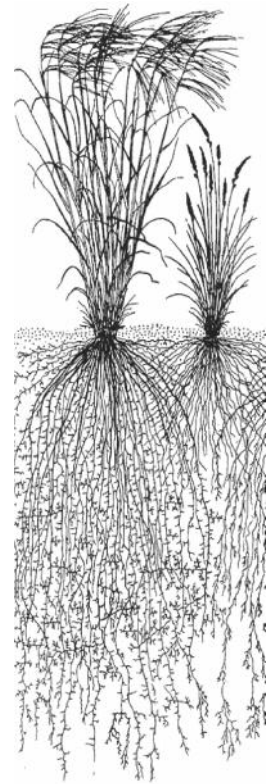

Post-planting Prairie Management

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Introduction

Post-planting management discourages weeds and encourages the species you planted. Management includes mowing, burning, pulling weeds, herbiciding, and adding extra species. The goal is to recreate the natural processes that maintain the prairie ecosystem, e.g., fire, soil disturbance, pollination, etc. **Post-planting management is extremely important for your prairie's health and should be a part of the planning process.**



The First Growing Season

What to expect

Keep your expectations very low the first year. The first year is typically the “**Oh-my-god-what-have-I-done??**” phase of the planting when weeds are abundant and prairie species seemingly absent. Relax, this is normal because native species may be slow to germinate and then grow roots before growing upward. Conversely, weeds readily germinate and grow rapidly.

What to do

- Mowing is the most important management activity during the first year. Mowing prevents weeds from setting seeds and prevents the shading of prairie seedlings. **Failure to mow or mowing improperly puts your prairie at risk.**
- When weed growth is 7 to 10 inches high *or* is dense enough to shade the ground, mow to a height of about 4 to 5 inches. This cutting height will not harm prairie seedlings because they will typically be shorter.
- Repeat this mowing pattern throughout the entire growing season as the weeds regrow, except you may need to increase the cutting height to stay above the prairie seedlings. You may need to mow as often as every 2 or 3 weeks on fertile sites, when growing conditions are favorable, or if site preparation was inadequate.
- To avoid smothering the native seedlings make the cuttings as fine as possible and do not windrow them.
- Time the final mowing to prevent weed seed production while leaving 6 or more inches of stubble. The stubble traps snow, mulching the young prairie plants during the winter, increasing their over-winter survival.
- Spot weeding, by hand or with a herbicide, may be beneficial if *carefully* done. Concentrate on perennial species since mowing will control the annual and biennial species. Be sure you know what you're pulling or spraying. If you're pulling, minimize soil disturbance and gently firm the soil afterward. Excessive soil disturbance kills tiny native seedlings and invites more weeds.

The Second Growing Season

What to expect

- If site preparation was good and the site was properly mowed during the first year you can expect to see some blooming flowers, a more noticeable abundance of native species, and fewer weeds.

What to do

- Burn in the spring if there is sufficient fuel to carry a fire. However, it is unlikely there will be sufficient fuel because of last year's mowing.
- If there is insufficient fuel for a burn then mow the planting to about 2-3 inches before the prairie plants have started growing (March or very early April). This allows sunlight to warm the soil and provides light for seedling growth. Do not windrow the clippings.
- You may need to mow one or more times if weeds are still a problem. The cutting height should only be as low as needed to stop seed production in order to minimize damage to the prairie seedlings. Spot pulling, cutting, or herbicide use may also be appropriate.

The Third and Successive Years

What to expect

The third year is typically the year the prairie begins to show its true character. By the end of the third year the majority of the species planted have germinated and have begun to establish themselves, unless weather conditions have been extreme during the preceding years. Although not all species will bloom this year, it is likely there will be flowers blooming throughout the growing season. Weeds should be less abundant due to increased competition from the native species and the prevention of weed seed production by mowing. This is the first year that a burn is likely to be feasible.

What to do

- **Burning:** Typically the entire planting is burned for 3 to 4 consecutive years beginning as soon as there is sufficient fuel, even though the burn may be spotty. Burning greatly enhances prairie development and is highly recommended. After this initial "burn-in" period, the site should be divided into several burn units. Each burn unit is then burned every 2 to 4 years, or so, on a rotating basis, depending on the progress of the planting, the type and density of the weeds, wildlife use, and management goals.
- **Mowing:** Large scale mowing for weed control is typically no longer necessary but spot mowing may be useful to control weeds in problem areas. Also, mowing may be used as a replacement for a spring burn if there is insufficient fuel to conduct a burn.
- **Weed control:** Continue to monitor and control weeds. Control can be achieved by carefully timing your burn, cutting, pulling, or herbicide application, depending on the weed species, the degree of infestation, and the amount of time available.
- **Enrichment:** Native plant density and diversity may be lower than expected because of weather conditions, low seed viability, weed competition, or erosion. When this occurs it may be desirable to overseed or spot plant additional species into the affected area. Overseeding is accomplished by sowing seeds into the affected area. Spot planting is accomplished by planting transplants in the affected area.