

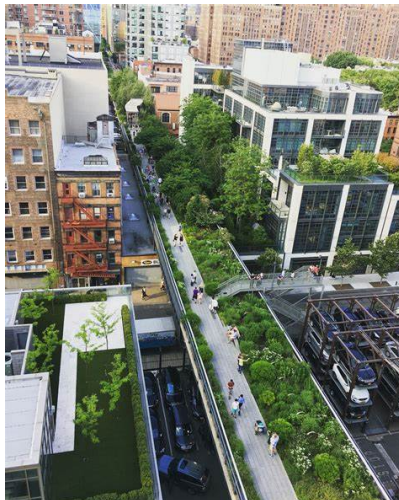
Nature in Neighborhood – Nov. 2024 – The High Line

I was in New York City recently and took the opportunity to visit the High Line, which is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year. If you don't know, the High Line is a 1.45-mile-long elevated linear park and greenway that extends from just below 14th street up to 34th on the city's west side. This "Park in the Sky," as it has been dubbed, had been an abandoned elevated rail line that was repurposed into what is today - one of the most popular visitor attractions in the city. In some places, the remains of the rails can still be seen hidden in the greenery or embedded in the walkway. I can attest to its popularity, as I was there on a weekday and, even then, it was crowded with strollers of every age and ethnicity, both locals and tourists. In addition to bringing people, the High Line has also brought economic and social revitalization to a declining and neglected section of Manhattan. Its overwhelming success has generated a worldwide trend in elevated parks.



In many ways, the High Line was what I expected: landscaped beds of mostly, but not entirely, native plants. This time of year, the highlighted flowering plants were purple asters and black-eyed susans, but there are more than 500 plant species along the path. The New York Times calls it "one of the best-known naturalist gardens anywhere." There were also some things I didn't expect, such as the eye-catching

contemporary artwork or the chance to walk under the canopy of a birch tree grove 30 feet up from street level.



I began to notice that everywhere I walked in NYC there were naturalist gardens such as Little Island, a unique urban oasis in Hudson River Park, and Brooklyn's Domino Park on the East River. And not just large parks such as these, but also along the streets and sidewalks throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn.

This profusion of native plantings is the result of a 2013 law (Local Law 11) whose goal is to decrease the presence of exotic monocultures in NYC's 30,000 acres of parkland in favor of native plants. Thus, the law requires maximizing the use of native plantings and drought and salt tolerant plants while also minimizing the presence of exotic monocultures on all city-owned properties. Where native plants are not appropriate, it requires that non-invasive species be used.

Closer to our neighborhood, there are a number of communities in Massachusetts that have adopted either native plant laws or policies, including Somerville (passed a Native Planting Ordinance establishing a minimum requirement for native plants and trees planted in city-owned parks, open spaces, and streets) and Ipswich (adopted a policy that prioritizes native plantings for its municipal spaces and encourages residents to consider native plants for their gardening and landscaping).

An increasing number of communities are recognizing the significant ecological benefits of native vegetation and are promoting sustainable landscapes by choosing at least a percentage of native plants for use in municipal public landscaped areas and, just as importantly, encouraging private homeowners to do the same.

Native plants enhance the beauty of the landscapes, maintain and restore biodiversity, support native pollinators and birds, and protect local ecosystems and environmental health. Additionally, using native plants, instead of their non-native counterparts *reduces:*

- the need for pesticides because native plants are already adapted to local conditions and therefore are more resistant to pest problems than non-native species;
- the usage of water because native plants are already adapted to the local climate and can generally survive with just natural rainfall;
- the need for fertilizers because native plants can often grow in soils that are low in nutrients or that would otherwise be unsuitable for non-native;
- the labor needed because native plants require much less maintenance than their non-native counterparts, especially once established; and
- the costs associated with pesticides, water usage, fertilizers, and maintenance - in other words *saves money*.

Doug Tallamy is the author of several books, including *Bringing Nature Home* and *Nature's Best Hope*, that aim to awaken readers to the fact that wildlife populations are in decline because the native plants they depend on are fast disappearing. His solution is simple: plant more natives! To see a video presentation by him hosted by the Swampscott Conservancy go to: [youtube.com/watch?v=C9aD5N5D3QM&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9aD5N5D3QM&t=1s)

"In the past," Tallamy has said, "we have asked [only] one thing of our gardens: that they be pretty. Now they have to support life, sequester carbon, feed pollinators and manage water."

NYC's Local Law 11 recognizes the critical role that native plants play in keeping neighborhood ecosystems diverse and providing healthy habitat. Implementation of the law has resulted in the creation of gardens that support a sustainable planet *and* are pretty.