Plant A Prairie
a project of the Kansas Native Plant Society
Gary and June Kiesen Memorial Fund

Garden Kits
for Kansas Teachers

Kansas Native Plant Society (KNPS) offers “Plant A Prairie” garden kits to Kansas teachers. Applications are accepted in the spring (beginning April 1), and live plants and supporting materials are delivered in mid-September. Kansas teachers K-12, as well as leaders of youth organizations, are eligible to participate in the free program.

The Plant A Prairie garden, which can be installed in about a week, is sized to fit the needs of the classroom teacher. Students will enjoy the hands-on experience of planting and tending their mini-prairie. They can learn the basics of plant biology and prairie ecology. And, the completed garden helps preserve our natural heritage by providing a way station for bees, butterflies and birds.

In mid-September, participating teachers receive 32 live native plants—enough to create an 8’ x 10’ prairie garden—delivered directly to the classroom. Each prairie kit includes 8 species that are hand-selected by Taylor Creek Nursery to match local growing conditions.

The Plant A Prairie kit contains a mix of grasses/sedges (25%) and wildflowers (75%), heavily weighted with spring and fall blooming plants, including milkweed for Monarch butterflies. The kit contains vigorous, easy-to-grow perennials, well suited to the extremes of Kansas heat and cold.

Funding for Plant A Prairie is provided by the Gary and June Kiesen Memorial Fund. Gary and June were active KNPS members and advocates for native plants and prairie restoration. The purpose of the Kiesen Fund is to engage youth in starting prairie gardens. Donations to support this project can be made to the Kansas Native Plant Society, designated to “Plant A Prairie.”

Key dates to remember

April-mid May – open enrollment (See Application form for exact dates).
Mid-September— plants and supporting materials arrive.
Following Spring – send us a photo of your garden and complete a short survey.

Learn more about Plant A Prairie and how to apply below....

- Who is eligible
- What is included in the prairie kit
- Links to lesson plans and other teaching resources
- Planting and care instructions
Who is eligible to apply

Kansas teachers K-12 are eligible, as well as leaders of youth groups, such as 4-H, scouting and others. Simply complete the one-page application and return it by the deadline. Plant A Prairie kits are free, but availability is limited. Early application is recommended. Successful applicants will describe (1) a clear educational plan with (2) strong youth involvement.

What is included with a Plant A Prairie garden kit:

- **32 individual potted plants**, each hand-selected to match the local growing conditions (as indicated on your application). Plants will be shipped in a live plant carton from Taylor Creek Restoration Nursery to arrive mid-September. Plants are about 8 inches tall; some taller plants may be trimmed at the nursery to fit. Note: you will get an email alert prior to plant shipment.
- A copy of the field guide: *Wildflowers and Grasses of Kansas*. This is the premier resource for identifying native plants in Kansas and contains a plant key (a helpful tool that relies on observation), plant habitats, descriptions of stems, leaves, flowers plus historical or cultural uses.
- An attractive “Plant A Prairie” sign to place in your prairie garden (shipped separately).
- Links to lesson plans and other teaching resources. See below.
- **Planting and care instructions** (see below). These include handy tips to assure your garden will be a success.
- **Technical support via phone or email**. A KNPS plant specialist will answer your questions about designing, planting and caring for your prairie garden. Email contact: PlantAPrairie@gmail.com
- A list of **Plant A Prairie plants** with their common and scientific names and other useful information (see below) to be used for reference. For example, the list contains information on plant height (tall, medium and short) and season of bloom.

Butterfly Milkweed *Asclepias tuberosa* and Wild Strawberry *Fragaria virginiana*
Links to lesson plans, educational standards, etc.

Some of the sites below offer free downloadable materials; some offer publications for sale; and, some require a subscription fee to download materials.

Tallgrass Prairie Center—University of Northern Iowa (elementary/middle school)
https://tallgrassprairiecenter.org/lesson-plans

Earth Partnership—University of Wisconsin (100 activities, elementary/middle school)
https://earthpartnership.wisc.edu/curriculum/

Dyck Arboretum of the Plains—Earth Partnership for Schools - Continuing Education for Teachers
Dyckarboretum.org/earth-partnership-for-schools/

Project WILD (K-12: wildlife conservation)
https://www.fishwildlife.org/projectwild/project-wild

Project Learning Tree (Environmental education, all levels)
https://www.plt.org/environmental-education-curriculum/

Missouri Botanical Garden—educational resources
https://www.missouri.botanical

Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education, KACEE
https://www.kacee.org/kgs

Links to plant descriptions and other information

Michael Haddock, Kansas State University (Kansas wildflowers and grasses)
www.kswildflower.org

PDF Pocket Guides for Flint Hills and Red Hills Native Plants - Free PDF Download

Link to all Great Plains Nature Center Pocket Guides - Free PDF downloads - Butterflies, Birds, Mussels, and more..

