

## Taking in the naturescape

Salt Lake Tribune, 2006-03-26

By Maggie Wolf - Special to The Tribune

From energy savings to increased resale value, the benefits of landscaping your home are well-known. But there may be other "hidden" benefits, especially when you buy and use native Utah plants. Most native nursery plants are produced in the state, so every one you buy helps bolster the local economy. Plus, native plants are well adapted to Utah soils and dry climates. They harbor native birds and insects, fostering a balance between pests and predators. The sustainable nature of Utah native plants means less irrigation, less pesticide, less pollution and less labor. For homeowners, the bottom line is saving time and money.

The Utah's Choice program helps Utahns learn about naturescaping through its Web site - <http://www.utahschoice.org> - as well as publications and a tagging program.

Utah's Choice is unique among similar programs nationwide in its focus on native species. In 2003, the Intermountain Native Plant Growers Association (INPGA) formed to assist Utah nurseries and garden centers in promoting 40 native plants that perform well in landscapes. These choices include grasses, perennials, shrubs and trees.

Because most homeowners appreciate some guidance on [landscape design](#), INPGA wrote and published a booklet featuring sample nativescapes. "Utah at Home: Landscaping With Native Plants" is a handy tool for learning how to arrange these plants, allowing landscapes to mature gracefully. At the center of the booklet, a table of information lists plant height, spread, flower color, sun preference, water needs and more. Nurseries and [garden centers](#) participating in Utah's Choice also sell this booklet.

The program provides plant tags to garden centers and nurseries to help customers easily find these natives. Information on plant characteristics and a photograph of the plant at maturity give customers a good idea of where to place the plant and how to nurture it. Many Utahn-owned garden centers sell Utah's Choice plants; check the Web site for a list of participating vendors. Because demand is still relatively small, you won't find these species at the big box or discount stores.

The INPGA also hosts a seed "bank" for members of the group. By encouraging native [plant growers](#) to begin growing seed stock plants, INPGA hopes to avoid plant shortages as demand increases. While collecting plants from the wild endangers species survival, stock plants can provide seed and perhaps cuttings for propagation purposes.

[Seed](#) produced by stock plants may then be sold to the INPGA seed bank, sustaining the native plant growers' productivity.

Utah's Choice provides a great resource for homeowners, but only succeeds when garden center customers ask for and buy these plants. Whether you're growing a new landscape or renovating an existing area, learn more about Utah's Choice. Once established, your naturescape will not only allow you more free time and spending money, but also deeper appreciation of Utah's natural beauty.

### Grow native plants from seed

Utah State University Extension Plant Propagation workshops are offering participants eight species of Utah native plants, including grasses, shrubs and perennial flowers. Learn how to grow the natives from seed, and take home a potential 72 seedlings. Cost is \$25. Workshops are

set Tuesday, 6-9 p.m.; Thursday, 6-9 p.m.; and Saturday, 10-4 p.m. For locations and to register, call 801-468-3179. Class sizes are limited to 15.

---

Maggie Wolf is an assistant professor for Utah State University Extension in Salt Lake County. E-mail her at [maggiew@ext.usu.edu](mailto:maggiew@ext.usu.edu). Send comments to [livingeditor@sltrib.com](mailto:livingeditor@sltrib.com).