

## Planting Guilds



A plant guild is a method of growing plants in groups that mimic natural habitats. The diversity of plant material and their roles in the guild support plant health while minimizing the human impact.

There are similarities between planting guilds and companion planting, but guilds are typically a longer-term design composed of perennials throughout the landscape. Plants work together at different heights (layers) within the landscape and assume roles naturally including: providing mulch, fertilizing, pest control, attracting pollinators, and other functions dependent on plant variety. Plant guilds are an opposing technique to monoculture which relies more heavily on human input to overcome problems such as diseases and pests.

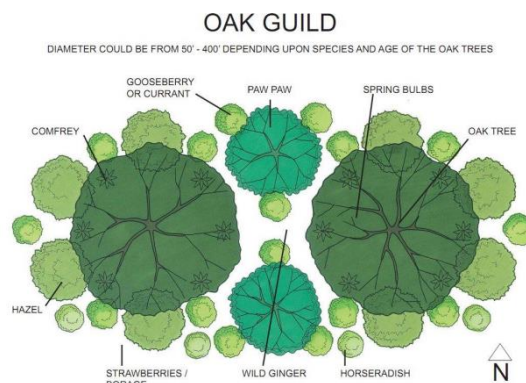
According to Midwest Permaculture, there are at least seven layers in an ecosystem. Not all of these layers have to be present for a healthy plant guild, but establishing plants in the landscape within the layer they naturally occupy is ideal.

Plant guild designs often begin at the center with the main crop. This is typically one or more trees that outrank the other crops by their size. They fill the canopy layer of the guild, filtering sunlight and protecting plants below from heavy rain. Trees provide a habitat and shelter for birds and wildlife and sometimes a food source. Trees also have aesthetic value.

Beneath the canopy layer are shrubs which can work together with trees to create a wind break. Vines can also fill this space and use the canopy plants to support their vertical growth.

The herbaceous layer beneath the trees and shrubs consists of perennial plants varied in their roles. Herbaceous perennials can be useful as a mulch layer, to attract pollinators and break up the soil with strong root systems. Deep rooted plants can help alleviate soil compaction. False indigo (*Baptisia australis*) and clover (*Trifolium repens*) are herbaceous plants that fix nitrogen.

Below this layer, groundcovers serve as mulch for the landscape protecting plants from erosion, water runoff and excessive





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temperatures. Plants such as, strawberries (*Fragaria x ananassa*) and white clover (*Trifolium repens*) are able to block other aggressive plants from invading and competing for nutrients.

Plants at the root layer play an important role in guilds as well. They can be a food source, improve drainage and fix nitrogen among other functions.

Quick tips for planting guilds:

- Select plants with similar water requirements.
- Vary the root systems to reduce competition for nutrients.
- Choose plants based on their function ensuring each plant has two to three uses. Some examples include: food, medicine, aesthetics, craft value.

Visit Midwest Permaculture for an in-depth look at plant guild designs to support your landscape. <https://midwestpermaculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Plant-Guilds-eBooklet-Midwest-Permaculture.pdf>

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