



Start by doing what's necessary, then what's possible, and suddenly, you are doing the impossible.
Saint Francis

It's time to plan your vegetable garden and decide which perennials or trees you want to plant. You might also want to set up a system to harvest rain water or create a rain garden. Some gardeners might also use pallets for garden ideas.

How do I know if a pallet is safe to use?

Examine the code stamped on the pallet. If the code includes the letters HT, then the pallet has only been heat-treated and should be safe to use however you wish. However, if the code includes the letters MB, then it has been fumigated with methyl bromide and should not be used anywhere that bare skin could come into contact with it or near food.

'Resistance of Trees and Shrubs to Deer Damage by Richard Jauron.

<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/1993/5-26-1993/damdeer.html>

Even if the trees are deer resistant, they might still munch on it if they are hungry enough. Keep in mind that as they grow the deer like to rut on them so you might consider keeping a fence around them until they are mature and it isn't as easy to damage the bark. There are also articles discussing rabbit damage to small trees and shrubs. If rabbits removed the tissue down to the wood all the way around the tree's trunk, the damaged tree has been girdled. Girdling destroys the tree as it disrupts the downward flow of food from the tree's foliage to the root system.

Annuals and perennials that deer rarely eat can be found on this website.

<http://warren.cce.cornell.edu/gardening-landscape/deer-resistant-plants>

Rain Water Harvesting

There are many resources on the internet but communicating with local gardeners is also a good option. You might be able to obtain free food grade barrels from Verena Street Coffee Co. Dubuque.

When this rain barrel system was installed a former neighbor designed the main collection barrel. An overflow opening was made by inserting a 4" pvc connector held with a good silicone caulk into the side of the barrel. There are two 4" pvc elbows, one on the outside to direct the overflow to the drain tile and another one inside so the water level can be adjusted. There are several layers of screen on top of the barrel to keep debris out. A hole is drilled on the side near the bottom of each of the barrels. Size depends on which size hose and connectors you decide to use. This allows the barrels to fill as the rain goes in the main collection barrel. A 6" hole was drilled in the top of each of the holding

barrels which are plugged with a whipped topping container. The hole is large enough to insert a 24" broom with soft bristles into the barrel to reach in to clean the inside before storing for the winter. The hose and connectors can be purchased at a farm supply store. The hose to drain water from the barrel has a connector that can be turned off to stop the flow of water.



Rain Barrel system. It was a bit of a challenge to insert the connectors at the bottom with the only access being the 6" hole in the top but tips from the internet helped. A tool that is used to pick up garbage might work. If it has been a while since we've had a rainfall, divert the rain into several 5 gallon buckets until the water runs clean. To prevent algae from forming in the barrels they should be covered to protect them from the sun.

Native Plant Sale

Friends of Jackson County Conservation is holding a wildflower sale this spring to help people obtain native plant species. Orders are taken until supplies run out.

Prairie plants are finding their way back into Iowa's landscapes, not only on public lands, but also in private gardens and yards. Native plants are a great choice for your yard or garden for many reasons. Native flowers and grasses:

- are well adapted to the local climate, and can better withstand the severe drought, flooding and temperatures of Iowa.
- require little to no fertilizers, are resistant to local diseases, insects, and other pests.
- provide habitat and food for local wildlife, including our insect pollinators!

Finding native plants to include in your yard is not always easy, but definitely worth the extra effort it takes to locate them. Many of the plants found at local 'big box' stores are not native and will not provide the long lasting benefits of prairie plants that have spent thousands of years adapting to Iowa's climate and soils.

Plants are \$3.00 each. To order, pick up an order form at the Hurstville Interpretive Center or download a form at <https://www.mycountyparks.com/county/Jackson/News/1369/Native-Plant-Sale.aspx>

Plants will be ready for pickup May 12-15, 2022. Order early, plants often sell out! Questions, call (563) 652-3783 or email jwagner@jacksoncounty.iowa.gov.

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Rain Gardens: Filtering and Recycling Rain Water author Ann Marie VanDerZanden

Rain gardens collect and filter rain water to improve storm water management. They also can provide an attractive habitat for birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects. The article has suggestions on the plants to include in a rain garden. <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/12607>

How to Build a Rain Garden

Choose your site: Pick a spot on your property where there is a natural slope from a downspout or sump pump. You can create a small trench directing flow away from building foundations. Ideally, choose low spots on your property that typically flood or pool water and have partial or full sun.

Plan Your Garden Plot: Prepare the plot by removing all of the sod and grass from the area. You should dig about six inches into the ground, making sure the center point is the deepest, and leave a natural slope on all sides towards the middle.

