



*L to r, roughleaf coneflower, wild violet petunia and Cherokee sedge*

*(Photos credits: Carolyn Fannon/[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](http://Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center), [fireflyforest.com](http://fireflyforest.com),  
and [bakerenvironmentalnursery.com](http://bakerenvironmentalnursery.com))*

## ***REPLACING NON-NATIVES WITH LOCAL NATIVES***

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**[npsot.org/wp/houston](http://npsot.org/wp/houston)**

Every year native plant enthusiasts learn of more reasons why growing LOCAL native plants:

- support our wildlife by providing shelter and food.
- increase the number of insects, lizards, and birds and wildlife activity in one's garden.

Many local native plants ideal for home landscapes can be found at the September 22 Wildscapes Workshop, at specialized local nurseries listed on [npsot.org/wp/houston/](http://npsot.org/wp/houston/) and at NPSOT/HOUSTON'S November plant and seed swap. Three excellent choices:

- ROUGHLEAF CONEFLOWER (*Rudbeckia grandiflora*). This Aster/Sunflower family member has flowers similar to Black-Eyed Susans, but is taller with larger flowers. These coneflowers can grow to be 2 ½-5', with only a 18-24" wide base . . . a striking plant that doesn't take up a large space.

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They grow on prairies so happily take full sun but do well in part shade. Plants need only average moisture, maybe a little water in dry times, like now. Late spring flowers attract bees, flies, butterflies, and other pollinators, including two small green *Synchlora* moths, whose caterpillars camouflage themselves by putting bits of petals on their backs. These wonderful caterpillars can also be found on *Gaillardia* and Black-Eyed Susans.

- VIOLET WILD PETUNIA (*Ruellia nudiflora*). This is so hardy, its lovely lavender flowers can be seen in dry, dusty and often mowed freeway green spaces. When not mowed or pruned, plants can be 1-2' tall. They take full sun, part shade, and perhaps shade. Moisture needs are low to medium - not a fussy plant. Flowers last only a day, but they bloom from April to October -- at my house it is more like June through August. They can be found at Mandell Park and at the Nature Discovery Center where they are being used to fill open spaces.
  - o Ruellias spread by flinging seeds when pods pop open. After a couple years, you might want to thin them, which gives you plants to share. These plants are host plants for several butterflies. (*These have more of a vining groundcover appearance and different leaf structure, unlike the often-invasive tall and clumping "Mexican petunia" ruellias*)
- CHEROKEE SEDGE (*Carex cherokeensis*). This evergreen grass-like plant is gaining popularity as a groundcover, particularly if one is trying to get rid of lawn but maintain a grassy green look. It grows 12-18" high, although seed stalks can be a little taller. Long drooping blades give a lovely airy feeling at first and over the years slowly creeping rhizomes create nice green clumps. The plant also spreads by new growth from seeds.
  - o This sedge likes part shade but can take full sun. It likes a moist area but can survive a drought, though a little watering helps. I am watering mine once a week right now. The plants are important as cover for birds and other small animals so it is worthwhile to consider them as a substitute for *liriope*. Nice companion plants for this sedge might be Violet Wild Petunia or Gulf Coast Penstemon.

Every native plant that is planted makes our area a little better.