

Spring

March-May

To Do:

- Sharpen bed edges by cleaning up invading turf grass.
- Freshen mulch; wood chip mulch should be a total of 2-3" deep. If you have mulch left from last year include that in the measurement and freshen with a light layer.
- Cut back old stems in late-April once temperatures are consistently reaching 55°.
- Avoid spraying weed killers (herbicides) in early spring as they damage new tree leaves. This time of year weeds are best managed by pulling, digging or using pre-emergent.

Weeds to pull:

- Crabgrass
- Bindweed
- Honeysuckle

Weeds to leave:

- Henbit (fades in the summer heat)
- Dandelions (spring pollinator food)
- Clover (spring pollinator food)



What is Pre-emergent?

- a weed killer (herbicide) that kills weeds before they sprout by preventing the seeds from germinating. It comes in pellets and is spread on the ground and watered to activate. This makes it less likely to harm the plants you want to keep that are already growing.

Summer

June-August

To Do:

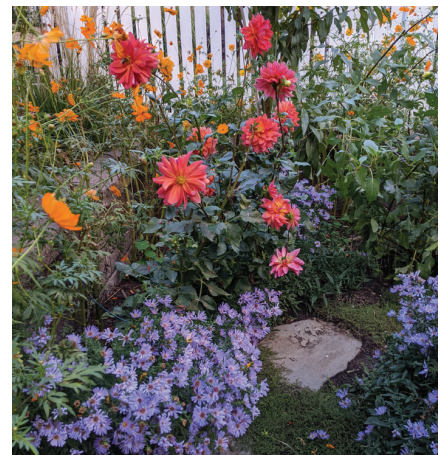
- Check in with your garden every two weeks so work stays manageable and fun.
- Plan to “edit” rather than pull every weed; focus on the largest and most aggressive and leave the less troublesome for later.
- Pull woody (tree and shrub) seedlings while they are small.
- Cut back stems of flowers that are done blooming to varying heights between 8-24” to provide nests for native bees.

Weeds to pull:

- Thistles
- Tree seedlings
- Button Weed

Weeds to leave:

- Seedlings from your garden plants
- Clover
- Anything too small to pull easily



Sit back and enjoy the view!

- Don't forget to take time to kick back and enjoy the beauty you've worked so hard to create. Take a daily or weekly walk through the garden to see what is blooming and which insects are visiting. You can share your observations with other gardeners and scientists on the iNaturalist app or take notes for your future self in a garden journal. It can be fun to track the changes in bloom time and visitors year-to-year.

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Fall

September-November

To Do:

- Use mulch or new plants to fill any bare spots left by weeding or plants that didn't make it through the heat.
- Plant groundhuggers like sedges or spring bulbs as a "living mulch" to lessen your need for wood chips in the spring.
- Cut back stems to 8-24" and leave the leaves as pollinator habitat over the winter. Native bees nest and hibernate in stems and leaf debris.
- Spot spray grassy weeds after native plants go dormant.
- Stay on top of weed trees before they get to large to pull.

Weeds to pull:

- Quackgrass
- Fescue
- Brome

Woody seedlings to watch for:

- Mulberries
- Sumac
- Maples



Prepare new gardens for spring:

- Fall is a good time to prepare the soil in any new garden beds you will be planting in the spring. Lay down cardboard and mulch to kill turf. Till and add compost. Whatever your chosen method, now is the time to get ahead of the spring mud and have your garden ready for planting.

