

DEVELOPMENTAL MAINTENANCE FOR NATIVE PLANTINGS.

Native installations are normally promoted as low maintenance. Unfortunately, owners and maintenance contractors often construe this as no maintenance, resulting in messy unattractive projects. It is vital that your specifications include detailed first year maintenance requirements, as well as a long term maintenance plan.

First year maintenance is vital to the success of native upland seed installations. Since native seedlings take a conservative approach, focusing on root growth during the first growing season, they normally remain under 6 inches tall. Annual weeds quickly outpace these seedlings, shading them and competing for moisture and nutrients. Regular mowing at a height of 4 to 6 inches removes the canopy of annual weeds with no negative effects on the developing natives. It is important not to let the weeds grow over one foot tall between mowings, so the clippings do not smother the native seedlings. Mowing also helps prevent establishment of rapidly developing perennial weeds such as Canada thistle and Canada goldenrod.

Second year maintenance on a prairie sowing will depend on the amount of weed pressure on the site. Most sites should be mown at least once in late spring, especially if annual ryegrass was utilized as a cover crop. It tends to act as a biennial, growing rapidly and setting seed in the spring of the 2nd growing season. It should be mown when the seed heads appear, typically in late May. Otherwise, the amount of weed growth should determine whether the site is mown in the second growing season. Mowing is excellent control for many weeds that may become problematic in a prairie sowing, including Canada thistle, sweet clover, and Canada goldenrod.

Spot spraying weeds in a developing prairie planting with a non-selective herbicide is generally not recommended. Overspray typically leaves extensive dead areas that are invariably colonized by annual and perennial weeds. Similarly, hand pulling weeds in a seeding typically results in many small prairie seedlings uprooted with each large weed.

Long term maintenance of native seeding typically includes an annual mowing as well as monitoring for noxious invasive weeds. The mowing should occur during the dormant season between November and March. In a tall grass situation where a large volume of clippings are generated, the clippings should be raked and removed. This may be accomplished with a hay bailer on large sites. Of course, for large rural sites, this dormant mowing and removal may be replaced with burn maintenance. Burn maintenance must be performed with the utmost care by highly trained crews.

If a noxious weed invasion occurs, it may be controlled by growing season mowing or by the targeted use of selective herbicides. Recommended maintenance of plug installations will be covered in an upcoming newsletter.

Plant Feature: *Rudbeckia subtomentosa* (Sweet Black-Eyed Susan)



This durable perennial is an outstanding performer in storm water BMPs. Growing up to 5 feet tall in fertile conditions, it produces an abundance of bright yellow flowers with dark brown centers from the end of July until mid September. It is native to wet-mesic prairies and floodplains, performing well in partial shade or full sun. It tolerates shallow inundation in a rain garden for 24 hours or more, yet is quite drought resistant. It is a strong and consistent performer in bio-retention basins. A list of appropriate associates for a restoration may be found in our [mesic](#), [wet mesic](#) and [sedge meadow seed mixes](#).