

# PRAIRIE SEED MIXES

## SELECTING NATIVE SEED MIXES

Prairie seed mixes can be custom designed or purchased pre-mixed. Either way, the options are so varied it can seem overwhelming. Just remember: Any mix that matches your site's moisture requirements and contains tested, local-ecotype native seed\* will provide durable, perennial cover that holds soil in place, improves water quality and provides year-round habitat.

## HOW MUCH DO MIXES COST?

It varies. Prairie seed can be expensive, but here's the good news: Mixes are available in a **variety of prices**. Lower diversity mixes (those with fewer species) are usually less expensive than those with high diversity. The least expensive mixes contain grasses only.

While grass-only mixes may be appropriate in some cases, adding forbs (flowers) creates better habitat for pollinators, birds and other wildlife, and makes the planting more resilient in the long term.



*Diverse plantings are adapted to a wide range of growing conditions.*

## WHY DOES DIVERSITY MATTER?

Diverse prairie plantings include many species, each with its own adaptability to soil, moisture and light conditions. That means diverse mixes tolerate most site and weather conditions, **ensuring the planting's long-term success**.

Other benefits of diverse mixes:

- Each species fills a niche both above and below ground, leaving less space for weeds to invade.
- Well-designed, diverse mixes will include flowers that bloom from spring through fall, providing season-long food for pollinators.

## ARE ALL DIVERSE MIXES EXPENSIVE?

Not necessarily. Even diverse mixes have a variety of price points, partly because the cost of each individual species in the mix varies. While supply and demand affects the price of all species, some are simply harder to grow and therefore consistently more expensive than others.

To create a diverse mix that's relatively inexpensive, a high rate of easy-to-grow, less-expensive species will be included. This kind of mix is often well suited for sites that won't receive regular maintenance.

## WHAT'S THE BEST GRASS:FORB RATIO?

The Tallgrass Prairie Center recommends a 50:50 ratio. While it may be tempting to use more flowers, prairie grasses provide the reliable, season-long matrix around which the forbs grow. And more importantly, grasses are needed to help keep weeds at bay.

**Note:** "50:50" may appear as "20/20" in CRP and commercial seed mix lists. That means 20 grass seeds + 20 forb seeds per square foot. 40 seeds/sq. ft. is the industry standard for a prairie seeding rate. If the planting site is on a slope, or if it's being broadcast-seeded (as opposed to being seeded with a drill), the seeding rate may be increased.

## IF GRASSES ARE SO IMPORTANT AND ARE LESS EXPENSIVE, WHY NOT INCREASE THE GRASS RATE?

Grasses (especially the tall species) are more aggressive than forbs. When grasses exceed 50% of a prairie seed mix, over time they will dominate the planting, crowding out forbs.

## THAT'S A LOT TO CONSIDER!

And yet there's more. The optimal amount of seed (oz., lbs. or seeds/sq. ft.) for each individual species still needs to be determined. Factors like seed size (number of seeds per oz. or lb.), species characteristics (e.g., aggressiveness) and current seed prices all play a role.

## OPTIONS FOR DESIGNING YOUR MIX

### Do it yourself

If you want to learn more or even try designing a mix on your own, visit the Tallgrass Prairie Center's Prairie Seed Calculator ([tallgrassprairieseedcalculator.com](http://tallgrassprairieseedcalculator.com)). Along with the online calculator, which helps you design your own mix, you'll find additional information about species selection and seeding rates at this link.

### Get some help

If you'd like help creating a custom mix, contact your Watershed Coordinator. He/she will get you in touch with the Tallgrass Prairie Center for help designing a mix that meets your specific site, cost and other specifications.

### Buy pre-mixed seed

The easiest alternative is to simply purchase a pre-mixed prairie mix from one of Iowa's native seed dealers. They often sell their own mixes, as well as mixes designed to NRCS specifications.

\*Native seed is tested by independent seed labs for a variety of criteria including viability and the presence of weed seeds. Seed dealers can provide this information. Local ecotype seed – which can be certified ("yellow-tag") or non-certified – is of Iowa or nearby origin and likely well-adapted to local growing conditions.

For more information visit [www.tallgrassprairiecenter.org](http://www.tallgrassprairiecenter.org)

The following species are among those typically found in diverse prairie seed mixes FOR MESIC (medium-moisture) SITES. Many other native species are available and may appear in mixes specified by the NRCS or in pre-mixed packages from prairie seed dealers.

