildlife:

The native plants provide needed habitat which attracts a significant amount of wildlife to the community. Maximize the number of species of native plants that are different in terms of timing of blooms and fruit, height, and structure.

A wide variety of wildlife is now found in and around the nature park

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Will Native Habitat Aggravate Allergies?

No. According to the American Academy of Otolaryngology, the general rule of thumb is that if a plant has bright, fragrant flowers, it is insect pollinated and should not significantly impact allergies. Many native plants, especially those with bright, conspicuous flowers, have sticky pollen, and rely on insects to transfer the pollen from one flower to another. Those plants generally don't cause allergy problems, since the pollen stays put, either in the flower, or on the insects. The pollens that do cause allergies are from plants which rely on the wind to distribute the tiny granules from one place to another. These microscopic particles are produced by plants which have flowers that are not noticeable, either visually or by scent, such as Kentucky bluegrass, some trees, and ragweed. Since these plants have to rely on the wind to carry their pollen, they have to produce massive quantities of pollen. The native flowers planted in a prairie would not be considered problem allergens.

The grass family in general is considered a significant allergen. However, most native grasses are not typically considered problematic. According to the Pollen Library, native grasses such as Little Bluestem are not an allergen concern. The reason native grasses are not significant allergy contributors are that they are not heavy pollen creators and that the pollen they produce does not typically trigger the antibody reaction similar to most turf grasses. An article in the *Grounds Maintenance* magazine recommended converting turf grass areas into native meadows in order to reduce allergic reactions.

Will Native Habitat Attract Vermin and Other Pests?

This depends on how you define vermin and pests. We generally define vermin as animals that are difficult to control and oftentimes associated with carrying disease such as rats. Native habitat does not offer the proper food source and does not attract these vermin. Furthermore, unsecured garbage is the main attraction for most pests such as rodents and raccoons. Therefore, native landscaping would not be an attractant for household pests. However, native habitat can attract wildlife which some people would consider undesirable. In addition to attracting butterflies and songbirds, native plantings provide habitat for such animals as mice, rabbits, and snakes.

Canada geese, considered a pest by many, prefer short turf grass over taller native grasses. A native buffer around a retention pond reduces the presence of geese

Will Native Habitat Attract Mosquitos?

No. Native landscapes discourage the pooling of standing water that is required for mosquitoes to breed. In addition, native habitat helps keep mosquito populations in control by attracting natural mosquito predators such as dragonflies, birds, and bats. In fact, most government agencies and municipal storm water control guidelines recommend a healthy natural habitat as part of their best management practices in order to control mosquito populations (Indiana Department of Natural Resources & Purdue University).