Wondering what to plant this summer? How about buying some native plants? According to Wildflower.org, native plants are defined as ‘plants that naturally existed before human introduction.’ There are advantages to growing native plants. Buying native plants is cost-efficient and water is saved because the plants are naturally adapted to Ohio’s climate. Native plants are less susceptible to pests and diseases so less pesticide is used, less fertilizer is used because they are tailored to grow in Ohio’s soil, and these plants provide great habitat for native wildlife such as birds, moths, and butterflies.

Planting a non-native or exotic plant can be risky because you may not know if what you are planting is considered invasive. In Ohio, there is no law to prevent nurseries from selling these noxious plants. According to Invasive.org, an invasive or exotic species is one that “…including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material, is capable of propagating that species, which is not native to that ecosystem; and whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health’.

An example of one invasive species that is problematic in Ohio is the Tree of Heaven, Ailanthus altissima. This tree is similar to the native sumac, Rhus sp., which have composite palm like leaves. According to Kathy Smith, Extension Program Director from the Forestry School of Environment and Natural Resources for The Ohio State University (OSU), the Tree of Heaven was initially used for landscaping and soil stabilization. These trees grow rapidly and thrive in a wide range of conditions, so they out-compete native trees. It also is allopathic, meaning it produces a chemical that prevents other species of plants from growing. Furthermore, one plant produces 300,000 seeds a year, and getting rid of them is tricky; exposure to their sap may lead to health problems such as inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis) and other troubling symptom such as shortness of breath, chest pains, and fever.

Getting rid of invasive plants costs taxpayers money. The more people become informed about this problem, the easier it will be to mitigate. Thirty-one percent of Ohio is forested, with 86% of Ohio’s forests owned by private land owners. It is vital that private citizens become involved and get rid of these plants.

For further information, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources presents a list of plant and animal species that are invasive. In addition, Invasive.org provides resources on how to properly get rid of invasive species. People with smart phones can also download a free application to take pictures of invasives with GPS coordinates. The data is then sent to the OSU Forestry and Natural Resource Department. Growing native plants helps increase seed
production, which allows natives to be better competitors against the ever troublesome invasive species.

In Delaware, there are two local places to buy native plants and both are conveniently close to each other. Scioto Gardens is located on State Route 37, three miles west of Grady Hospital, and Riverside Native Trees is on River Road, five miles southeast of Delaware. Both nurseries have websites worth perusing. Scioto Garden’s website has a more personal feel and has useful information such as making a rain/bog garden. It also provides a full list of plants including useful symbols indicating which plants smell nice, are edible, have medicinal use, and more. Riverside Native Trees’ site is straightforward and easy to navigate. It shows what trees and shrubs are available along with a nice interactive map on the native species range in Ohio. Alas, the two nurseries do not provide landscaping services, but both offer helpful advice and recommendations. Comparing the two companies, each have a remarkable story of how their business formed and both provide unique experiences for customers and are worth checking out.

Scioto Gardens is owned by Michael and Linda Johnson, who have bachelor’s degrees in horticulture and natural resources respectively. They founded their nursery in 1999. Besides themselves, they have a staff of four, including students from Ohio Wesleyan. Scioto Gardens has a wide variety of herbaceous and woody plants including ferns, wildflowers, shrubs, and trees. Because they do not have a green house, their nursery does not sell annual plants. Mrs. Johnson explains that as long as people can easily dig in their yard, they can visit and buy native plants to grow throughout the season.

The Johnsons get most of their plants from growers in northern Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. They choose northern species varieties that survive in cooler climates to ensure survival of spring frost or early fall chills in central Ohio. The Johnsons state that they try to ‘minimize environmental impact’. One interesting sustainable practice is potting plants in black fabric bags instead of using thick unrecyclable plastic containers. These fabrics are decomposable and can be planted directly in the ground.

Since Scioto Gardens is out in the open, the ideal time to visit is in the cool morning and evening. The nursery may seem overwhelming at first glance with the numerous varieties of plants and garden decor, but the helpful staff is happy to suggest plants suitable to your personal ecosystem.

The Johnson’s do sell some exotic plants, for instance the voodoo lily, a stinky plant with beautiful foliage. They are clear that if there is any possibility for any plant species to become invasive they will not stock it. Scioto Gardens is a good place to start learning about native plants and is a pleasant place to visit.
Riverside Native Trees specializes mostly in Ohio trees. The owner, Ed Kapraly, is a school teacher at Buckeye Valley. He spends his free time running his business, which he proudly calls his ‘tree growing empire’. Because this is Kapraly’s side business, it is helpful to call in advance to schedule a visit. Kapraly, along with his family, run the operation. In the summer he hires a couple of Buckeye Valley high school students to help him with his company.

