

Significance of Prairies

It could be said that Prairie Grasslands are one of the most misunderstood and under appreciated ecosystems in North America. Americans did not start caring about conservation of prairies, until they were almost gone. It is possible that pre-settlement Kentucky may have had 25% of its land in prairies and various forms of grasslands. In Kentucky, less than 1,500 acres of grasslands exist today.

American prairies have a variety of forms and contain a wealth of individual grasses, sedges, and wildflowers, often revealing a stunning collection of colors and patterns. The ecology of grasslands is very complex and often difficult to fully understand, because so few intact remnants still remain.

Because prairies and grasslands are so important to the ecology, culture, and overall diversity of our state and nation, many people have become interested in the process of prairie restoration. Restoration projects offer unique opportunities to learn more about grassland ecology, while attempting to preserve threatened habitat for important plants and animals.

At The Arboretum, there has been a demonstration prairie near the main entrance since 1998. Less than a half acre in size, it contains over 20 native species.

Species in The Arboretum Prairie

Shrubs

- staghorn sumac

Wildflowers

- purple coneflower
- gray-headed coneflower
- tall goldenrod
- gray goldenrod
- coreopsis
- bee-balm
- maximilian sunflower (not native to KY)
- frostweed aster
- illinois bundleflower
- common milkweed
- butterfly milkweed
- hemp dogbane
- wild strawberry

Grasses

- little bluestem
- big bluestem
- indian grass
- switch grass
- eastern gamagrass
- side-oats grama
- wild eye

Animals

- butterflies
- moths
- bees
- beetles
- mice
- rabbits
- birds

How to Grow Your Own Prairie

Successful establishment of a prairie involves proper site preparation, selecting plants that are suited to your soil, and choosing the best methods and time of installation. When selecting a site, look for areas with maximum sun exposure and minimal root competition from trees. Leave at least 20 feet of conventional lawn or noncombustible surface between the prairie and buildings or any other combustible items.

There are three commonly used procedures to establish a prairie in an existing lawn. The first method is to put a dark plastic sheet, or tarp over the grass for at least two months before you begin planting, to kill the grass. This method works best when begun in the summer or fall to prepare for a spring planting.

The second method is to turn the soil and cultivate the area every few weeks for a complete growing season.

The most common method of establishment involves using a nonselective herbicide containing the active ingredient glyphosate, such as Roundup, to kill all existing vegetation. Then plant seeds or plants directly into the dead sod.

Always select plants with the characteristics of your particular site in mind. Include grasses because they provide physical support, competition for weeds, protection for wildflowers, and a source of food and shelter for birds during the winter.

For More Information

Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers. Doug Ladd and Frank Oberle. The Nature Conservancy: Falcon Press, 1995.

The Prairie Garden. Beatrice S. Smith and J. Robert Smith. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980.

Gardening with Prairie Plants. Sally Wasowski. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Prairie Plants and Their Environment. J. E. Weaver. Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1968.

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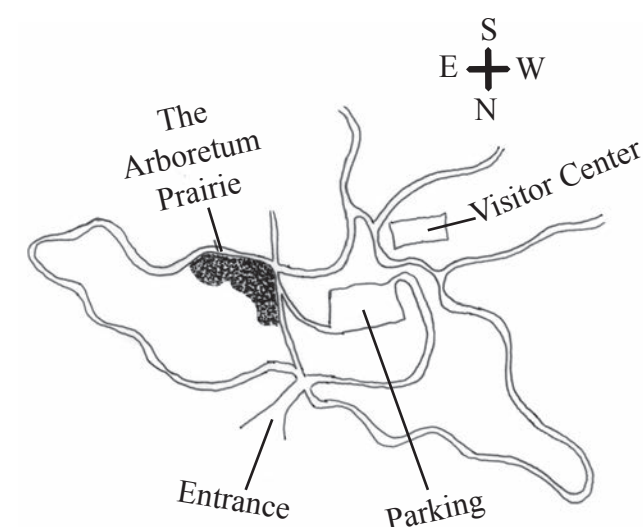
<http://www.uky.edu/Arboretum>

The Arboretum acknowledges the generous support of the many organizations and individuals who have assisted with the planting and care of the Arboretum Prairie.

The Arboretum is open 365 days a year from dawn to dusk. Admission is free. The Dorothea Smith Oatts Visitors Center is open M-F from 8:30 to 4:00.

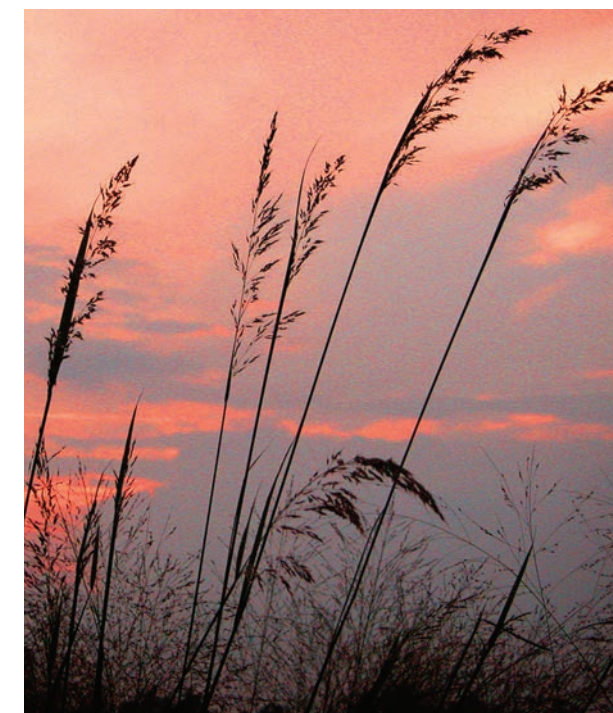
Funding for brochures provided by Kentucky Division of Forestry.

The Arboretum Prairie Location Map



gray goldenrod

Photos provided by: Betty Hall Photography



The Arboretum Prairie

“You can grow a prairie facsimile in five or ten years. But some scientists think it could take two hundred years to construct the intricate prairies ecosystem. Others think five hundred. Still others, never.”

The Tallgrass Prairie, Can It Be Saved?

— Dennis Farney (1980)