

PRAIRIE PLANTS IN THE GARDEN

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Illinois is known as the prairie state, but little of the original prairie remains. A resurgence of interest in the planting of display gardens as well as actual prairie reconstruction is happening at the present time. Hopefully, no more virgin prairie will be destroyed in the future. The public has been informed and all we need to do is keep the interest going. The use of prairie plants in a garden is just a small way that we in the field of horticulture can help with conservation.

The Chicago Botanic Garden has begun planting a display garden with prairie grasses and forbes. Our display of these plants is not only ornamental but is used as a learning tool for the interested public who chooses to see plants displayed in landscape settings. Classes are held for plant identification as well as prairie construction. In addition to these, a tram stop is being planned for next year to be able to make people more aware of the beauty and ornamental qualities of these plants. We collect seeds in the wild, process them according to the proper method or methods, and plant them in the prairie in the early spring. Large numbers of plants are required. Propagation techniques for these prairie plants vary with genus and species. Most of the perennials occur in nature where extremes in temperature during both winter and summer are commonplace, and the plants have adapted to their locations. This can pose problems for the plant propagator. Division, one of the oldest and most common means of propagation for perennials is often unworkable for some prairie plants. Very deep root systems, often like a tap root, form in some plants rendering division impractical. Exploding seed heads, ephemeral qualities and normally poor germination are all difficulties to be taken into consideration when choosing a proper method of propagation.

Plant selection is a highly subjective subject. Many qualities enter into the selection and everyone has different characteristics to meet the criteria. The professional plant propagator is faced with all the aesthetic choices as well as the important one of ease of propagation. Fortunately for professionals, the prairie perennial plants are easy to grow by most conventional methods. The following (highly subjective) list is made up of easy to propagate, ornamental, non-invasive, readily obtainable and, to the author, **PERFECT PLANTS!**

Amorpha canescens, lead plant. A shrub to 3 ft with dense violet flowers on new wood from mid-June to mid-July. Flowers the 4th or 5th year from seed. Best propa-

gated by seed collected from August to October. Seed treatment: soak seeds in 180°F water, allow to cool then stratify for 60 days at 41°F.

Anemone patens, pasque flower. A perennial with flowers pale lavender. Best propagated by seed collected from May to early June. Seed treatment: sow fresh or stratify 21 days at 41°F.

Asclepias tuberosa, butterfly weed. A perennial to 2 ft with brilliant red, yellow, or white flowers mid-June to mid-August. Flowers the second year from seed. Best propagated by seed collected from September to October. Seed treatment: stratify 30 days at 41°F.

Aster sericeus, silky aster. Perennial to 2 ft with rosy-blue flowers in September and October. Best propagated from divisions in either spring or fall.

Baptisia leucophaea, cream false indigo. Perennial to 2 ft with creamy yellow flowers from late May to June. Flowers the 5th year from seed. Best propagated from seed collected in August and September. Seed treatment: stratify 130 days at 41°F.

Dodecatheon meadia, shooting star. Ephemeral perennial to 2 ft, with white to pale pink flowers in May and early June. Flowers the 4th or 5th year from seed. Best propagated by division in July.

Euphorbia corollata, flowering spurge. A perennial to 3 ft with tiny white flower clusters from June to September. Best propagated from seed collected in early September. Seed treatment: stratify 60 days at 41°F.

Filipendula rubra, queen of the prairie. A perennial to 3 ft with deep pink flowers in July and August the second year from seed. Best propagated by division.

Oenothera pilosella, prairie sundrops. Perennial from 1 to 3 ft with lemon yellow flowers from July to September. Best propagated by softwood cuttings in spring.

Petalostemum purpureum, purple prairie clover. A perennial to 3 ft with purple flowers from July to mid-August the second year from seed. Best propagated from seed collected during August and September. Seed treatment: stratify 30 days at 41°F.

Physostegia virginiana, false dragonhead. A perennial with pink to white flowers in terminal spikes during August and September. Best propagated by division in spring.