



Organically establishing native plants from seed requires some work and patience.

## Year 1: Preparation and Seeding

The best time to broadcast native plant seed is in early winter (late October through November), just before the first snowfall and before the ground fully freezes.

1. **Cover the area** for 4-6 months to kill existing vegetation. For small areas, use cardboard and landscaping fabric. Use weed fabric or tarps for large areas. (A sod cutter can be used for very small areas.)
2. **Measure the area and purchase the seed** according to the square footage. When in doubt about the exact size of the area, purchase more seed rather than too little. Consider purchasing additional species to increase diversity.
3. Once vegetation is dead, use a metal rake and/or a motorized power rake to get the area to **bare soil**. This step is very important: native plant seeds require direct contact with soil to germinate successfully.
4. To ensure even distribution, **mix the seed with loose, dampened compost** (sand or peat moss work too) in a large bin or wheel barrow. In general, every 1,000 square feet of area requires approximately 8 gallons of this filler material.
5. **Broadcast the seed mixture**. To help with an even distribution over large areas, consider dividing the mixture into two parts and distributing it over the entire area in two passes.
6. **Tamp it down** by stepping on the area with a large piece of cardboard.
7. On steep slopes, cover the seed with a thin layer of straw or an erosion control blanket.

## Year 2: First Growing Season

Most sites need maintenance trimming to keep weeds from going to seed and to allow light to reach the ground and encourage growth of the natives. You may get some blooms this year, but you must sacrifice those beautiful flowers if you want the other species to establish. **Keep the area cut to 6-8"** this year using a weed trimmer. Don't pull weeds: this will disturb the root systems of the nearby natives that are trying to establish.

## Year 3: Second Growing Season

This may or may not be the year you start enjoying the fruits of your labor. You may need to trim once this year. Be patient—although some species may reach flowering stages in year 3, many could take 5 years or more.

## Burning or Mowing

After the first growing season, if possible and legal in your area, consider burning the site in mid-spring every 2-3 years. Fire reduces weeds while stimulating native plants and seed germination. It is a vastly superior way to manage your site when compared to mowing and manually pulling weeds. Hiring a prairie management company is likely the best and safest way to burn your site. Estimates and information about burns can be provided by Prescribed Burning Contractors recommended by Johnson County Iowa Soil and Water Conservation: [jcsacd.org](http://jcsacd.org). If burning is not possible, then mow to 3-4" inches in mid-spring.



Measure and stake out your prairie patch.



Cover it to starve existing vegetation of sunlight.



Rake back dead vegetation to bare soil.



Mix the seeds with compost and spread it.



Seedlings will germinate in the spring.

### Midwest Native Seed Sources

Ion Exchange: [IonXchange.com](http://IonXchange.com) (IA)  
 Prairie Moon Nursery: [PrairieMoon.com](http://PrairieMoon.com) (MN)  
 Prairie Nursery: [PrairieNursery.com](http://PrairieNursery.com) (WI)



**Backyard Abundance** is a nonprofit that helps build vibrant communities by creating beautiful, resilient landscapes that provide healthy food and habitat.

**We envision** the growth of ecologically resilient communities that meet everyone's basic needs of survival today and in the future. Yards and public areas grow healthy food and natural materials to nourish our bodies and support our local economy. The land supports healthy ecosystems by providing habitat, supporting healthy water quality, and emulating nature's resiliency. This community focus creates a healthy social fabric, ecological integrity, and a spirit of abundance for all.



## How You Can Help

1. **Observe and learn.** Carefully observe what is happening in your landscape to better understand how you can work with nature to improve it.
2. **Improve the environmental health of a landscape.** Knowledgeable friends and online resources can provide ideas for projects of any size and skill level.
3. **Share what you have done.** Alternatives to conventional landscapes must be seen and experienced for the movement to take root. Use Facebook and other social media to learn from others and share your pictures and stories.

## We Can Help You...

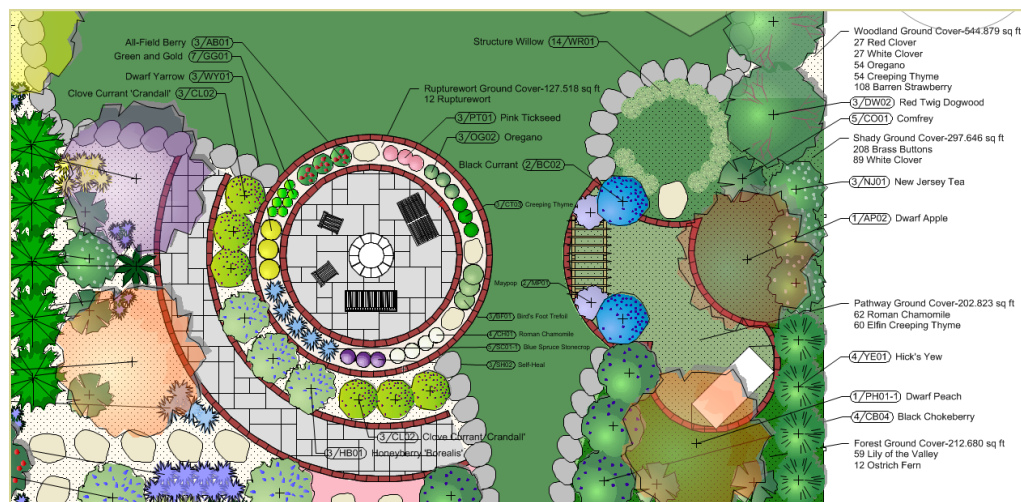
- Lower the maintenance, increase the beauty, attract desired wildlife and enhance the ecological health of your landscape.
- Connect and collaborate with others in your community.
- Find elegant solutions to environmental issues.

## Landscape Tours

We host free yard tours feature landscapes designed to benefit our environment. Local experts are available to describe the ecological benefits provided by each yard and explain how residents can implement similar features. Refreshments are provided at each event.

## Design and Education

We provide onsite consultations and group-based workshops to help you create a beautiful landscape that saves you time, energy and money while improving the health of our environment. A wide variety of activities create a fun and engaging learning experience for gardeners of any experience level.




## More Information

Visit our website to learn about upcoming events, find information, and see pictures of abundant landscapes.

[www.BackyardAbundance.org](http://www.BackyardAbundance.org)

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