



Native Plant Communities of Springfield

Understanding the growing conditions in your yard is the key to having a successful native plant garden. These conditions make up your property's "habitat," and help to define the plant community that lived there before your house or subdivision was built. This sheet describes Michigan's native plant communities and how you can use this information to decide which plants will work best for your yard.

Plant Community Basics

A native plant community is a group of plants that share the same or similar growing conditions. For example, a marsh is a plant community where the vegetation that grows there needs wetland soils, full sun and high moisture levels. As you learn more about the plants in each community, some species need slightly more of

one condition, or less of another. For instance, there are plants in a marsh community that grow in deep water, some that grow in shallower water, and some that grow at the edge of the water. However, they are all considered part of the same community because they all share the "wetland" growing conditions.

There are several main native plant communities that exist in southeastern Michigan. Identifying these communities that exist on your property will help you

match the native plants with the growing conditions in your yard. It's the "right plant, right place" theory, and will help your natives grow and thrive. This sheet describes the main native plant communities in Springfield Township and are categorized based on the "habitat" category under the "Plant Search" section of Springfield Township's Native Plant CD. This information, and much more, can be found in the book *Michigan Trees* by Barnes and Wagner.



Subdivision Exception

Development practices today can remove much of a site's plant life before building the home. These practices make it difficult to know what the existing plant community once was! If this is your situation, there are other ways you can "deduct" what grew on your property.

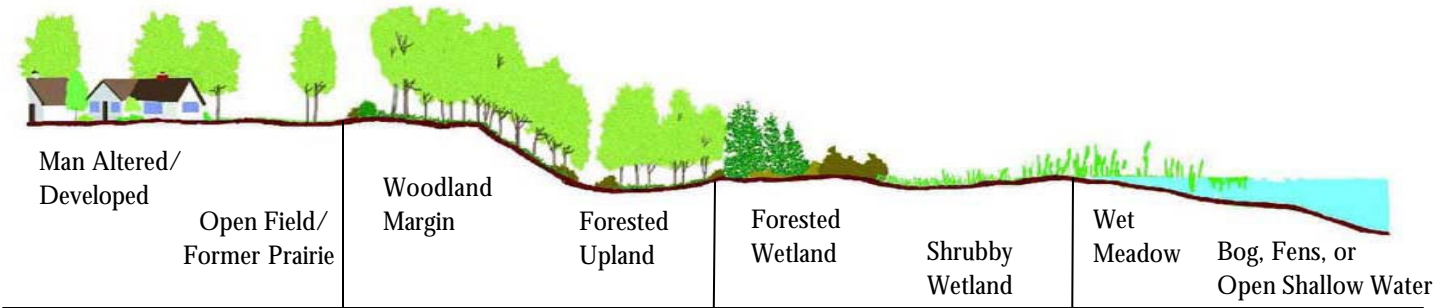
- 1) Look at the plants growing at the boundaries of your yard. These plants can tell you what was most likely growing on your property as well.
- 2) There may be a woodlot or other natural feature in your neighborhood that could give you clues about your own yard.
- 3) Just one mature tree on your property could also help you decide whether oak-hickory species or beech-sugar maple species are more appropriate.

And remember, many native plants will grow under general garden conditions just fine. The important thing is to be aware of the native plant communities around your yard, and that you invite at least a few natives into your garden!

Native Plant Community Map

A map of Springfield Township was created that identifies areas within our community that you can visit to study its different plant communities.

Springfield's Native Plant Communities



Many abandoned agricultural fields exist throughout Springfield Township, and some prairie plants still grow here. A *prairie* is a grassland that includes several species of grasses, and many species of “forbs” or wildflowers. Prairie plants generally grow in full sun in both dry and moist soils. Species in the prairie community include black-eyed susans, goldenrods, cone-flowers, asters, switchgrass, big and little bluestem and Indian grass.

Vernal Pools are another very important wetland type that play a critical role in the lifecycle of birds and amphibians. These wetlands form in small, shallow depressions in grasslands or forests and fill up with rain. They are usually wet during winter and early spring, and dry out in the summer. If you have a “wet spot” in a woodland behind your house, be sure to listen for the frogs calling in the spring. They are visiting the vernal pools to make more frogs!

Woodland margin describes the edges of any woodland where the plants receive more sunlight than the interior of the woodland. Many woodland plants also grow well at the woodland margin.

Generally, two types of upland forests exist in Springfield: the Oak-Hickory woodland, and the Beech-Sugar Maple woodland. *Oak-Hickory woodland* occurs in upland areas on dry, well-drained soils where drought is a major habitat characteristic. The main species in this woodland are white, black and red oak; pignut and shagbark hickory; black cherry; white ash; downy serviceberry; and flowering dogwood. The *Beech-Sugar Maple woodland* occurs in mostly upland areas that have fertile, moist soils (moisture during the growing season). Some main species in this community include the American beech, sugar maple, red oak, basswood, white ash, black walnut, tuliptree, shagbark hickory, and alternate-leaf dogwood.

The *forested wetland* plant community requires a cool, wet location. The water table is generally high, fluctuates only slightly, and water and nutrients are available to the plants almost year round. Typical species found here include the red maple, black ash, yellow birch, American elm, silver maple, and pin and swamp white oak.

The *shrubby wetlands* have many of the same site characteristics as a marsh, but are dominated by shrubs (woody vegetation versus herbaceous vegetation) and small trees, and also support wildflowers. Shrubs that occur in these wetlands include buttonbush, winterberry, red-osier dogwood, shrubby cinquefoil, elderberry and highbush cranberry.



Wet meadows and wet prairies are wetland types that are dependent on rain and are usually wet during winter and early spring, and dry out in the summer. Both are dominated by grasses.

Bogs and fens are dominated by the build-up of peat (partly decayed plant matter). Bogs are waterlogged areas in depressions and receive their water through rain and snow. These wetlands tend to be acidic, and support acid-loving plants such as sphagnum moss. Prairie fens are peat wetlands that form at low points or near slopes where ground water comes up to the surface. Prairie fens are globally rare. Springfield Township is home to some of the Midwest's largest and most pristine. Fens generally support grasses, sedges and flowering plants.

Open shallow water wetlands (marshes) are characterized by continuous shallow water and dominated by floating-leaf plants, such as water lilies; and emergent aquatic plants, like cattails. These communities are found at lake edges and along slow-flowing streams and rivers, from which they receive most of their water.