



Tips for Prairie Gardens

- Design your prairie style landscape to include 50-75 percent grasses. By competing with the prairie wildflowers, grasses help keep them from growing too tall or becoming aggressive. They also frame the flowers, adding a refined texture to some of the coarser-looking prairie plants, and hiding the legs of seasonal wildflowers that go dormant. With competition you can control aggressive seeders like ironweed, *Ratibida* or pitcher sage. Plants with underground runners like maximillian and sawtooth sunflower, Jerusalem artichoke, late Canada goldenrod and prairie cordgrass are more difficult to control and are best planted in a confined space.
- It is best to plant in a random pattern so it won't look lined up or artificial. Prairie plants will seed around the garden and show up in random locations (free plants for the frugal gardener!). Most only become a nuisance on open ground.
- If a prairie garden appears too informal, you can soften the wild look by providing a distinct border or edge between the prairie garden and other areas to show that this is a planned landscape.
- Smaller plantings are easier to establish by planting wildflowers and grasses that were grown in small plug containers rather than from seed. Later on you can broadcast seeds of pioneer forbs—like upright prairie coneflower, wild larkspur and plains coreopsis—to compete with weeds and add more interest.
- If possible, enrich the soil by adding a few inches of compost or good topsoil. Prairie plants will benefit from the enriched soil and from being raised above grade to improve drainage.
- Most prairie grasses take awhile to green up in the spring so include early season wildflowers and native sedges that will grow as soon as temperatures rise above freezing and compete with aggressive forbs and spring weeds like henbit and dandelions. Sedges are wonderful for this and there are native sedges for both wet and dry soils.
- In a prairie garden, it helps to make root competition so fierce that grasses and forbs don't get leggy and nothing is allowed to be aggressive.
- Weeds are best eradicated before planting or sowing, because they can out-compete or shade slower-growing prairie seedlings
- Pick your battles! Spend your efforts on the worst weed problems and try to eliminate them early on.
- Once established, water your garden only during periods of extended drought. Otherwise the ones that can survive on rainfall will rot and you'll be left with plants that require extra water.

