

Prairie Planting Plan

Prepared by Eric Hammond, May 25 2005
Heritage Seedlings, Inc.

In small settings it is feasible to approach the establishment of native grassland as you would a typical perennial garden with common techniques employed.

Your soil is full of weed seeds and you will never get rid of them. There are no exceptions! Therefore weed-free mulch will be your friend. Operating on this principle prepare your planting area as you normally would and apply mulch after planting, to a depth of 2", completely excluding exposure of weed seeds to conditions that would otherwise encourage germination. Also be careful not to have the crowns on your new plants too deep.

A grass dominated meadow will have a species mix of nearly 80% grasses while a forb dominated prairie will be between 50-60% grasses. Maintain at least 50% grasses in your planting for the best look. In the Pacific Northwest the best time to plant is in autumn because the winter rains will help to establish the plants and annuals can be sown immediately on the fresh mulch.

In a garden situation annuals can add a desirable element and they help to mimic the natural environment. The best way to establish annuals in your wildflower garden is by broadcasting seed on the weed-free mulch in autumn. Our native annuals all require light for germination so they need to be sown on the soil surface. The annual rains will keep the mulch moist and germination will occur on a natural cycle.

In restorations the goal is a replicating system with lots of reseeding going on. While this may not be important in a garden the principle helps to give the garden a more natural feel. Design the plantings around mixes of species that overlap like the links of a chain. Confine each mix to ten or fewer species planting them randomly in their allotted area with the edges of each concentrated mix overlapping the next like the teeth of a zipper. The more species you want to include in a garden the more mixes, or links you will have in your design.

Distilled:

- 1.) Plant in autumn
- 2.) Mulch with weed-free mulch
- 3.) Over seed annuals