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Mother Nature has designs to follow

By Beth Smith

Design with Mother Nature, not against her. Listen to your mother. She reveals her secrets if you take the time to listen.

PLANT IN LAYERS. Tall canopy trees, understory trees and shrubs, ground level plants. Include vines to connect the layers or to sprawl on the ground.

MULCH. It conserves water, reduces weeds, enhances soil. Allow the fallen leaves to stay in place to decompose and provide free mulch. You can speed up the decomposition process by raking them into rows and running the mower over the piles. Place the shredded leaves around your plants. Birds will scratch through them looking for tasty morsels to eat.

GO NATIVE. Native plants are adapted to the local climate, soils and native animals with which they co-evolved. Once they are established they are often drought-tolerant and generally need far less care than nonnative plants. Natives provide food at different times of the year in the

form of berries, seeds or insects. They present recognizable, safe nesting sites and shelter protecting birds from inclement weather and predators. The native flora and fauna are interconnected and beneficial to each other and provide more biodiversity in your yard.

LESS LAWN, MORE PATCHES OF NATIVE GRASSES, SHRUBS AND WILDFLOWERS. Lawns are ecologically sterile environments consisting of alien grass species that support mostly Japanese beetle grubs. Lawns require more water, energy, fertilizers, time and money than natural areas.

LIMIT PESTICIDES. Pesticides kill good insects along with bad ones. Plants in nature sustain some insect damage but pests do not overpopulate a natural ecosystem because of the presence of natural enemies. Limiting pesticides allows the natural enemies to control the pests.

Beth Smith is a member of The Garden Keepers, the organization responsible for the Sensory Garden at Living History Park.