



# WHAT TO EXPECT:

## Establishing **Prairie Vegetation** on Your Farm

### What is prairie vegetation?

A diverse mix of deep-rooted, stiff-stemmed native perennial grasses and flowering plants.

### Why grow prairie vegetation?

Perennial prairie plants offer many benefits, including:



**Nutrient loss reduction**



**Improved water infiltration**



**Erosion control**



**Pollinator habitat**



**Wildlife habitat**



**Aesthetics**

### Where can prairie vegetation fit on your farm?

Prairie vegetation can fit anywhere on the farm, including small areas (<1 acre), as long as the area is accessible to mow in the first crucial years of establishment.



#### **In-field strips**

Plant contour prairie strips at least 30 feet wide within row crops. You can increase width to match your field layout and farming equipment.



#### **Edge-of-field plantings**

Establish or improve field buffers to retain sediment and nutrients within the field, and increase wildlife and pollinator habitat.



#### **Marginal and unprofitable areas**

Convert low-profit areas out of row crop production to reduce time, effort, and inputs, and improve overall field profitability.



### BEFORE YOU PLANT

#### **How do I start?**

Consult with your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or similar organization for technical assistance and resources to determine a site-appropriate seed mix, available seeding options, timing recommendations, and cost share opportunities.

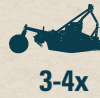
#### **When do I start?**

Establish prairie vegetation following soybean harvest in existing row crop fields to reduce the potential impact of previous herbicide use.

# What to Expect After Seeding Prairie Vegetation

## YEAR 1

- Prairie seedlings will be small and patchy, with grasses appearing first. Growth is primarily underground to establish extensive root systems.
- **Mow three or four times** when vegetation is knee-high, to a height of 4 to 8 inches, to reduce weed competition.



## YEAR 2

- More prairie species will be visible as root systems become more established and outcompete weeds.
- **Mow two or three times, when regeneration is knee-high.**
- **Spot spray with herbicide** using targeted sprayer technology or hand-held systems, being mindful of herbicide drift.



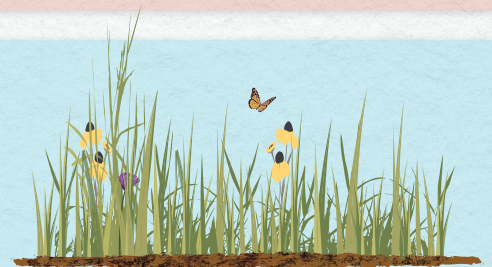
## YEAR 3

- Area will begin to look like a cohesive prairie planting.
- **Conduct a prescribed burn in the spring or fall** when the vegetation is dormant to help establish forbs and grasses and reduce weed competition.
- Control weedy or brushy areas if needed with **spot mowing or physical removal.**
- **Spot spray with herbicide** to control perennial weeds like Canadian thistle.



## YEAR 4-6

- Grasses and forbs will be established well enough to begin flowering.
- **One or two prescribed burns** in the dormant season will help to control weeds and further establish forbs.
- **One mid-summer (July 15–Aug. 31) haying** can help control brush and provide livestock feedstock or bedding. Vegetation will have time to regrow for overwintering wildlife habitat.



## YEAR 7+

- Perennial prairie vegetation is fully established, with many tall grasses and flowering forbs.
- **Prescribed burning or mowing every other year** helps to control trees, brush, and weeds, and stimulates growth of the native grasses and forbs.
- Vegetation increases in diversity with time and height.



## What Prairie Plants are Growing?

Free Online Plant ID Resources:

- [Seedling ID Guide for Native Prairie Plants \(USDA-NRCS\)](#)
- [Prairie Plants of Iowa \(University of Iowa Press and University of Iowa Libraries\)](#)



**CONSERVATION**  
LEARNING GROUP

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