

# Missouri - Grow Native!

Administering Agency:

Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (non-profit)

Contact(s)

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Please provide a two-sentence description of the program:

Grow Native! promotes naturally resilient plants for naturally beautiful landscapes to help the MDC increase biological diversity on the state's public and private lands. Using a combination of education, demonstration and marketing techniques, Grow Native! boosts consumer and commercial demand for Missouri-grown native plants and helps consumers easily find both quality native plant materials and capable native landscape professionals.

How long has this program been operational (month and year)?

The Grow Native! program was initiated July 1, 2000.

Why was the program created? (What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?)

MDC is charged with sustaining and increasing biodiversity in Missouri. Biodiversity depends on the widespread existence of native plants and natural plant communities. However, most of Missouri, over 93%, is privately owned, and most landowners carry on the tradition of replacing native plants with crops, cultivars and exotics. To increase biodiversity statewide, MDC realized it must encourage landowners, land managers and landscape professionals to "think natives first" for all landscape uses. MDC also realized that promoting qualified native plant growers, marketers and landscape professionals would help consumers and commercial clients get in the habit of choosing and using native plants, thereby increasing biodiversity.

Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

(NOTE: Please see Program Time Line, 3rd Quarter Operational Plan Report and Program Business Plan, attached.)

Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The Grow Native! program is unique within the MDC and the nation. No other agency has taken a free market approach to solving a widespread public problem: declining biological diversity. Instead of taking on all problem-related education, promotion, plant production, distribution and installation efforts, the program builds partnerships among private industry, government agencies, and interested nonprofits.

This partnership approach expands staff efforts exponentially, achieving goals far faster than possible through MDC’s efforts alone. The emphasis on privatization also allows existing and new alternative agricultural ventures to prosper, adding statewide economic benefit. Many value-added crops and new, related agribusiness ventures may arise specifically for small, family farms across the state, and also in regions of the state that are currently economically depressed including those of Ozark and Bootheel. The program’s web site, www.grownative.org, launched December 1, 2002, is already a respected on-line source of information about native plants of the Midwest. Its use continues to grow on a monthly basis.

What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide detail about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

First year budget was \$60,000 including all salaries, expenses and supplies.

What are the program’s annual operational costs? This year’s budget (FY03) is \$188,000.

BUDGET ITEM	1st YEAR FY01	2nd YEAR FY02	3rd YEAR FY03
Salaries	\$48,000\$	\$81,000	
Expenses	\$12,000\$	\$107,000	
TOTAL	\$60,000\$	\$188,000	
Percent MDC funds	100%	76%	
Percent Grant funds		24%	

How is the program funded?

The program is funded through MDC budget and federal grants. In FY03 the ratio is about 80% MDC and 20% USDA Rural Economic Development grant funding.

Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No.

What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

We use standard computer software and hardware including Windows NT/2000, MS Office XP (Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint), GroupWise, Dell-PC. We also use a digital camera, data projector and slide projector. We use ‘SuperStats Reporting’ to chart web site traffic.

To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator’s name, present address and telephone number.

Yes. Judy Allmon suggested the unique marketing concept for the program. Her personal address and phone number is 14124 Stevens Road, Russellville, MO 65074, 573-782-4059.

Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

No, in fact, other Midwestern states are currently interested in licensing the program. Several out-of-state agencies and organizations including Kansas Department of Transportation and Iowa Native Roadside Vegetation Center regularly consult with Grow Native! staff.

Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

The program has been successfully launched, but it continues to discover opportunities for development, mainly in the areas of education and certification, promotion, product development and market research.

For example, federal incentive programs (LEED, EPA) reward architects and engineers for designing and implementing environmentally responsible buildings and infrastructure. Native plants are a key tool developers can use to control storm water runoff and win “green building” points. However, few architects, engineers and installation contractors know how to use natives in residential and commercial construction projects. Grow Native! has responded with a comprehensive landscape professional training and certification program, offering initial coursework annually. Future plans include delivering continuing education on-line. We also plan improve outreach to Missouri’s Hispanic agriculture and landscape community, which provides much of the production and installation labor to our native plant industry.

The new Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) provides unprecedented incentives to use native plants in conservation programs, and Grow Native! is promoting this message to those with the most power to act on it: Missouri’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) employees and their landowner clients.

As Grow Native! works with its coalition partners, it discovers gaps between product supply and demand. For example, many consumers and commercial clients want native shrubs and woodland forbs. Unfortunately, few producers specialize in these. In FY ‘04, the Grow Native! program will seek funds to research, develop and deliver commercially desirable, but as yet, unavailable species to market.

While Missouri’s native plant industry has been growing rapidly over the past 20 years, no entity has undertaken to study its parts, dimensions or activities. In FY ‘04, Grow Native! will seek funding to launch a comprehensive study of Missouri’s native plant industry, fully exposing gaps in supply, areas of unmet demand, and niche markets for alternative fibers, feeds. By working with native plant industry leaders, the Missouri Department of Agriculture and other coalition members, Grow Native!’s goal to help stimulate and stabilize a fully organized Missouri native plant industry focused on areas of maximum opportunity to produce, market and implement native plants on all Missouri landscapes could be realized by FY2005. Grow Native!’s complete vision for Missouri’s partnership-fortified native plant industry is one which influences and works cooperatively with neighboring states for the region’s greater economic, ecological and social good.

Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

While America’s natural heritage is native, our cultural heritage is predominantly European. The greatest challenge in promoting native plants (and biodiversity in general) is our social preference for European-based landscapes and plants. Most people simply don’t know about native plants, their beauty and their benefits. At the same time, people express a hunger for things that are more natural, simpler, more effective, and even saner.

Apparently, Grow Native! has struck a chord with those who crave a stronger connection with nature and more meaning in their lives. The longer Grow Native! operates, the more people contact MDC for native plant information, materials and programming. Almost every Grow Native! education program has sold out, and people and professional groups around the state ask Grow Native! to hold programs or presentations in their areas. Landscape professionals eagerly enroll in the Grow Native! membership program, register for Grow Native! training and endorsement programs, and agree to serve on Grow Native! committees.

If more people are buying and planting Missouri native plants, then Missouri’s biological diversity must be on the rise. That said, it’s still hard to persuade some user segments that Missouri native plants have place in the landscape market and on public and private landscapes. Many people still regard natives as ugly, troublesome weeds. This attitude proves the need for Grow Native!’s work to continue and grow.

How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The program always had its unique marketing emphasis, but it began as an outreach to homeowners and emphasized small landscapes. The emphasis of the program now is on landscapes of all sizes and has specific material directed to home-scale, small acreage and large-scale landscapes. The program also works in coalition with other state agencies toward common goals including the Missouri Department of Agriculture (several grants are pending toward statewide agribusiness seminar program); and Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT). Grow Native! helped the MoDOT gain \$1 million in federal transportation enhancement funds for reestablishment of native roadside plantings along with a 20% match for the planting project from the MDC.

What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Any state with the vision and political will can implement a Grow Native! type of program. It mainly takes time to develop partnerships; money to pay creative, education and market-oriented staff; and money to produce the membership and marketing materials. Because biodiversity should spread across state boundaries, Grow Native! is interested in franchising its program to boundary states, facilitating the flow of locally grown plant materials to appropriate markets. At this time, three states have expressed an interest in such an agreement. A state that chooses to franchise the Grow Native! program can save itself several years and thousands of dollars in start-up and development costs.