



Organic Planting Instructions for Linn Pollinator Mix

This pollinator seed mix was developed with plants native to Linn County, Iowa. It includes 38 varieties of milkweed, forbs, and grasses that will provide season-long nourishment for monarchs, bees, and other pollinators.

One concern some individuals have toward habitat restoration is the use of herbicides several times during seed-bed preparation. The technique described below works well as a no-herbicide approach when prairie size is relatively small. Note: We recommend you refrigerate your seeds until you are ready to plant.

An old saying goes, “Success is 90 percent preparation, 10 percent perspiration.” That adage is true here, too: Site preparation is the largest determinant of your prairie’s success (and it does take some perspiration). Please do not skimp on site prep or invasives are likely to overtake your prairie.

Step 1: Site Selection

- Select a site that is sunny and well drained (or at least not wet).
- Identify a site that is relatively free of invasive plants. If currently planted with grasses, it’s best if the areas has been mowed for several years.
- If you intend to plant in a road right of way (ROW), contact your city or Linn County to learn more about the requirements for planting in this space.

Step 2: Site Preparation

In spring, lay down a thin black plastic sheet over the area to be planted. This sheeting should be installed after mowing or weed-whacking as close to the ground as possible. Lay down the sheeting, use landscape staples to secure it, then add another strip of sheeting, overlapping the first strip and again secure with landscape staples.

The cost of this sheeting and landscape staples is comparable to the cost of purchasing a sprayer, herbicide concentrate, and three applications during summer and early fall. Both the sheeting and the staples are available at home improvement stores. Here’s an example of black sheeting that covers up to 800 square feet:

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000V4I5GG>

Leave the sheeting in place all summer and through the fall. This will thoroughly kill any remaining vegetation, along with all weed seed in the soil through the 140-degree temperatures created by the black sheeting.

Step 3: Plant the Seeds

In late fall or early winter, when the area is ready to plant, remove the plastic sheeting. (The plastic sheeting can be recycled.) Then plant the seeds.

- Mix seed with clean sand to help distribute it across the site more evenly. Use 1 to 2 pounds of sand per 1 ounce of seed.
- Broadcast the seed by hand using even, sweeping gestures. Take your time and make multiple passes walking in multiple directions.
- After the seeds are sown, very lightly rake the area to ensure greater seed-to-soil contact.
- Walk thoroughly across the planting site to press the seeds into the soil. You can also roll an old tire over the planting site to achieve the same effect.

Step 4: Maintain Your Prairie Planting

Even with your careful site preparation, you will still see some annual weeds pop up. Annual weeds grow quickly and can shade out young prairie seedlings and guzzle valuable moisture.

- In the first couple months after planting, mow or use a weed trimmer on your planting to allow more light to reach the prairie plants and provide the prairie seedlings greater access to available moisture. If your mower cannot be set at a very high setting (6-8 inches) you will need to use a weedwhacker or trimmer. Mow or trim a few times waiting until the plant material reaches ten to twelve inches or so; more regular mowing tends to favor lawn weeds like trefoil, crabgrass, or clover.
- Water your plants when you don't receive sufficient rain, particularly during extended dry periods. Saturate the soil and give them a good drink.
- Don't expect your native plantings to look wonderful after the first year. During this time, natives put most of their energy into root development. Your prairie will look its best starting in the third or fourth year.
- Once the prairie is established, mow around the perimeter of the planting, signaling to others that this is a prairie that is cared for and maintained.

Step 5: Let Your Neighbors Know You Are Part of a Movement!

Prairies take two to three years to establish, so it's often a good idea to add signage that identifies your site as a prairie-in-progress. The Monarch Research Project sells signs, a cost, with the "Monarch Zones, Pollinator Zones" logo. You also can find signs sold by other organizations or make your own. Either way, be sure to let your neighbors know that you are part of a bigger effort to plant 10,000 acres of butterfly and pollinator habitat in Linn County!

More detailed instructions on how to plant and maintain a prairie can be found at the following websites:

- www.unitedseeds.com/how-to.html
- www.prairiemoon.com/blog/how-to-grow-a-prairie-from-seed
- www.shootingstarnativeseed.com/about-natives/restoration-guidelines/

Species included in the Linn County Pollinator Seed Mix:

Swamp Milkweed	Sneezeweed	Prairie Spiderwort
Common Milkweed	Early Sunflower	Blue Vervain
Canada Anemone	Button Blazing Star	Hoary Vervain
Prairie Sage	Prairie Blazing Star	Culvers Root
Butterfly Weed	Great Blue Lobelia	Golden Alexanders
Sky Blue Aster	Wild Bergamont	Lead Plant
Heath Aster	Purple Prairie Clover	Little Bluestem
Smooth Blue Aster	Prairie Cinquefoil	Side-Oats Grama
New England Aster	Foxglove Digitalis	Canada Wild Rye
Canadian Milk Vetch	Mountain Mint	Virginia Wild Rye
Partridge Pea	Yellow Coneflower	Rough Dropseed
Showy Tick Trefoil	Black-Eyed Susan	Prairie Dropseed
Pale Purple Coneflower	Sweet Black-Eyed Susan	
Cream Gentian	Showy Goldenrod	

Thank you for investing in Linn County's green infrastructure!

Your friends at the Monarch Research Project

www.monarchresearch.org

