

## GARDEN PLANS

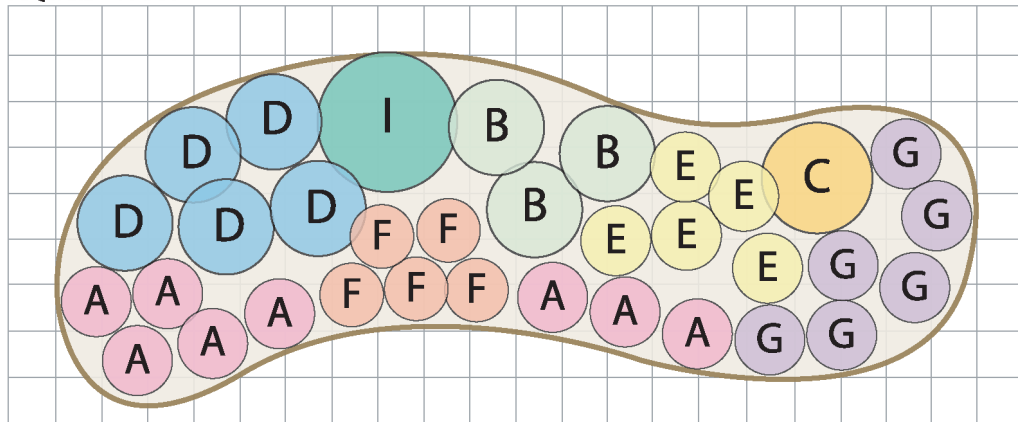


# Prairie Garden

NATIVE PLANTS HELP MAKE THIS GARDEN NEARLY FOOLPROOF.

One of the best things about planting native plants is that they are extraordinarily hardy and easy to grow. This prairie-inspired garden is a catalog of plants that Midwestern settlers would have found when they arrived. False blue indigo, wild petunia, prairie blazing star, and Indian grass are just a sample in this varied garden. Like the true prairie, this garden enjoys full sun and tolerates summer heat.

1 SQUARE = 1 FOOT



## PLANT LIST

### **A** **Prairie Dropseed** (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) (8)

Fine textured, emerald green leaves turn gold in fall, uniquely fragrant seed head. Zones 3-7, 2-4' tall.

ALTERNATE PLANT

#### **Sideoats Grama** (*Bouteloua curtipendula*)

Short grass with small oat-like seeds on one side of the stalk. Zones 3-7, 2-3' tall.

### **B** **Little Bluestem** (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) (3)

Blue-green foliage turns crimson in fall, fluffy silver seed heads. Zones 4-8, 2-3' tall.

ALTERNATIVE PLANT

#### **Western Sunflower** (*Helianthus occidentalis*)

Shorter of the native sunflowers, golden-yellow flowers on leafless stalks. Goldfinches adore the seeds. Zones 4-7, 2-3' tall.

### **C** **Indiangrass** (*Sorghastrum nutans*) (1)

Easy to grow and will tolerate light shade. Soft, silky seed heads. Zones 4-7, 5-7' tall.

ALTERNATE PLANT

#### **Switchgrass** (*Panicum virgatum*)

Lush foliage and conical seed heads turn gold in fall, upright stems stand up well in winter. Zones 3-7, 3-6' tall.

### **D** **Pale Purple Coneflower** (*Echinacea pallida*) (5)

Pale purple petals droop from prominent cone, blooms in June and July. Zones 4-7, 3-5' tall.

ALTERNATE PLANT

#### **Sweet Black-Eyed Susan** (*Rudbeckia subtomentosa*)

Butter-yellow blooms most of summer, reddish brown centers. Zones 4-7, 4-6' tall.

### **E** **Prairie Blazing Star** (*Liatris pycnostachya*) (5)

Wonderful showstopper! Purple-rose blooms in a spike form, blooming from top down. Zones 4-7, 3-5' tall.

ALTERNATE PLANT

#### **Beardstongue** (*Penstemon digitalis*)

Long blooming, white flowers tinged pink in June and into summer. Zones 4-7, 2-3' tall.

### **F** **Downy Phlox** (*Phlox pilosa*) (5)

Bright pink flowers in spring, Zones 4-7, 12" tall.

ALTERNATIVE PLANT

#### **Heath Aster** (*Aster ericoides*)

Named this since it resembles heath, small white flowers in fall, Zones 3-7, 1-3' tall.

### **G** **Wild Petunia** (*Ruellia humilis*) (6)

Wonderful violet, trumpet-shaped flowers in midsummer. Zones 4-7, 12-18" tall.

ALTERNATE PLANT

#### **Western Spiderwort** (*Tradescantia occidentalis*)

Hot pink flowers in June and July, low growing, Zones 4-8, 12" tall.

### **I** **False Blue Indigo** (*Baptisia australis*) (1)

Deep blue sweet-pea-like flowers in early summer, unique seed pod, Zone 4-8, 3-5' tall.

ALTERNATIVE PLANT

#### **White False Indigo** (*Baptisia lacteal*)

Very white flowers in early summer, slow growing but majestic, Zones 4-8, 3-5' tall.