Choose your Plants: Plant native! Native plants are hardy and require less upkeep. Planting perennials will create a stronger root system absorbing more water – and they return yearly! Keep diversity in mind by planting multiple species of wildflowers, grasses and sedges that will support numerous wildlife species and pollinators, and also keep your garden beautiful year-round. For best results, divide your garden into three zones.

Zone 1: The center-most and deepest part of the garden, for plants that can tolerate very wet conditions.

Zone 2: Surrounding zone 1, is for plants that can tolerate occasional standing water.

Zone 3: The outer-most part of the garden, for plants that prefer drier conditions.

Maintenance: Mulch and add soil when needed. Remember to prune and weed regularly. Watering the garden during dry times its first year will help to get it established, Then you're all set!

For information on native plants in your area, check out

<https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/plants>

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How to start a backyard prairie - By Kerri on March 28, 2016 in Blog

<https://www.inhf.org/blog/blog/how-to-start-a-backyard-prairie/>

So, you want to start a backyard prairie? We can help. This guide will walk you through the basic steps of preparing, planting, and maintaining your own mini prairie or prairie garden.

Benefits

From a visual standpoint, native grasses and forbs can be beautiful additions to any landscape—think prairie roses, pale purple coneflowers or butterfly milkweed. Prairie plants also create vital habitat for native birds, butterflies, insects and other species. Take the Monarch butterfly for example: it's an important native pollinator and relies on milkweed plants for its survival. Blank Park Zoo's Plant.Grow.Fly program offers tips for making your prairie especially pollinator-friendly.

After a few years, a backyard prairie can even be easier to maintain than a traditional lawn. There's not much mowing involved, and a prairie doesn't require expensive pesticides or fertilizers.

Upkeep

Especially in the first few years, your prairie will be susceptible to weeds and invasive species. As prairie plants become established, combat the problem by mowing or periodically hand-weeding the area.

Once your plants have become well-established, upkeep and maintenance are minimal. Be patient, as it may take some time (2-4 years) for your native plant community to thrive. But once it does, you will be rewarded with a backyard prairie that is both aesthetically pleasing to the community and ecologically important to pollinators and other critters.

Questions? Contact Land Stewardship Dir Ryan Schmidt at rschmidt@inhf.org or 515-288-1846, ext. 13

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Hundred-acre jewel

CJ Younger, communications intern, cyounger@inhf.org on December 20, 2021 Blog

For the past 50 years, Robert McCarthy's property in southern Dubuque County has been another rectangle in the patchwork of agricultural land that dominates Iowa's landscape. Historic 2020 ended with a new beginning for his 100 acres.

McCarthy first spoke with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) more than a decade ago about his desire to see the land restored to its natural state for recreational use, and his intentions to bequeath the land to INHF to carry out his vision. Now, nearly eight years after McCarthy's passing, INHF is partnering with Dubuque County Conservation (DCC), which will own and steward the land long-term.

DCC Director Brian Preston has big plans for the property, at the heart of which lies an ambitious prairie planting.

"It's not very often that you get to start with a blank slate," said Preston. "It's really exciting for our staff to have a hand in a project that's going to have a huge impact."

Land and legacy

McCarthy wrote in his will that the land "shall not be cultivated and shall be left to grow wild in its natural state," envisioning a place welcome to "hikers, hunters and horseback riders."

Carrying out McCarthy's vision will be one of DCC's most ambitious restoration projects to date — it's the largest prairie they have planted in one place in a single year. It's an exciting challenge, and Preston worked with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop a robust restoration plan. Historically, native prairie dominated this area, and DCC will follow nature's framework by planting 92 native prairie species.

McCarthy pre-prairie

DCC's biggest obstacle is ensuring the initial seeding is successful. They plan to employ several different techniques, including cross-seeding (where half the seeds are drilled one way and the other half at a 45-degree angle). Ongoing management over the next couple of years will include mowing

three times a year and conducting seasonal prescribed burns. Preston anticipates the prairie should bloom for the first time in 2023. "It's going to be a hundred-acre jewel of a prairie," he said.

The costs of the transfer and restoration are also being supported by the Dubuque County Conservation Society, Dubuqueland Pheasants Forever and the Friends of the Dubuque County Conservation Board.

Bird-like inspiration

Beauty aside, this natural prairie will provide significant ecological benefits. It will filter and reduce runoff from surrounding properties and help re-establish the hydrologic cycle in the area. The prairie will also serve as a new habitat for native species such as eastern meadowlarks and bobolinks.

"This may be a small little patch in an otherwise ag-dominated area, but it doesn't mean the birds won't find it," said INHF Land Projects Director Ross Baxter. "The birds always find it."

