# 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







**Erosion control** 



**Pollinator habitat** 





#### Aesthetics

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# **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.

### 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.

What to Expect After Seeding Prairie Vegetation			
<b>YEAR</b> 1	<ul> <li>Prairie seedlings will be small and patchy, with grasses appearing first. Growth is primarily underground to establish extensive root systems.</li> <li>Mow three or four times when vegetation is kneehigh, to a height of 4 to 8 inches, to reduce weed competition.</li> </ul>	3-4x	JANE KARANKARA
YEAR 2	<ul> <li>More prairie species will be visible as root systems become more established and outcompete weeds.</li> <li>Mow two or three times, when regeneration is knee-high.</li> <li>Spot spray with herbicide using targeted sprayer technology or hand-held systems, being mindful of herbicide drift.</li> </ul>	2-3x	MANIMENT
YEAR 3	<ul> <li>Area will begin to look like a cohesive prairie planting.</li> <li>Conduct a prescribed burn in the spring or fall when the vegetation is dormant to help establish forbs and grasses and reduce weed competition.</li> <li>Control weedy or brushy areas if needed with spot mowing or physical removal.</li> <li>Spot spray with herbicide to control perennial weeds like Canadian thistle.</li> </ul>	* **	
<b>91010101010101010101111111111111</b>	<ul> <li>Grasses and forbs will be established well enough to begin flowering.</li> <li>One or two prescribed burns in the dormant season will help to control weeds and further establish forbs.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>	1-2x	
<b>YEAR</b> 7+	<ul> <li>Perennial prairie vegetation is fully established, with many tall grasses and flowering forbs.</li> <li>Prescribed burning or mowing every other year helps to control trees, brush, and weeds, and stimulates growth of the native grasses and forbs.</li> <li>Vegetation increases in diversity with time and height.</li> </ul>	*	
	<ul> <li>What Prairie Plants are Growing?</li> <li>Free Online Plant ID Resources:</li> <li>Seedling ID Guide for Native Prairie Plants (USDA-NRCS)</li> <li>Prairie Plants of Iowa (University of Iowa Press and University of Iowa Libraries)</li> </ul>		
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#### CONSERVATION

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