

MEADOWS AND PRAIRIE GARDENS

Plants and Practices for Pollinators' Paradise

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assess site conditions:

sun—preferably all day or at least full sun for 6 hours
soil type—sandy, loamy, silty, clayey, rocky, shallow, deep, subsoil
moisture—how much and when, drainage
weeds—annual, perennial, seed bank, spreading underground

control weeds:

hand pulling
roughing up and irrigating to expose and germinate seed bank
solarizing with clear plastic/smothering with black plastic
smothering with layers of paper or tarps
spraying with weed killers—can use vinegar and other relatively non-toxic types for many weeds but not for the most tenacious perennial spreading weeds
Quinstar kills bindweed after a few well-timed sprays, most effective in early to mid summer
spot-spraying with weed-specific herbicides if dealing with well-established populations of very difficult weeds like leafy spurge and Canada thistle

loosen compacted soil
amend with rotted manure, compost, alfalfa pellets if area is mesic or will be irrigated regularly

ideal order of planting:

flowering perennials and sedges first—best in spring
bulbs next—the following fall
grasses last (they are bossy--establish faster than most flowering perennials)—the following spring

maintenance:

don't deadhead/cut back until late winter/early spring unless trying to control prolific seeding—seed and duff is useful to wildlife and is attractive in a naturalistic garden such as these
get after weeds and unwanted seedlings regularly; weeds will diminish over time as plants fill in
cut back in late winter/early spring with a brush mower, string trimmer, hedge trimmer, or by hand
in mesic plantings spread pelleted alfalfa every fall/early spring or every other fall/early spring or
top dress with good compost/shredded leaves/shredded duff from cutting back
add and subtract plants as your taste guides you

plants

p: attracts pollinators

s: edible seed for various bird species

(many native grasses are larval hosts to butterflies and moths)

N: native to western North America or the North American plains and prairies

for mesic meadows

Deep loam or clay soil and a bit of extra water make it possible to grow a bounty of beautiful grasses and forbs native to North American mid-grass prairies, and a few other stalwart species that can compete with grasses. The ebb and flow of bloom and seed in these diverse plant communities make for a lively mecca for insects and birds, providing larval food, nectar, pollen, seed, cover, and nesting material. Strong-growing rodent-resistant non-native bulbs bloom early in the season when most native grassland plants don't. Their flowers offer vital springtime food—pollen and nectar—to early foraging bees in April and May

herbaceous perennials and bulbs

prairie smoke *Geum triflorum* p, N May

non-spreading golden banner *Thermopsis lupinoides* p, May-June

long-blooming bluestar *Amsonia* 'Blue Ice' p, May-June

dwarf blue indigo *Baptisia minor* p, N May-June

burgundy burnet *Sanguisorba menziesii* p, May-June

wild quinine *Parthenium integrifolium* p, N June-August

hardy mealy-cup sage *Salvia farinacea* 'Texas Violet' p, N June-September

pale coneflower *Echinacea pallida* p, s, N July-August

horsemint *Monarda fistulosa* and hybrids with *M. didyma* p, N July-August

mountain gayfeather *Liatris ligulistylis* p, s, N July-August

pearly everlasting *Anaphalis margaritacea* p, N September-October

pitcher sage *Salvia azurea* 'Nekan' p, N September-October

compact New England aster *Symphotrichum novi-angliae* 'Purple Dome' p, s September-October

border sedum *Hylotelephium spectabile* 'Neon', 'Matrona' p, September-October

strong-growing selections of daffodils (*Narcissus*) such as Bravoure, St. Keverne, Smiling Sun, February Gold, Rapture, Surfside, Golden Echo, Angel Eyes, Kokopelli, Segovia p, April-May

purple onion *Allium aflatunense* 'Purple Sensation' p, May-June
drumstick onion *Allium sphaerocephalum* p, July

grasses

Atlas fescue *Festuca mairei*

Idaho fescue *Festuca idahoensis* 'Siskiyou Blue' N

alpine plume grass *Achnatherum calamagrostis*

prairie dropseed *Sporobolus heterolepis* and compact selection 'Tara' s, N

Undaunted ruby muhly *Muhlenbergia reverchonii* Undaunted™ N

for dry prairie gardens

These reflect upland plant communities of the Great Plains. Smaller in stature and more frugal with water than classic prairies, plants native to dry short-grass prairie are diverse, colorful, and support a wide range of native creatures. Bunching rather than spreading grasses are used here, responding to light and wind while allowing colorful flowers to intermingle. Strong-growing rodent-resistant non-native bulbs bloom early in the season when most native grassland plants don't. Their flowers offer vital springtime food—pollen and nectar—to early foraging bees in April and May

herbaceous perennials, bulbs, and a couple subshrubs

pasqueflower *Pulsatilla* spp. p, (N—*P. patens*) April-May

oriental poppy *Papaver orientale* p, May-June

blue flax *Linum perenne* ssp. *lewisii* p, N June-July

sulfur flower *Eriogonum umbellatum* p, N June-July

Rocky Mountain penstemon *Penstemon strictus* p, N June-July

Indian blanket *Gaillardia aristata*, 'Amber Wheels' p, N June-October

fringed sage *Artemisia frigida* N

non-spreading yarrow *Achillea filipendulina* 'Moonshine', 'Terracotta' p, June-August

rocky top coneflower *Echinacea tennesseensis* p, s June-July

prairie coneflower *Ratibida columnifera* p, N June-August

purple prairie clover *Dalea purpurea* p, N July-August

butterflyweed *Asclepias tuberosa* p, N July-August

leadplant *Amorpha canescens* p, N July

gayfeather *Liatris punctata* p, s, N August

hummingbird trumpet *Epilobium* (formerly *Zauschneria*) *canum*, 'Flame Thrower' p, N August-October

Oklahoma goldenrod *Solidago* 'Wichita Mountains' p, N September-October

narrowleaf ironweed *Vernonia lettermannii* 'Iron Butterfly' p, N September-October

dwarf rabbitbrush *Ericameria nauseosa* ssp. *nauseosa* p, N September-October

aromatic aster *Symphotrichum oblongifolium*, 'Dream of Beauty' p, s, N September-October

star of Persia *Allium albopilosum* p, May-June

grasses

Indian rice grass *Achnatherum* (formerly *Oryzopsis*) *hymenoides* s, N

blue grama *Bouteloua gracilis* 'Blonde Ambition' p—bees collect pollen from the flowers, N

sideoats grama *Bouteloua curtipendula* s, N

little bluestem *Schizachyrium scoparium* 'Prairie Blues' s, N

hardy deer muhly *Muhlenbergia rigens* 'Girl Next Door' N