

If you cannot plant when collected, store the seeds in a cool place until spring. During winter, you can use the trunk of your car or the crawl space of your house for storage. However, as soon as it starts to get warm, place them in the refrigerator. All it takes is one 80° day to break the germination cycle and the seeds will have to go through another cold spell before growing.

Hard dense seeds may need their seed coat scratched before germinating. Shaking them in a small coffee can lined with rough sandpaper is a good way to do this.

Prairie seeds need light to sprout. Once the garden is plowed and cultivated, just scratch the surface, then pack the seeds down by stepping on them.

Maintaining Your Prairie Garden

The biggest challenge of prairie gardening is controlling weeds during the first two or three years. Prairie plants spend the first years of their life rooting while Eurasian weeds put all their energy above the ground, crowding out prairie seedlings.

You can control weeds in a variety of ways using herbicides, mulching or hand weeding. Planting a groundcover crop the first summer, like oats or annual rye, will take up space so weeds cannot crowd out prairie plants. Since they only live one year, they will allow prairie plants room to expand the second year.

Mowing and raking every spring also helps control weeds and promote growth. You should mow in late June with the blade set above 5-8 inches high. This will cut back early growing annual weeds, but not affect slower-growing prairie plants.

By the third year, there is little for the prairie gardener to do but enjoy their colorful landscape!

Prairie gardens require no covering, no pruning, no spraying, no irrigating and little, if any, fertilizing—saving prairie gardeners hundreds of dollars in maintenance costs and hours of labor.



Selected References

The Prairie Garden: 70 Native Plants You Can Grow in Town or Country. J. Robert Smith and Beatrice S. Smith, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980.

Nursery Sources: Native Plants and Seeds. Available from New England Wildflower Society, Garden in the Woods, Hemenway Rd, Dept FG, Framingham MA 01701.

Sources of Prairie, Woodland and Wetland Plants and Seeds:

Quailcrest Farm
2810 Armstrong Rd
Wooster OH 44691
(330) 345-6722

Baker's Acres, Inc.
3388 Castle Rd NW
Alexandria OH 43001
(740) 924-6525

Prairie Moon Nursery
Route 3, Box 1633
Winona MN 55987
(507) 452-1362

Prairie Nursery
PO Box 306
Westfield WI 53964
(800) 476-9453

Prairie Ridge Nursery
9738 Overland Rd
Mt. Horeb WI 53572
(608) 437-5245

Applewood Seed Co.
5380 Vivian St
Arvada CO 80002
(303) 431-7333

Ion Exchange
1878 Old Mission Dr
Harpers Ferry IA 52146
(800) 291-2143

Shooting Star Nursery
444 Bates Rd
Frankfort KY 40601
(502) 223-1679



Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Division of Natural Areas and Preserves
1889 Fountain Square Court, F1
Columbus OH 43224
(614) 265-6453
ohiodnr.com