Watering

After Planting:

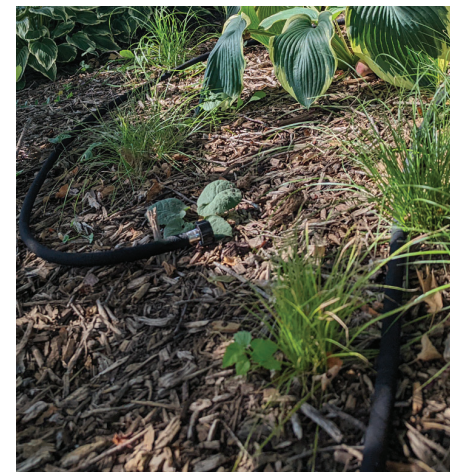
- The first 6 weeks after planting is called the "Establishment Period". The plants are settling in to their new home and growing roots. This is when watering is most important.
- Week 1-2 after planting: water every other day.
- Week 3-4 after planting: water twice a week.
- Week 5-6 after planting: water once a week.
- After establishment only water when you haven't received at least half an inch of rain in two weeks.

Tools:

- 2 gal watering can
- good hose; doesn't kink easily
- watering wand; gentle shower
- Bonus: a soaker hose!

Amounts:

- 2 gallons per tree
- Count of 10 per plant
- 1 hour with soaker hose



Soaker hoses are an easy way to establish new plants and efficiently deliver water right to the roots.

Tips:

- Water at soil level with can or watering wand. Avoid overhead sprinklers and use a soaker hose. Sprinklers and watering too high loose water to evaporation and cause foliar diseases and flopping.

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Preparing a Garden Bed

Steps:

1. Measure and layout shape of garden with a hose or rope.
2. Mow or weed whack grass very short and close to the ground.
3. Mark edges with spray paint or flags.
4. Use sharp spade to cut and flip sod over in 6-12" border around garden bed (sod in center of bed can be left or flipped).
5. Cover garden bed area with cardboard or 3-4 layers of newspaper.
6. Cover cardboard/newspaper with 1-2" of compost (optional).
7. Cover garden area with 2-3" of mulch.

Alternatives:

- kill off grass with herbicide; this usually requires 2 applications and you need to start 4-6 weeks before planting. Skip to step 6.
- Cut holes in cardboard to plant immediately, lay compost and mulch after planting.

We recommend:

- Preparing your garden bed 1-2 weeks before planting (4-6 if using herbicide) although you can plant immediately. If planting immediately make sure water is getting to plant roots below cardboard.
- Using wood chip or straw mulch. Grass clippings can be used if you know it is free of weed seed.



Cardboard over grass, shrub planted immediately. Left: underneath 1 month later. Edge made with bricks.

Fall Cleanup

To Do:

- Cut back flower stems to varying heights between 18-24".
- Cut large, flopping plants in half for cleaner look.
- Lighten up deep piles of leaves and debris.
- Cut back and kill or dig up woody seedlings.

Things not to do:

- Cut all plant material and grasses back to ground.
- Remove all stems.
- Remove leaves completely.

Why leave stems and leaves?

- Stems provide nesting spaces for native bees and other pollinators. Leaves and plant debris cover the ground for the winter providing shelter for wildlife and decomposing; adding organic matter and improving the soil.



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Spring Cleanup

To Do:

1. Cut back grasses to 1-3".
2. Remove remaining dead stems and standing leaves.
3. Rake up large or deep piles of leaves that may smother new plants. Leave some to continue decomposing and building soil

Tips for cutting back grasses:

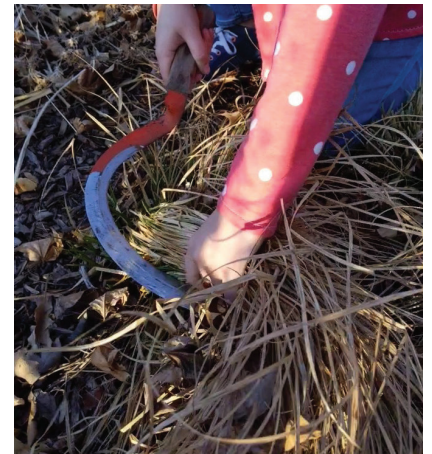
- Tie large clumps with twine before cutting to make it easier to collect debris.
- Use a grass knife or sickle, save pruners for stems and plants.
- Wear long sleeves and gloves, dry grasses dust and splinters can be very itchy and hard to wash off!