The birds may find it, but will the people? Preston said many in the community are "nervous about the prairie," but he's hopeful that the opportunity to experience its beauty and benefits first-hand will put any apprehension at ease, and even inspire others.

"This is a great opportunity for folks to see a prairie and encourage them to do this on their own property," Preston said.

In defense of the land

The realization of McCarthy's vision was not without obstacle. McCarthy had several conversations with INHF staff about his wishes for the restoration and public use of his land, during which he indicated the land would be bequeathed to INHF for that purpose. It was these conversations that led INHF to defend what it believed to be McCarthy's earnest intention for the land in a dispute over ownership in the months after his death, a position that was upheld in court.

Per McCarthy's wishes, the land remained in trust to benefit his brother, Gerald, until his passing in December 2020, at which point it came to INHF to be protected and restored.

"Deciding the future of land is an emotional decision," said INHF Director of Philanthropy Abby Terpstra. "When people take the time to discuss their hopes and dreams with us, we feel a great sense of obligation."

McCarthy is the latest in a historic line of donors who envisioned a bright future for their land. INHF will continue to honor these bequests by protecting their land, one jewel at a time.

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5 of Iowa's most invasive species (and how to get rid of them)

<https://www.inhf.org/blog/blog/5-of-iowas-most-invasive-species-and-how-to-get-rid-of-them/>

Invasive plant species are like the common cold: They're easily caught, undesirable and if left untreated, can lead to something much more serious. Across Iowa, a variety of species threaten our native ecosystems. These weeds dominate and choke out wild and native plants, leading to less diverse native natural areas.

The following are five of the most common and threatening invasive species in Iowa.

Garlic Mustard has small, white, four-petaled flowers and a distinct garlicky odor when crushed.

Threat: Garlic Mustard is one of Iowa's most prolific invasives. The species has no natural predators or diseases, and it spreads rapidly, threatening to dominate woodland areas and crowd out native plants. A single plant can contain hundreds of seeds. The species thrives in shaded areas, including forests, shrublands and along trails, streams, roads etc.

Removal: The best method for removal depends on the time of year. For smaller areas, hand pulling the weed is best done between March and May. Spot spraying with herbicides works well in late fall or early winter while prescribed burns should be done in the spring to set back or hinder the plant's growth. Stay away from the plants between July and October, as the plant is seeding at this time and any interaction may spread more seeds.

Reed Canary Grass is large, coarse grass that can grow to be four feet tall.

Threat: Reed Canary Grass has creeping roots that can spread extensively. The species often invades wetlands, marshes and other wet areas, but they can occasionally tolerate mesic to dry soils.

Removal: The invasive is often times very difficult to control. Grass-selective herbicide can be effective, but it may require multiple treatments. Increasing native plant diversity and competition by adding relevant species such as prairie cordgrass and native sedges can also be successful.

The following are woody plants and usually require herbicides to kill them.

Bush Honeysuckle Often six to 15 feet tall with egg-shaped leaves, short stalks, reddish/orange berries and pink or white flowers.

European Buckthorn Up to 22 feet tall, this shrub features grayish/brown bark, yellow-green flowers and clusters of small black fruits.

Multiflora Rose Thorny shrub with arching stems, fragrant white or pink flowers and bright red rose hip fruits.

For more information about these species and other invasives in Iowa, check out the Iowa DNR's guides. <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Forestry/Forest-Health/Invasive-Plants>

Looking to learn more about invasive species? Contact Land Stewardship Director Ryan Schmidt at rschmidt@inhf.org or 515-288-1846, ext. 13.

Read articles by Willie Vogt regarding the 'need to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus coming from farms into the watershed' in the Wallaces Farmer magazine. **Jan 2022 – 'Dubuque County, Truterra partner in conservation'** and **Feb 2022 – 'Cities turn attention upstream to work with farmers.'**

Dubuque County Master Conservationist program consisting of 7 meetings taking place 6 pm Tuesdays, April 26 - June 7 2022. Cost is \$30. Registration deadline is 12 pm April 25, 2022. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/dubuque/content/dubuque-county-master-conservationist>

Register for the Older Wiser Livelier program on the Jackson or Jones county website.

**** OWLS - Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge Tour, Prairie City, IA. April 7, 2022. 7:00 AM – 3:30 PM****

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Dubuque, IA 52001



Reminders:

April 12, and May 10 meetings will be 6 p.m. at the National Guard Armory Old Hwy Rd
We take a break during the summer months and will meet again in September.

Check the events calendar for Dubuque County Conservation and surrounding counties

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Dubuque.aspx>

Or search for Dubuque County Conservation on Facebook

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Jackson.aspx>

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Jones.aspx>

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