WINDFLOWER NATIVES

2008 Co HWY 111
Fergus Falls, MN
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www.windflowernatives.com

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

HOW TO INSTALL A POLLINATOR GARDEN

YOU CAN DO IT!

Do you love the idea of supporting our ecosystem by planting native plants but feel a little unsure of where to start? Don't worry, you're not alone! Many of our customers find themselves in exactly this position. This guide is designed to give you the confidence you need to get started. These steps will show you how to construct a tidy urban pollinator garden from potted plants or plugs. There are other types of pollinator plantings that one might consider (raised beds, larger reconstructions, bio-diversity enhancement). Regardless of which style of planting you chose, this guide contains insights that can help aid your work.

1. Select your location

Sunlight: Some plants like sun, others prefer shade. The selection of native prairie plants that like sun vastly exceeds those that prefer shade. The plants we offer are either full sun or full to partial sun species. This means you'll want to select a site that gets between 8 and 6 hours of sunlight for the full sun species and between 6 and 4 hours of sunlight per day for the partial sun species.

Soil type: Most prairie plants will will grow best in well draining loam (black) dirt. Some will also thrive in dry or sandy sites, and many will do just fine in clay so long as it is not saturated with water for long periods of time.

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Moisture: Most soils are considered medium unless they are very sandy or regularly have standing water/saturated clay. Most all native prairie plants will thrive in medium soil, but some can tolerate sandy sites while others can tolerate more moist sites.

2. Select the right plants for the right location and pre-order

In this step you will measure your planting area and determine the square footage you will be working with. With the site characteristics you have determined in the previous step, you are now ready to begin shopping on our ***Native Plant Store***. Here plants are organized with tags so that you can easily sort plants based upon sun and moisture characteristics.

Draw out a design. It's helpful to begin a drawing to aid in your planting design. A general rule of thumb is to plant one plant every 12-16". A few design principles can help you think this step through. Placing shorter species towards the edge makes the garden have a more tidy feel and make it easier to maintain. Clump like species and consider spreading plants of different bloom times throughout the planting. Consider mixing short grasses and sedges into the planting for unique texture and to give less room for weeds to gain a foothold.

Get started with a garden kit. An easy way to get started is to begin with one of our ***garden kits***. Our kits have been designed for different soil types and come pre-designed with plants that will bloom across the entire growing season!

Pre order your plants. Growing dozens of native species requires a lot of planning, but even at our best we sell out of some plants by April. Because of this, you'll always have the best selection if you get your plant pre orders in early. We ship our plants in late

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May/early June. You can also select local pick up, in which case you will receive an email notification when your plants are ready.

3. Remove existing plant competition

This step is absolutely crucial for a new pollinator planting. If you want to enjoy a beautiful weed-free planting with high native plant diversity, this step cannot be ignored! All existing vegetation needs to be killed, especially lawn grass. The species used in a typical American lawn wreak havoc within native plantings by crowding out native species. Once in a planting it is very difficult to get under control. There are two basic methods of site preparation to choose between, **organic** and **chemical based**.

Organic Based Site Preparation: If you prefer organic methods you can choose between solarizing/smothering methods or sod removal. To solarize or smother a site you will need to plan ahead. These methods take at least 8 weeks to adequately prepare a site. For an early June planting one would need to have this method in place by April 1. Solarizing involves covering the site in 6mil clear plastic, while smothering involves covering the site with heavy paper rolls (from the paint isle at the hardware store) or cardboard, then adding 3" of wood mulch directly on top. Solarizing tends to be the more effective of the two, since smothering can sometimes simply put hearty grass species into dormancy.

A faster but more labor intensive organic option is sod removal. Using a sod cutter from the rental store or a shovel, one simply cuts out the top layer of the sod. This method is fast, but very labor intensive and comes with the drawback of removing some of the highest quality soil from the site and forcing you to have to find someplace to dump it.

Chemical Based Site Preparation: If remaining organic is not a high priority, the quickest and most effective way to prepare a site with the glyphosate, a non-selective, short-lived

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herbicide. It is crucial that glyphosate is the ONLY active ingredient in the herbicide you purchase. Some herbicide mixes contain other active chemicals that can persist in the soil for years and negatively affect your planting. Glyphosate is a herbicide, not an insecticide. It will not negatively impact pollinators. Because this herbicide kills on contact and doesn't persist in the soil, once a site is sprayed you can install 3" of mulch after only one or two days and begin planting immediately. So long as you followed the label instructions of your herbicide, no harm will come to the leaves or roots of your new plants.

