

Subtitles

Good morning. I'd like to welcome you all to the Wistendahl Garden, which is located on the grounds of the Visitor's Bureau in Athens. What we have here are over 350 individual species of plants native to Ohio, including trees, shrubs, vines, grasses, and wildflowers. This is sort of indicative of any type of walk or hike that you would take within the state and it gives you a chance to see up close what a lot of these individual species look like. But mainly, most people want to know how they can create a native plant garden. And that's what this particular how-to presentation is about. So what I'd like to do is just sort of give you a panorama of the garden and then we'll go through some of the things that are essential to creating one, and how to maintain them.

(SLIDESHOW AND VIDEO OF GARDEN)

As you can see, there's quite a bit of diversity in the Wistendahl Garden and it tells you just how prolific and also how beautiful these gardens can be. This garden should give you an idea if you want to do something like this at home of the steps that would be necessary. This garden is five years old, and when we started, it was just a bare patch of ground with five dead trees and dead sod. We planted it the first year, and sort of created an infrastructure, and by that summer, many of the plants were already in bloom. And each year, as the garden has progressed, we have added species, and we continue to do so, but the garden has now reached a point where we're just letting it go. The seeds disperse, and year after year we find plants in one place that they weren't the year before, and it always makes it exciting when spring comes to see exactly what's happened. The question is: how can you create a garden? And the first thing I want to tell you is that it is not a formidable task, and that you can do it usually in a day, depending on the size of the garden. So what I'd like to do now is just move over to gardens that were created last year and I will go through, step by step, why you should have a native plant garden and how to go about creating one and finally how to maintain it.

What we're looking at now is a native short grass terrarium. This garden was created on May 11th last year. It was basically just an open expanse of grass which we removed. And what I would like to do now is tell you why and how to create a native plant garden. There are three things you should consider. The first one is that if you do native plants, you never have to irrigate. You never ever have to use any kind of pesticide, and also there are no chemicals whatsoever involved. Plants grow, in a natural soil, they are basically disease-resistant, and once they are established, they are there for quite a long time. Now these are the steps that I would recommend that if you wanted to create your own native plant garden. And

I would start out small, usually a 4x8 space that you can create in a square, a rectangle, any kind of geometric design. The first thing that you want to do is determine what are the growing conditions of that particular site? Is it full sun? Is it in shade, semi-shade, is it dry, is it wet? Does it change as the season progresses? All of these things will determine what species of plants you should actually put into that garden. Once you've done that, you want then to make a list of the plants that you would like to use. I call this gardening on paper. Rather than just start out with things in the ground, and wait to see what happens, you can actually determine the character of the garden by designing on paper. SO, once you've made your selection of species, then you're ready to actually begin the garden. The first thing you want to do is this: never ever till plow or dig your garden. Most people don't understand that soil is a living organism. When you disturb it, when you plow it, till it, you destroy that structure, and then the soil will actually compact, and it becomes very difficult for plants to get themselves established without continuing cultivation. So, the first step in creating your garden is to physically remove the topsoil, the sod. I use in almost all of my gardens, what is called a Pulaski axe. It could be a paddock, it could be a shovel, whatever. But with this particular tool, you actually skim off, cutting down maybe an inch to an inch and a half, and physically remove all of the sod so that you're dealing with just an open expanse of soil. The garden behind me was cleared in two hours with a sod cutter, and then finished up by hand. If you were to do this by hand, I'd say it would take you half a day. When you're done, you're ready to plant. Now, when you buy your plants, don't look for something in full bloom, or a large plant, because it had already expended its energy for the year, and while you might have that momentary gratification of seeing that flower, what you want to do is try to get a plant that's basically about this size. I'd say usually a three, maybe a four inch size container, and you want to make sure that the plant is at least one year old, but no more than two, because if they are, the roots, they'll root bound, and they're not going to spread quickly once you put them into the garden. You have your plants, then, what you want to do, is simply create a cavity where the plant's gonna go. Don't disturb any of the other soil, because there's no plants growing there at the time being. So once you go down, you can use an augur, you can use a paddock, a shovel, whatever, but only plant one plant in that space. All these plants here were put in on two foot centers, which seems kind of large, but really ,by the second year, they begin to fill in. Now, this garden, is comprised probably about 70% of native shortgrass prairie grasses, but it's also interspersed with wildflowers. So as the grasses grow, wildflowers begin to grow amongst the grasses, and by next year, this garden will fill in, and we'll have a bed of grass, but you'll also see numerous wildflowers growing in it. When the garden is, when you have your plants in the ground, the next step is that you want to mulch. And the only thing that you want to use for mulch is either shredded leaves, wood chips, or if you're lucky enough, you can use grass clippings. And you want to layer these things, start with the grass clippings, the leaves, and top it with the wood chips. And

these serve two purposes: one, they keep the soil from drying out and moderates the temperature of the soil, and secondly, it suppresses weeds actually growing up in the garden. I should say third, as these things begin to decompose, they provide the nutrients that your plants are going to actually feed on, and that's exactly what happens in nature. Leaves fall from the trees, twigs and branches fall, they rot and decompose, and that creates the growing conditions for native plants. Now, once the plants are established, and you've mulched, it's just a periodic walking around the garden, and if you see something growing that you know shouldn't be there, you simply go in and pull it out, it doesn't take a lot of work to do that. In the fall, when the garden is finally dormant, you want to go in with your clippers, and cut the plants down to probably six inches above the ground, and use that material as mulch again. Just lay it down in the garden. The garden then will winter over, everything will decompose, and you want to add another layer of mulch just to help the plants to get through the winter. So again, it's grass clippings, shredded leaves, and wood chips. Just keep doing that. This garden that we just came out of, the Wistendahl Garden, was at one time the actual airport for Ohio University. When we began to plant that garden, we ran into chunks of tarmac that were actually under the ground. There were no worms, there' was nothing under the garden; it was basically sterile. But we started adding the mulch, and by the second year, you could actually begin to see that it was improving. The soil, instead of being rock hard, you could take a trowel and dig down into it, and lo and behold, begin to see earthworms and everything else. And then finally, one of the reasons for doing one of these native plant gardens is that you are creating a habitat for wildlife. You are offering them a habitat in which to live, native birds or whatever, or moths and butterflies will begin to come in and feed off the nectar of the plants that are growing. And what most people fail to understand is that there's a symbiotic relationship between specific species of butterflies and moths, and the species that are growing. What you're doing by creating all of this diversity is creating a tremendous food source for all of this wildlife. You'll begin to see hummingbirds come in, you'll begin to see birds are getting to nest, uh, praying mantises, all sorts of things will begin to come in to your garden. And since you're not using any pesticides or herbicides or any types of chemicals, those insects and wildlife will thrive, and it's a pleasure to walk through a garden and just see what kind of wildlife has appeared to feed off and live amongst the plants that you've created.

In conclusion, there are some thoughts that I would like to leave with you. The first one is that if you're apprehensive about doing a native garden, then I would invite you to come down and volunteer to work in the Wistendahl Garden. Once this virus epidemic has finally subsided, then we'll begin meeting every Tuesday at 9 o'clock in the morning, usually work for about an hour, hour and a half. We weed, take care of whatever needs to be done, but it's also a time to learn from each other about what they're doing at home with their gardens.

In the meantime, if you'd like to contact me, my email address will be posted at the end of this presentation and I invite you to contact me. I will help you with garden design, plant selections, where to find plants, any type of information that you need, I'm more than happy to share with you. So, once again, I invite you to come volunteer with the garden and start your journey in creating a native plant world.