Kapraly collects the seeds from trees and shrubs of Ohio and grows them himself. He created a special technique of hard work, fertilizer, and specialized pruning pots for the woody plants. In 2005 Kapraly started his business originally growing mums and selling them to Buehler’s grocery store in Delaware. However there was not much money to be made, so he decided to revamp his production selling Ohio native trees and shrubs. Kapraly’s idea of selling native plants was inspired by a talk by Dan Struve, PhD., a professor from the Ohio State University. In his talk, Professor Struve emphasized the need for nurseries to sell more native trees. Captivated by this idea, Kapraly e-mailed the professor, which led to a life-long partnership in growing native plants. Riverside Native Trees has now expanded to provide services for many metro parks around Ohio including the Cuyahoga National Park.

Riverside Native Tree is affordable, with prices ranging from $5-20. Kapraly says that selling trees with the roots in burlap sacks causes the loss of 80-90% of the roots, which decrease the tree survival rate. According to his website, Kapraly instead grows trees in pruning pots which allow the trees to grow a ‘mop-like mass of roots’ that has many ‘growing points’. With many ‘growing points’, the tree can anchor into the ground quickly, ‘providing a large surface area for water and nutrient uptake and minimizing transplant shock.’ Because of this technique, the native trees such as oak species which usually have a tap root system like a carrot have a better chance of survival and would grow faster with their roots spread out when transplanted. A prime model of Kapraly’s success is his own burr oak tree, Quercus macrocarpa, which is in its sixth season in the ground and has grown 20 inches (51 cm) tall with a diameter of 5 inches (12 cm). For a normal oak tree, that would take approximately fifteen to twenty years to grow.

Kapraly emphasizes for the best tree growth success, fertilize, fertilize and fertilize. For some environmentalist that raises an issue of using too much fertilizer, but Kapraly contends that using fertilizer is essential for the tree’s survival. The extra nutrient boost would help the tree to grow substantial enough to prevent deer and other animals from eating it. Yet Kapraly shares anecdotal evidence of a customer who did not use fertilizer regularly because they prepared the soil properly enough for the tree to thrive.

So if you’re thinking of adding a nice shady spot to your yard, why not invest in native trees that provide great habitat for animals? There are some butterflies and moths that need a certain host plant to survive and Kapraly knows the trees that would attract these types of
wildlife, such as the luminous cecropia moth, *Hyalophora cecropia*, and luna moths, *Actias luna*. Another interesting tree species he sells is Big Leaf Magnolia, *Magnolia macrophylla*, which are grown in one county in Ohio. With all this selection, Kapraly has a list of ten species of native trees and shrubs that are easy to grow. For first time tree growers, these trees are a good investment and if customers have any question about their trees, Kapraly is happy to talk with them.

Taking advice from a clever catchphrase from Dona Ana Company Master Gardeners, “Bee Creative; Plant Native!” Having native plants creates a broader diversity of wildlife since they provide food and shelter for many organisms. In addition it is a way to preserve the natural history of Ohio. Lady Bird Johnson, who had a great love for wildflowers, stated that native plants “give us a sense of where we are in this great land of ours.” Growing these plants illustrates the past and brings hope for the future in keeping these plants from extinction, and perhaps one day these native plants might provide a breakthrough in medicine and technology. So take a nice country drive and visit these two nurseries, Scioto Garden and Riverside Native Tree. Be sure to talk with the staff, who are knowledgeable and passionate about their companies, and happy gardening!
Websites:

Scioto Gardens
http://sciotogardens.com/
Riverside Native Trees
http://riversidenativetrees.com/
Further information about native plants and nurseries that sell them
Top ten invasive plants from the Ohio Department of Natural Resource (ODNR)
Further information of Ohio’s invasives
http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/Home/wild_resourcessubhomepage/dealing_with_wildlifeplaceholder/NuisanceSpecieslandingpage/tabid/15463/Default.aspx
Information about invasives and getting rid of them
http://www.invasive.org/
Free phone application for Ohio invasives species

Ohio’s Top Ten Invasive Species

Japanese Honeysuckle
Japanese Knotweed
Autumn Olive
Buckthorns
Purple Loosestrife
Common Reed
Reed Canary Grass
Garlic Mustard
Multiflora Rose
Bush Honeysuckles

Ed Kapraly’s List of Top Ten Trees and Shrubs *

Trees
Bur Oak
Swamp White Oak
Pin Oak
Red Oak
Red Maple
Sycamore (for wetter areas)

Shrubs
Gray Dogwood
Silky Dogwood
Buttonbush (for wetter areas)
Carolina Buckthorn

*all of these considered to be fast growers if fertilized.