Once you have killed or removed other plant competition you are ready to plant. Unless the soil is badly compacted or is very dense clay soil there no need to till the site or add compost. In fact, such efforts can bring in additional weed seeds or simply expose existing weed seeds in the soil.

4. Add Edging

Installing edging is an optional step, but is recommended for plantings that are surrounded by lawns. Lawn grass spreads by underground rhizomes and will quickly invade your new planting unless it is kept in check by some form of landscape edging. The most common type is the 5" thick black plastic landscape edging that you can buy at most garden centers. There are some more ascetically pleasing metal options on the market these days. They are not cheap, but they look pretty slick. Block edging can be used as well, but a plastic barrier is also necessary since the grass shoots will simply sneak in between the blocks without it.

5. Add 3" of wood mulch

Mulch is also optional, but highly recommended. If mulch is installed at the outset of a planting, it should only need to be installed once. As the plants mature and fill in, the mulch layer will break down and new prairie plants will begin to grow instead of weeds!

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Mulch helps a new planting by suppressing the germination of weed seed in the soil, as well as helping retain moisture. This greatly reduces the amount of time you will need to spend weeding and watering your new planting.

How much mulch do you need? You will need approximately one cubic yard of mulch for every 100 square feet of garden. If you are buying your mulch in 2 cubic foot bags you will need 14 bags of mulch to reach 1 cubic yard.

What kind of mulch? Keep it simple. Go with natural shredded hardwood mulch.

What about landscape fabric? Plastic landscape fabric is very good at suppressing weeds in the short term, but it eventually becomes a headache. After the mulch breaks down weeds begin growing on top of the mulch. You will then have to decide if you want to try to remove the mulch, or add more plastic over the top of it. If you want additional weed suppression during the early phases of the planting, you could always install the thick paper rolls that degrade naturally beneath the mulch layer after the first season.

When to mulch? In general it is easiest to mulch before you install your plants. This way you don't have to try to dance around a bunch of tiny plants as you spread the mulch layer.

6. Plant your plants

1. Resist the temptation to pull the plants out of their plugs or pots by their stem. This can easily kill young seedlings. To safely remove a plant form its container, support the potting soil with one hand, tip the container upside down, and gently tap the bottom of the container. The plant should slide right out. Sometimes it is

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helpful to have small rod like a pen to poke through the bottom of plug trays to help release the plant.

2. Set the plant in its freshly dug hole. The top of the potting soil should come to just at, or a little below the virgin soil height.
3. fill in the hole and ensure that there is about 1/2" of virgin soil completely covering the potting soil. Potting soil dries out very quickly when exposed to the elements. Covering it completely in this way will help ensure that your new plants don't quickly dry out the moment its exposed to the hot sun.

Water in after planting: Once all the plants have been installed it is crucial that they are immediately watered in. Giving freshly planted plants a few good soakings right after being planted helps the roots begin integrating with the surrounding soil and collapses any air pockets that might be left over from planting.

Planting tools: If you have a lot of plants, consider purchasing a garden auger that can be fitted to a cordless drill. We prefer that augers made by Power Planter. Our favorite is the 2" x 24" heavy duty termite and tree auger. Be careful when using these tools in clay or gravel. They can catch and wrench your wrist if your drill does not come with a clutch. The trick is to bring the drill up to speed prior to pressing it into the earth, then gently easing it into the ground bit by bit. If you just press it into the ground and pull the trigger, it usually just pulls the auger into the ground before finally twisting your wrists! Once you get the hang of it, it's a huge time saver.

7. Water every 2-4 days for a month

Once established, your native plants will generally not need any additional water, but when they are freshly installed they require supplemental moisture until their roots become integrated into their new home. There is a bit of an art to watering. If you water too little, plants will die. If you water too much, the roots will rot and plants will die.

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The amount you water is highly condition dependent. The addition of mulch will cut down on watering needs. Either way, watch for signs of wilting, consider the heat and the wind, test the soil moisture with your finger. As a rule of thumb, you will likely need to water once every two to four days for the first month, less if the site is mulched, more if it is not.

8. Weed at least once per month

During the establishment phase of your planting, it will greatly increase the aesthetics and overall quality of your planting if you spend a few minutes on a weekly basis weeding, and if not weekly, at least once per month.

Tending to your planting about once per week helps you get to know your natives and also aids in identifying weeds from native plants. The younger the little weed sprouts, the easier they are to differentiate from native seedlings, and the easier they are to pull. As your planting matures weeds will become less and less of an issue.