If you are considering a native plant garden, take time to design it. You will enjoy it more, and it will be easier to care for. Do things in this order:

1. Make a map and check drainage
2. Hardscapes go in first
3. Choose plants

1. Make a map and check drainage:
The first thing to be done is to consider the whole area you are landscaping. Even if you are not going to plant it all at once, draw your map (including hardscape and planting areas). The finished product will have the continuity you want. Dig several holes and fill with water. If they don’t empty in 2 hours, you have poor drainage. You can often offset this by building raised planting areas.

2. Hardscape, what you might want besides plants:
Pathways
If it is a large area you may want pathways through it. This not only adds interest, but helps you access your planting beds easily. It also breaks up a large area into smaller manageable pieces for working on or planting.
Water
You should include placement of waterlines, and decisions regarding type of water system (sprinkler, drip, etc.). Most natives benefit from some extra water. You may also want a water feature or bird bath.
Other elements
-- A large rock or rocks, logs, fences, benches or yard art all can provide interest and habitat.
--Some people like the look of a dry creek bed with or without a bridge.
--If the area is flat you should consider building some low hills to plant on for interest and better drainage.
--If you think you may someday want to have path lighting, water fountain, or some other electric device in your garden, bury a pipe under pathways you can push a wire through later.

3. Choosing Plants—some general guidelines:
--Fall is the best time to plant natives. Some native plants like shade, others don’t. The ones that like sun require at least 6-8 hours daily.
--A few natives will die if they get summer water. Know which ones these are, and avoid planting them in places that receive summer water.
--Think about sun angle. Will any of your new plants be shaded by existing trees, shrubs, fences etc. during the winter?
--You want your garden to be a habitat, not just a place for plants. So think about plants with different flowering times, flower colors, shapes, and even berries. It will look better to you also.
--Structural variety is most pleasing, and better for wildlife. Your plants should be of various heights.
--Don’t forget to include grasses as they provide habitat and contrast with leafy plants.
--It’s OK to prune natives, and in some cases it is required to keep them from getting rangy. Some natives make a fine hedge.
--Plant several plants of the same species together, at least 4 sq. feet. It looks better, and pollinators benefit from the large nectar sources.
--It’s OK to plant non-natives if you have some favorites. Just remember, as a general rule, natives will be utilized by the local creatures more than non-natives.

Your local native plant nursery can help you choose plants once you have an idea of what you want and need for your area. Bringing your map with the hardscapes drawn in will help the nurseryperson assist you in choosing appropriate plants.