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walk, I designed that area as a lower groundcover dominated by plants such as wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*).

I began to create my garden with seeds collected from local prairie remnants and with plants bought from nurseries or salvaged from local development sites. As if an omen that what I was doing was right, a bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) sprouted at the corner of my driveway and the sidewalk. This tree had been cut back several times before in favor of a Pfitzer juniper (*Juniperus chinensis*), which I had removed. Having a well-developed root system, the oak grew 1.5 m (5 feet) the first year.

My neighbors were curious about my strange garden, but seemed to think that since I am a landscape architect I must know what I was doing. At every opportunity, I told them about the native plants that I was introducing and tried to describe to them what I hoped the garden would look like. The wild strawberry plants especially fascinated them and I was quick to share bowls of my harvest and allowed children to pick the ripe berries. Gradually, my neighbors became somewhat protective of my work. When official-looking visitors (whom they presumed were there to enforce the local weed ordinance) stopped by to examine my garden, the neighbors quickly came over to assure them that my garden was intentional and actively cared for.

Despite my yard's general acceptance, I was still wary of involving neighbors in the occasional burning of my prairie. When I wanted to burn in the spring of 1993, Ann Arbor's new fire marshall insisted that I contact my immediate neighbors. At this point, I decided to make the fire a grand event and delivered hand-made invitations to every person on the street. With only one or two exceptions, all turned out to watch the fire from their porches or on my driveway (see Figure 1). All summer after the fire "party," neighborhood children and adults would comment about how lush the grasses seemed or how beautiful the flowers were. When I decided not to burn the following spring, I was told that I was depriving neighbors of one of their favorite events—much like our annual neighborhood block party. One neighbor told me that my garden was no longer just a yard, but a neighborhood legend. Some neighbors credited me with bringing fireflies and butterflies back to the neighborhood. They even protested that the trees and shrubs near my sidewalk were beginning to block their views of the prairie!

Though these experiences were not carried out in any scientific way, I am convinced that inviting and involving one's neighbors can be the best way to make "natural" gardens more acceptable. From conversations with my neighbors, I have developed a set of observations that I believe may be helpful to others working in similar situations:

1. Neighbors sense a difference between yards that are "let go" and those that are deliberately restored to some sense of "naturalness;"
2. Often your neighbor's greatest fears revolve around a perception that their property values will decline because your yard



As neighbors gather to watch, Bob Grese tends a prairie fire in front of his Ann Arbor, Michigan home. Photo by Bob Porter.

is not mowed regularly. Dispelling this misconception will often make them more accepting of your natural landscape;

3. Neighbors may be more willing to accept native plantings if they perceive them as wildlife habitat or if such plantings contain edible fruits;
4. The fear of not knowing how to take care of prairie or woodland habitats keeps many people from adopting such approaches in their own yards; and
5. Few people are willing to make drastic changes in their home landscapes. Many, however, may be willing to make gradual changes, such as introducing a few of the native plants they see growing sedately in your garden.

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2 Frequent Mowing May Increase Quality of Prairie Restorations (Iowa)

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Several practitioners recommend mowing newly-planted prairies to control weeds and enhance the establishment of prairie plants (Schwarzmeier, 1970; Diboll, 1984; Ross and Vanderpoel, 1991). Summarizing these ideas, Thompson (1992) advises mowing to a height of 14 to 30 cm (6 to 12 in) in late June or early July the first year after planting, followed by a similar treatment in May or June of the second year.

I tested this concept by trying several mowing strategies on a prairie planting in the town of Blue Grass, Iowa. The experiment site is part of a 2-hectare (5-acre) tract I am restoring slowly in small, yearly plantings. I planted the area on May 30, 1992 by hand-broadcasting a seed mix of nine grasses and 46 forbs, which

I collected from nearby remnants. After planting, I established three 6 m by 15 m (19.7 ft by 49.2 ft) plots and treated them as follows: north (mow when weeds reach 5 cm [12 in]), center (mow when weeds reach 10 cm [24 in]), and south (no mowing). Using a rotary lawn mower set to cut at a height of 13 cm (5.2 in), I mowed the center plot twice in 1992 and once in 1993. Similarly, I cut the north plot five times in 1992 and once in 1993. In March, 1994, I burned all three plots.

I surveyed all plots throughout the summer of 1994 and identified six grasses and 10 forbs that had flowered. The north plot had highest number of flowering species (16) followed by the center plot (14) and the south plot (10). I believe this demonstrates that additional mowing can enhance the success of a newly-planted prairie. But how does this happen? First, mowing removes the weedy vegetation and allows sunlight to reach the young prairie seedlings. Second, more frequent mowing apparently changes the weed species that the prairie plants compete against. For example, during the second growing season most of the weeds in the most frequently-mowed plot were mowing-tolerant plants such as crabgrass (*Digitaria* spp.) and plantain (*Plantago* spp.). In the center and south plots, the prairie plants had to compete against taller weeds such as foxtail (*Setaria* spp.) and lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album*). I believe this may be the reason why the prairie plants in the north plot were both larger and more numerous than those in the other plots after three growing seasons.

From a purely sociological perspective, I also observed an unexpected benefit from the more intense mowing treatment—the neighbors thought it looked nicer than the infrequently-mown or unmown plots. This is often an important consideration in restoration efforts, since nearby residents may frown upon the unkempt, weedy appearance typical of prairie plantings in their first few years.

I am currently studying whether continued, regular mowing of a newly-planted prairie through the first two years influences its future condition. Bragg and Sutherland (1986) and Ross and Vanderpoel (1991) both suggest that mowing for more than the first year encourages the establishment of prairie species. Boettcher and Bragg (1988), on the other hand, found that regular mowing of mature, native prairies reduces species diversity and increases the number of aggressive and introduced species. These findings suggest the existence of a critical year when further mowing begins to degrade the quality of a prairie. My future research will attempt to determine that pivotal juncture.

References

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3

FROM: Abstracts of the Eighth Annual Shrub Symposium: Arid Land Restoration.

3.1

Establishing Perennial Grasses on Abandoned Farmland in The Sonoran Desert. pp. 2-3. Cox, J.R., Research and Extension Center, Texas A&M University, Vernon, TX; and Gary W. Thacker.

Natural vegetation has been unable to invade several million acres of semidesert grassland along the northeastern edge of the Sonoran Desert, now abandoned farmland. Researchers spread native and introduced grass seed over disced seed beds to determine the effect of different irrigation levels on forage production and establishment. Bufflegress (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) seedlings emerged on irrigated plots, non-seeded plots, and one year after seeding on plots receiving only natural rainfall, making the species satisfactory for reclaiming the area. Bottlebrush (*Antheophora pubescens*) and sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) emerged but did not survive, while 'Catalina' boer lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvala*), 'Cochise' lovegrass (*E. lehmanniana* x *E. trichophora*), and kleingrass (*Panicum coloratum*) died after 24 months.

4

FROM: Proceedings of the 55th Fish and Wildlife Conference.

4.1

Tall Fescue Populations Changed By Prescribed Burning in Missouri. p. 176. Aulabaugh, J.B., Department of Agronomy, University of Missouri, 210 Waters Hall, Columbia, MO 65211; and David A. Sleper.

In place of chemicals or introducing plant species, prescribed burning is used to alter tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) stands, which adversely affect wildlife and livestock. A study showed that consecutive annual burns increased plant diversity and allowed interseeding of desired plant species. The authors feel that changes in plant species composition are necessary to integrate grazing and wildlife habitat management.