**Before You Begin.** Preparation is the key to creating a garden that will offer a lifetime of pleasure. Before you head to the nursery or lift a spade, take the time to review all garden plan materials. Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Do I have a suitable location for this plan?** The layout diagram shows the dimensions for the plan as designed. In general, you can enlarge or reduce the size of the garden by adding or eliminating plants, although the character of the garden may change if you alter the size dramatically.
- **Does my yard offer the right conditions?** Check the plant list carefully to see whether the plan will do best in full sun, partial shade, or full shade. Also make sure that the plants are suited to your USDA Growing Zone. (In many cases, the alternative plants list includes varieties that will grow in other zones.)
- **Does my soil need improvement?** Most plants will survive in a variety of soil conditions, but well-drained, moist (but not soaked) soil is generally best. To test your soil, wet it thoroughly with a hose, wait 24 hours, then squeeze a clump in your hand. If the soil forms a ball that holds together, but breaks up easily when you poke it with your finger, your soil is ideal. If the soil won't hold its shape when squeezed, it is probably too sandy. If the clump doesn't break up easily, the soil may be too clay. In either case, you can improve your soil by mixing in organic matter like compost or peat moss.
- **Is my soil's pH and fertility okay?** Check at your local garden store for a soil test kit, or inquire about testing at a local county extension service office. Follow the recommendations that come with your test results if you need to correct the soil's pH (how acid or alkaline the soil is) or fertility.

**Creating the Bed.** To lay out your bed, use a garden hose to mark the edges. When you are satisfied with the layout, use striping paint (available at many home centers) to mark the outline. (Or, sprinkle flour along the hose for a more temporary mark.) Using a sharp spade, dig along the marked line to set the edge of your bed.

If the garden location is currently covered with lawn, you have a couple of options. For smaller areas, you can strip the sod using a straight-edged shovel. To make this easier, wet the area thoroughly, then use the shovel to cut the lawn into strips that are the width of the shovel and about three feet long. (Expert tip: Sharpen the edge of the shovel frequently with a file.) Use the shovel to pry up and roll back the strips of sod. Once the sod is removed, you can loosen the underlying soil with a shovel or a power tiller.

For larger areas covered by lawn, consider using a heavy-duty garden tiller to grind the sod into the underlying soil. This has the twin benefits of adding organic matter to the soil and eliminating the need to discard or compost sod.

Regardless of how you are preparing your bed, be sure to use this opportunity to mix in organic matter (such as compost, peat moss, or rotted manure) and loosen the soil at least 6 inches deep, or even 8 to 12 inches if you can. Don't mix in fertilizer unless your soil test shows a need; in general, excessive amounts of fertilizer will do more harm than good.

After your bed is prepared, water it thoroughly and wait a week. This will allow some weed seeds to germinate. Remove these seedlings or dig them back into the soil. If you choose to use chemicals to kill the weeds, follow the instructions to the letter, including the time to wait after application before planting.

**Edging.** Most beds are easier to maintain if they have an edging that keeps surrounding grass or vegetation from invading. Choose plastic, metal, stone, or brick -- whatever you prefer. If you have lawn around your bed, consider also including a mowing strip, a 6- to 12-inch-wide swath of masonry or stone set even with the surrounding soil.

**Planting.** Now comes the fun part! If you have all of your plants on hand, keep them in their pots and set them out on the planting bed. This will give you a preview of how the bed will look and allow you to make adjustments. Use the tags that come with the plants to ensure that the spacing is correct. Don't worry that the bed looks sparse; the young plants need room to grow.

When you're satisfied with the arrangement, plant your garden from largest to smallest container (usually trees first, then shrubs, perennials, and finally annuals). Each plant type does best with a specific planting method:

- **Trees.** Dig a hole that is slightly larger than the pot or root ball and deep enough so the top of the root ball or pot is slightly higher than the surrounding soil. For potted trees, remove the tree from the pot, loosen the soil slightly around the roots, then place the tree into the planting hole. For balled-and-burlapped trees, loosen the burlap after the tree is in the hole, cutting away as much of the burlap as possible. When the tree is in place and straight, fill the hole one-third with soil, tamp firmly to make good contact between roots and soil, then water. Repeat twice more until the hole is filled. Make a shallow collar of soil around the hole to catch water and hold it near the root zone. Water the tree thoroughly by letting a hose run slowly for 30 minutes.
- **Shrubs.** Plant shrubs in a hole that's about twice the diameter of the root ball. The top of the root ball should be slightly above the surrounding soil level. Backfill with garden soil, tamping firmly to ensure a contact between soil and roots. Water immediately by slowly running a hose at the shrub's base for about 20 minutes.
- **Perennials and Annuals.** Set these plants in soil at the same level they were growing in the pot. Firm the soil around each plant with your hands, then water thoroughly.

**Mulching.** As you place each plant, it's a good idea to add mulch to conserve moisture, cool the roots of plants, and protect the soil from washing away in the rain. Organic mulches like shredded bark will require periodic additions as the mulch decays. Mulches like crushed stone are more permanent, but may not offer the character you prefer.

**Aftercare.** The first season of growth is the most critical for your garden. A good guideline is to water thoroughly every other day for the first two weeks, then twice weekly for the remainder of the first season. The following year, you can let nature take its course, supplementing dry periods with deep watering.

You should also be diligent about weeding your bed during the first year. As the plants mature and fill in, there will be fewer opportunities for weeds to gain a foothold. A thick layer of mulch will also help keep weeds in check.

**Ongoing Maintenance.** Most plants will thrive with only minimal care. Apply a general fertilizer according to package directions in the spring after growth has started. If you need to prune trees or shrubs to maintain their shape or size, do it in late winter before growth has started. The exception to this general rule is spring-flowering shrubs like lilacs that should be pruned immediately after flowering.

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