Keeping Water Local at Riverbend

Demonstration Project #2: Native Plants–Drought Tolerant Garden

At our driveway entrance at Riverbend, IRWA created a drought tolerant garden with native plants and non-invasive cultivars. The purpose of the garden is to illustrate how to have a beautiful landscape that uses little water and no chemicals.

The key to a beautiful and low-maintenance garden is choosing the right plants. The garden at Riverbend’s entrance is planted with native and drought-tolerant perennial flowers, shrubs, and ornamental grasses that require no supplemental watering. Native plants are hardy and evolved to tolerate New England’s weather extremes, from summer drought to winter storm. It is important to make sure that plants are well suited to the site conditions – taking sun/shade, soil type, wetness/dryness into consideration is essential for success.

The plants used in this garden include (*native):


Shrubs: Virginia Sweetspire*, Fothergilla*, Northern Bayberry*, Winterberry*

Ornamental Grasses: Little Bluestem*, Feather Reed Grass

The New England Wildflower Society is an excellent resource for native plants - local nurseries are increasingly stocking native plants as well. Equally important, check here for a list of invasive plants to avoid. Often, there is a native plant that provides a similar attribute to that of a popular nonnative, invasive species. A good example is blueberry vs. burning bush: both have foliage that turns a beautiful red in fall; but blueberries (highbush for wet areas or lowbush for dry areas) are native, while burning bush (winged euonymous) is invasive. See the New England Wildflower Society for a list of plants that are good alternative to common invasive species.

In establishing this garden, we added compost, which is an excellent soil amendment for both sandy and clayey soils. Compost increases the water retention and nutrient availability of most soils, thus aiding in making a site more drought tolerant and fertile. While limited watering was done after planting (as is typical), we did not add any irrigation mechanisms (such as drip irrigation hoses) to the site, as it is our intention not to water this site once it is fully established.

Links:
List of Massachusetts Prohibited Invasive Plants: [http://www.mass.gov/agr/farmproducts/proposed_prohibited_plant_list_v12-12-05.htm](http://www.mass.gov/agr/farmproducts/proposed_prohibited_plant_list_v12-12-05.htm)

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