

Management tips for establishing a native landscape

Weed Control

Weed control prior to seeding is critical. Controlling existing vegetation before planting is necessary to establish a successful seeding. Planting into established vegetation, such as turf grass, requires a chemical treatment to kill the existing vegetation. An alternative to chemical treatment is placing a weed barrier over the vegetation, such as weighted down black plastic, until the vegetation dies.

A Firm Seedbed

A firm seedbed is very important for good seed to soil contact necessary for seed germination. Plant seeds less than one-quarter inch deep. Use a no-till drill or broadcast seeds after tillage and compaction of the seedbed. You will be able to see seeds on the soil surface at this depth. Consider hiring a contractor who specializes in native landscapes to prepare and seed the site.



Native plantings, such as the one above, require less maintenance than turf grass, a cost-effective alternative for many businesses.



Native plantings work well in open space next to trails. Notice the mowed turf grass border that keeps the site looking well-kept.

Seeding Date Guidelines

Plant seeds within these guideline dates:

Spring	April 1-July 1
Dormant	Nov. 15-Freeze
Frost	Feb. 1-March 15

Establishing Native Landscapes

Any perennial plant requires time to establish from seed. It is a multi-year process to achieve the desired, expected result. Consider signing a three-year maintenance agreement with a specialist to help obtain your desired results.

Maintaining Native Landscapes

Native landscapes do not require weekly mowings like turf grass. However, annual mowing and removal of clippings is recommended. These plantings also do well with fire management. Talk with an expert about possible fire management options.

Native Landscaping Websites

www.iowaprairienetwork.org
www.prrcd.org/inl/index.htm
www.prairienet.org
www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov
www.urbanwaterquality.org

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Seeding Native Landscapes

Establish native plants from seed for beautiful, low maintenance landscapes that provide a multitude of benefits for neighborhoods, acreages, businesses, parks, trails, and urban settings.

Native plantings are beautiful additions to any urban landscape. Once established, native landscapes are low maintenance areas that provide great habitat for insects and birds adapted to Iowa.

Native plantings are also good for the environment. Their root architecture increases soil organic matter, builds soil quality, and helps retain and infiltrate stormwater.

Incorporating native plants can be as easy as planting young plants into landscaped areas. With additional work, larger plantings can be established through seedings. Adding a mowed turf grass border around native landscaping in urban settings gains wider acceptance of the new look.

What to Choose

It is important to choose high quality seed mixes native to Iowa. Numerous Iowa seed producers sell high quality native mixes that match a variety of site conditions and preferences. Seed not produced locally may show early color, but will decline with age, instead of becoming more established and beautiful with time.

The Establishment Process

During establishment, the native landscaping site can look weedy or unkempt, especially if it is not properly managed. During the first two growing seasons, annual weeds can dominate native plant seedings.



The purple coneflower is a beautiful summer/fall bloomer that attracts butterflies, bees and other pollinating insects.

People often become frustrated with how a young site looks. The best way to ensure a successful native planting is to understand the process. For example, many people become frustrated that native plants are not visibly established as quickly as bluegrass lawns. It takes several months before it is possible to identify native plant seedlings. Young native plants establish their deep (6–12 ft.) root systems before they put much energy into above ground plant growth. Once the roots are established, the plants will dominate and bloom beautifully. This may take two years or more.

Timeline

On the inside of this brochure we provide a timeline for native plantings, from seeding to establishment. This timeline applies to smaller neighborhood settings, larger acreages, or even larger corporate, campus-type settings. The timeline illustrates the steps to take and what to expect when planting a variety of native landscapes.



These native grasses and forbs, established from plants, make a beautifully landscaped area on this acreage in central Iowa.

Native Landscapes Timeline

From Seeding to Establishment



Seeding

Plant a diverse native seed mix into bare land. The soil above had no perennial vegetation. If the site already has vegetation, it is important to chemically kill the existing plants prior to seeding.



Mow Often

Mowing will reduce competition from fast growing weeds and allow light to reach native seedlings. Frequent mowing during the first growing season will help plants become established.



Keep On Mowing

Mow 6-8 inches high about three times during the first growing season to keep weeds at bay. Most plantings will also need to be mowed twice in the second growing season.



Residential Setting

Native plantings provide a beautiful, low maintenance substitute for turf grass in wide open areas of residential neighborhoods. As new species mature and bloom, it will be spectacular!

May Year 1

June Year 1

July Year 1

Aug. Year 1

Sept. Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

Year 4



No Cause for Alarm

One month after planting, annual weeds may be the only visible vegetation. If the proper preparation, planting and maintenance procedure is followed, sparse growth is no cause for alarm during the establishment year.



Light the Way

Three months after seeding, it may be possible to detect native plants among annual weeds. Mowing provides sunlight necessary for small native plants to develop during the first growing season.



Early Bloomers

The Black-eyed Susan is an example of an early bloomer. These flowers can be very showy in year two and become less prominent over time. An inspection of a new establishment should indicate a diverse mixture of natives.



Corporate Setting

Businesses can incorporate native plants into their campuses. Above, a colorful mixture of native species protect the water quality of this pond from sediment runoff, fertilizers and other chemical pollutants.