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (North America wildflower information)
https://www.wildflower.org/plants-main

Kansas Native Plant Society—Wildflower Gallery (photos of many native plants)
https://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org/kansas-native-plant-identification/

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)—Plant Database (Search by plant name; maps of distribution; list of pollinators, and more)
https://plants.usda.gov/home

Missouri Botanical Garden—Plant Finder (Search plant by name; photos and basic information)
http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/plantfindersearch.aspx
Planting and care instructions

1. **Prepare the garden site.** For best results, pick a site with at least 4 hours sun daily; more is even better. Most plants should be planted 12-30 inches apart to allow adequate spacing for maturity, less space is needed for shorter plants. Allow a border of about 1’ around the outer edges of the garden for plants to fill out. The finished plot should equal an 8’ x 10’ or 8’ x 12’ space. **If the plot you’ve chosen is a new bed, filled with grass,** you will need to kill and remove the grass. You may kill grass by covering it with tarp or black plastic for at least 4 weeks. You may also use a chemical application to kill grass before summer break. To suppress grasses and weeds before plants are shipped, cover the entire garden space with cardboard or paper, then cover with about 5 inches of natural wood chips or natural wood mulch. Water well to settle in. One or two inches of aged leaf mulch, straw or dried grass clippings can also be layered on top of mulch to help retain moisture. The outer edge of the garden space can be edged with rocks, small logs or other materials to define the edge of the bed. **If aggressive grasses are present,** a trench around the outer edge of the garden, filled with thick mulch, will help suppress the grasses.

**If a garden space is already established and grasses and weeds are not present,** simply cover the soil with mulch and water thoroughly.

2. **When plants arrive,** remove the ENTIRE TRAY from the box, leaving the pots in their places in the tray. Place plants in a shady area and water well. There are eight rows in the tray containing four plants per row. Typically, only the front plant in the row is labeled, and that label applies to all the unmarked plants behind it. You will need to create a label for EACH plant (craft sticks labeled with pencil work well, but can get lost in mulch and aren’t permanent). Place a label in each pot.

3. **Layout design for the garden.** As soon as you receive your plants we recommend you create a rough layout plan on paper, with plant spacing according to mature plant size. As a rough guide, allow short plants 12”-18” space; medium, 18”-24”; and tall, 24”-30”. Consult the plant list (see below) to determine the plant height (tall, medium or short) to aid you in your plan. Place taller plants toward the back, or in the center as a focal point. Step down with medium plants; position short plants near the edge. For a natural look, avoid placing plants in a straight line. Consult the [Wildflowers and Grasses of Kansas](#) book for height and width.

4. **Planting Day.** A cloudy day is ideal for planting. While plants are still in their pots, set them out in the prepared garden space according to your design. Expect to adjust and rearrange, but remember that plants will spread and fill empty spaces. Consider the before and after photos below and trust your research on spacing.

5. **To remove plants, push gently on the bottom and sides of the pot.** Keep working at it until it comes free. **Do not pull plants out by leaves or stems as that may cause injury.** With a hand trowel, move enough mulch away to dig a hole twice the size of the pot. Break up any hard clumps in the soil. Insert plant in hole and add additional potting soil if necessary so that plant is not above or below the natural ground level. Crumble, replace soil and press down to ensure a good contact between the plant roots and soil. Replace the mulch, taking care to not cover the young plant. Mark the plant location with a label, **consider adding a utility flag.** Repeat steps for remaining plants and then water the entire garden thoroughly so plant roots receive water.

6. **Initial plant care.** Water 2 to 3 times a week (if no rain) and remove any weeds. Water through October when plants go dormant. If any plants are pushed from the ground in winter, push them back carefully. Replace labels as needed. **There is no need to cut stems or remove leaves through Winter.**

7. **The following Spring.** Identify the plants as they emerge before beginning to pull weeds and add more labels or flags if necessary. Leave stems and leaves around plants to help locate plants and to not disturb pollinating insects that may be overwintering. Reapply mulch where needed to suppress weeds and retain soil moisture. Water occasionally starting late March if there is no snow or rain.
**Second and third years.** Continue to mulch between plants and around the garden edges; normal plant litter may suffice as mulch in the garden’s center. As the plants mature, they will shade out most weeds. Dead stems and seed heads should be left standing through winter to provide food for birds and habitat for native bees and other insects. Wait until fully emerge each spring to cut back old stems, if desired, but leave 12” standing for habitat and support of taller plants.

**BEFORE AND AFTER**

First season in a newly installed garden.

The same garden in its third season.