Timing:

- Don't clean up plant debris until at least late-April or early-May. Most critters have woken up once temperatures are consistently reaching 50*. There is no hurry!

We recommend:

- Composting your plant material at your home or taking to city compost site. Keep plant material out of the landfill so it can continue to build our soils and protects any remaining hibernating creatures.



Sickles make cutting grasses fast and easy.

Weeding

Work Smarter not Harder:

- Set boundaries of a reasonable area to work in based on the time you have. This lets you see your impact each time!
- Set priorities when you have limited time: largest, toughest, most problematic weeds first or most visible garden areas first.
- Cutting off seed heads buys you more time to pull the weeds before they can spread.

Tools:

- Dandelion digger
- Japanese Garden knife

Prevent is the best medicine:

- Keep soil covered with either plants or mulch.
- Start fresh; make sure to clean up weeds before planting.
- Put weeds in separate compost, don't put seed back in garden.



To spray or not to spray:

- Use chemicals sparingly in habitat gardens. Be sure to follow the label to prevent unintended damage.
- Pre-emergent can be very helpful for establishing gardens with lots of weeds seed in the soil.
- Avoid spring spraying that damages emerging tree leaves. Save spray for late fall emergency cleanup.

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Diversity

Types of diversity in the garden:

1. Species: have diversity in the types of plants you use.
2. Bloom time: have something blooming spring-fall.
3. Flower shape: flat, tube shaped, etc. insects have lots of different shapes of tongues and land on different types of flowers.
4. Color: for you and the pollinators.
5. Height: short plants in front, taller in back.
6. Type: mix grasses and flowers, if space allows include shrubs.
7. Flooring: wood chip mulch, straw, ground cover plants, a bit of bare soil for ground nesting bees.

The more diverse the garden:

- the more types of insects, birds and other wildlife it can support.
- the less you will notice the effects of drought, insects and disease on one plant, the garden as a whole still looks good.
- the more pleasing it will look to you. Prairie looks its best when it includes a variety of flowers and grasses.
- the better it will look year round. A truly diverse prairie garden is even beautiful in the middle of winter!



Mix flowers with grasses and shrubs for a garden with four season beauty.

Habitat

Food:

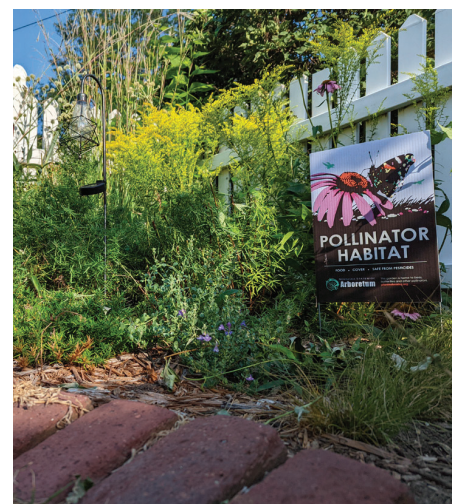
- variety of flower shapes, colors & bloom time.
- variety of leaf types.
- consider adding shrubs that produce berries for birds.

Shelter:

- Grasses provide shelter from wind & rain and winter hibernation.
- Cut flower stems in half after bloom & leave standing for the winter. Many native bees make their nests in hollow stems.
- Leave the leaves and plant debris in the garden. Many insects and small creatures hibernate in the leaves. Moths make their cocoons in the leaves.
- Pieces of logs and bark provide nests for many beetles and some bee species.
- Small areas of bare ground attract ground nesting bees. Don't over mulch and leave small areas with very light mulch.

Water:

- Add a few textured rocks to your bird bath for butterflies and bees to land on when drinking.
- Splash the sidewalk a bit when watering.
- Plant species like Cup Plant that hold droplets of water in their leaves.



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