Grasses		May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	Big bluestem						
<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	Sideoats grama						
<i>Elymus canadensis</i>	Canada wild rye						
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Switchgrass						
<i>Schizacrium scoparium</i>	Little bluestem						
<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Indiangrass						
<i>Sporobolus asper</i>	Rough dropseed						
Forbs							
<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	Swamp milkweed						
<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Butterfly milkweed						
<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>	New England aster						
<i>Astragalus canadensis</i>	Canada milkvetch						
<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i>	Partridge pea						
<i>Dalea purpurea</i>	Purple prairie clover						
<i>Desmodium canadense</i>	Showy tick trefoil						
<i>Echinacea pallida</i>	Pale purple coneflower						
<i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i>	Rattlesnake master						
<i>Helenium autumnale</i>	Sneezeweed						
<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>	Ox-eye sunflower						
<i>Lespedeza capitata</i>	Roundheaded bushclover						
<i>Liatris aspera</i>	Rough blazingstar						
<i>Liatris pycnostachya</i>	Prairie blazingstar						
<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Wild bergamot						
<i>Oligoneuron rigidum</i>	Stiff goldenrod						
<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	Foxglove penstemon						
<i>Pycnanthemum virginianum</i>	Mountain mint						
<i>Ratibida pinnata</i>	Yellow coneflower						
<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	Black-eyed Susan						
<i>Rudbeckia subtomentosa</i>	Sweet Black-eyed Susan						
<i>Silphium laciniatum</i>	Compass plant						
<i>Tradescantia ohioensis</i>	Ohio spiderwort						
<i>Verbena stricta</i>	Hoary vervain						
<i>Zizia aurea</i>	Golden Alexanders						





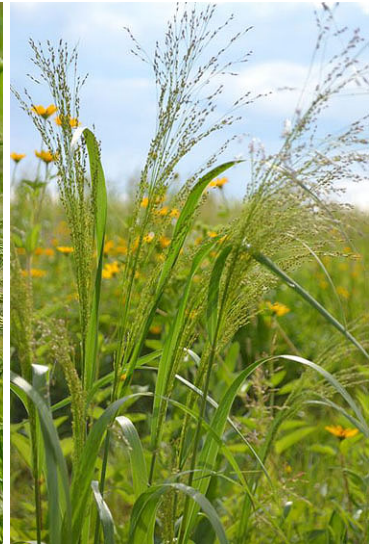
**Big Bluestem**



**Side Oats Grama**



**Canada Wild Rye**



**Switchgrass**



**Little Bluestem**



**Indiangrass**



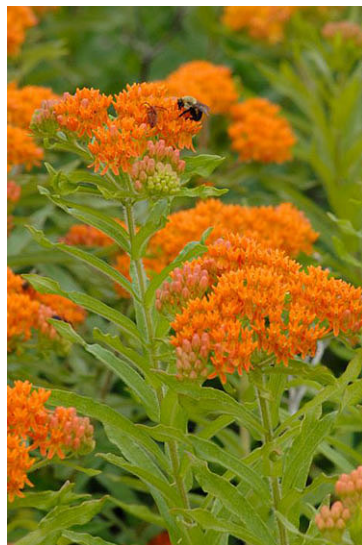
**Rough Dropseed**



**Leadplant**



**Swamp Milkweed**



**Butterfly Milkweed**



**New England Aster**





Canada Milkvetch



Partridge Pea



Purple Prairie Clover



Showy Ticktrefoil



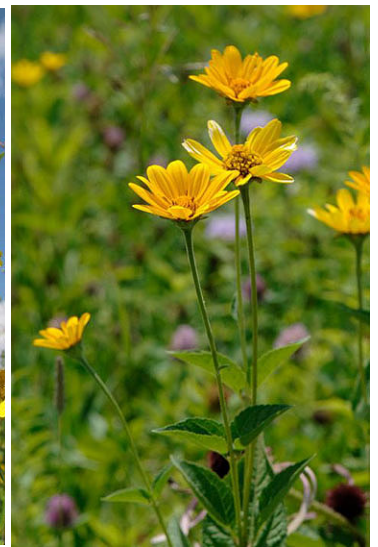
Pale Purple Coneflower



Rattlesnake Master



Leadplant



Ox-eye sunflower



Round-headed Bush Clover



Rough Blazingstar



Prairie Blazingstar



Wild Bergamot





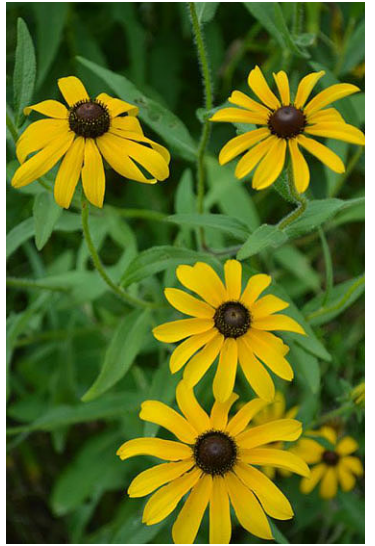
**Foxglove Beardtongue**



**Mountain Mint**



**Yellow Coneflower**



**Black-eyed Susan**



**Sweet Black-eyed Susan**



**Compass Plant**



**Stiff Goldenrod**



**Ohio Spiderwort**



**Hoary Vervain**



**Golden Alexanders**