Making a Prairie Garden

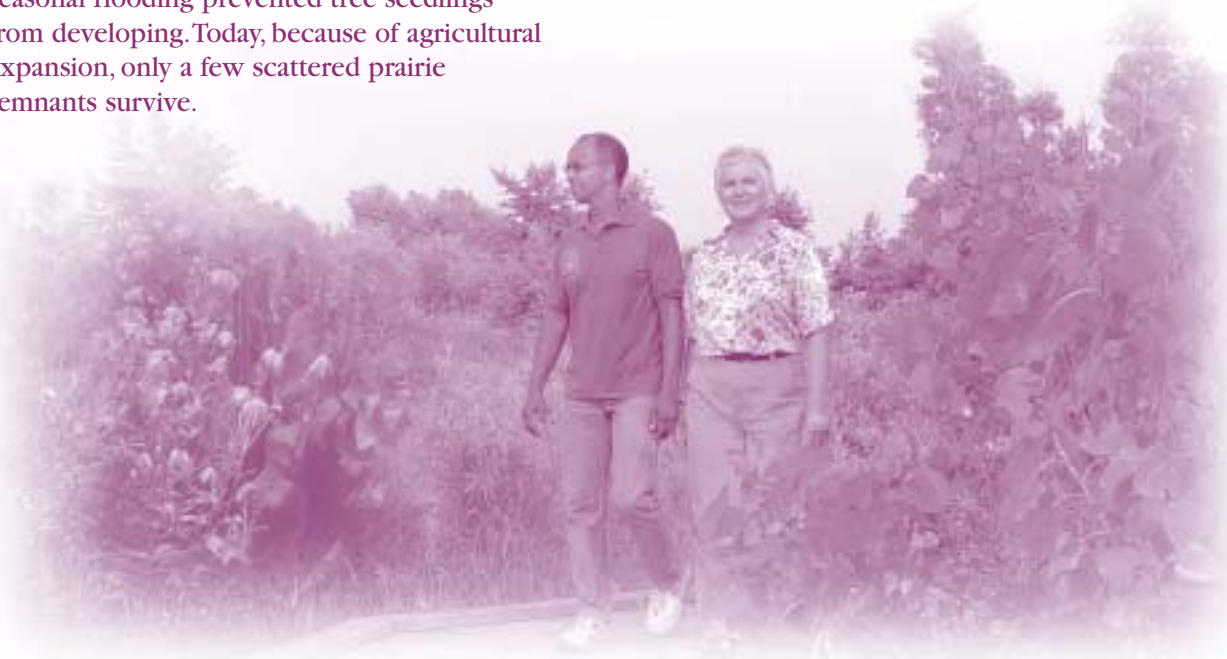


Making a Prairie Garden

Easy-to-grow prairie plants are among nature's most spectacular flowers, producing waist-high blooms of brilliant yellow, flaming crimson and soft lavender. Because of their extensive root systems, prairie plants can be the answer to problem garden spots. Once established, they require little maintenance.

Small patches of prairie grow throughout much of Ohio. They are relicts of a time 4,000-6,000 years ago when a sustained warm, dry period caused the expansion of drought-resistant western plants eastward through Ohio to western Pennsylvania.

When the rain and cooler summers eventually returned, the eastern edge of the prairie again gave way to forest except for pockets of land where erosion, shallow dry soils or prolonged seasonal flooding prevented tree seedlings from developing. Today, because of agricultural expansion, only a few scattered prairie remnants survive.

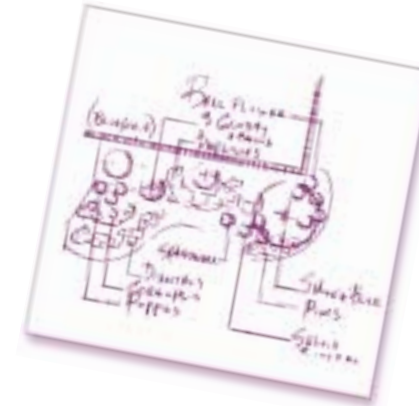


Choosing the Site

The first step in creating a prairie landscape is to choose the site. Except for needing full sunlight, prairie plants adapt to most conditions.

Prairie plants grow in a diversity of soil, from clay to sand, and tolerate a wide range of soil fertility and acidity. Prairie plants also grow in dry shallow soils or marshy soils that most plants cannot tolerate.

Prairies are divided into three types—dry, mesic (moderately moist) and wet. Mesic and dry prairie plants prefer loose soil with good drainage. Wet species grow in poorly drained areas, where water stands after a heavy rain. Using a wide range of prairie species can help disguise problem areas, such as a boggy hollow or gravel hill.



Planning

Once the site is selected, you may want to draw a planting plan. The following tips can help you design an attractive and healthy garden.

- Prairies are grasslands, but check local weed control ordinances before planting prairie grasses. Instead, you may prefer to concentrate on prairie wildflowers.
- Use native Ohio species whenever possible.
- Match plants to your soil—dry, mesic or wet.
- Fit the size of the plants to the size of your area. Keep tall plants to the edges.
- Planting in curves, instead of rows, will give you a more natural look.
- Allow one species to dominate, then blend into another.
- Try for continuous color throughout the growing season.
- In a large prairie garden, you may want to make paths to walk along.
- You can turn your prairie garden into a wildlife oasis by selecting plants that are attractive to butterflies, birds and other wildlife.

Nurseries that sell prairie seeds or books about prairie flowers can help you select the best species to suit your needs.

Collecting Seeds

Many prairie plants are rare or endangered and are protected by law when growing on public land.

- Seeds can not be collected from state nature preserves or wildlife areas.
- Always obtain permission from landowners before collecting on private land.

Scout prairie areas during the peak blooming season, late July through August, to find which seeds you want to collect. Then draw a map or mark the flowers with a stake or tie.

Seeds should be collected when they become ripe in the fall. Leave enough seeds at the collection site for it to propagate itself. Digging a mature plant is not a good idea—its deep roots make it almost impossible to transplant.



Preparing & Planting

Once collected, seeds should be spread on a screen to dry, which prevents mold. Remove any surrounding plant material from the seeds.

Because the seeds have to go through a cold spell to trigger germination, they have a better chance of germinating if they are planted in the fall, as soon as they become ripe. However, fall planting increases the toll taken by rodents, birds and insects during the winter, so plant more seeds than needed.