



Prairie Originals

WILDFLOWERS
NATIVE GRASSES



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Natural & Distinctive

It's that time of year again. Planting season is upon us! Hopefully the cold weather is behind us and we will have a "normal" May and June. We are opening on Monday, May 12 – MANITOBA DAY. May 12 marks the day Manitoba was created: on May 12, 1870 the Manitoba Act received royal assent, making Manitoba the fifth province in Canada, and the first in the west. A great way to celebrate Manitoba Day is by putting some Manitoba Wildflowers, Grasses or Shrubs in your garden.

It is always exciting in spring to watch the buds swell and the shoots start poking out of the ground. The birds are returning to start new families and the warm air smells so fresh. We have a Bald Eagle nest about ½ kilometre north of us along Henderson Highway and I can see that Mr. & Mrs. Eagle are back and sitting on their nest already. The pelicans are back along the river too. There is nothing better than an early spring morning when the sun is shining, the air is calm and the birds are singing. It is invigorating.

WHAT'S BLOOMING NOW?

We have had a cold spring this year so the flowers are later than usual. Our provincial flower the **Prairie Crocus** started blooming around April 14 when it was warm. When the snow and cold, cloudy weather set in they closed up their flowers and waited for the sun to reappear. They are just finishing blooming now.

Marsh Marigolds are sprouting now but not blooming yet. They should start in Mid May.

Early Blue Violet, Three Flowered Avens and Pussy Toes are often blooming by now but it will probably be another week before they start.

Wild Plums, Pincherries and Saskatoons usually start blooming in early or mid May and flower for about 10 days. This year they are taking their time.

CAN YOU GUESS WHAT THIS PLANT IS? Answer at end of the newsletter.



PREPARING THE SOIL FOR PLANTING

This is a very important first step in creating a new prairie area or flowerbed. Good preparation enables the plants to grow and fill in the space as fast as possible. If your soil is very heavy clay (very sticky when wet and very hard when dry) or very sandy, add lots of organic matter such as peat moss, compost, manure or leaves and work it in. This improves the soil texture by aerating heavy clay soil and increasing water retention in sandy soil, resulting in quicker establishment. If you are in a new housing development there may be no topsoil at all. There may be only grey subsoil which has no organic matter and few nutrients. Plants grow poorly in subsoil. You will need to add 15 cm (6") of mixed topsoil. Your site should be weed free before planting, the same as if you are starting a lawn, vegetable garden or flower bed.

NEW VARIETIES FOR 2008

Brittle Prickly Pear Cactus *Opuntia fragilis*. We actually have two varieties of Prickly Pear Cactus that are native in Manitoba and this is one of them. They are a hardy native cactus that spreads to form large mats. Caution, they are very prickly. They need full sun and sandy or gravelly, well drained soil. They produce pale yellow flowers about 5 cm (2") across in late June. Mine haven't bloomed yet and the Flora of North America states that in many places it flowers infrequently. It is native to the southern parts of Western Canada and the Midwestern United States. In Manitoba it grows in the Carberry Sandhills.

Flat Top Goldenrod *Euthamia graminifolia*. This is a fine textured Goldenrod with narrow leaves and flowers in flat clusters at the top of the plant in August. It spreads by roots so it is better planted in a mixed, prairie style planting than in a flower bed. This plant grows well in medium to wet soils and full sun. All goldenrods are good nectar plants for butterflies. It is widespread across Canada and the United States. I had it appear at my old place on Schreyer Crescent, probably courtesy of the birds or the wind. I have also seen it growing in the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve near Tolstoi.

PLANTS FOR DRY SHADE

I often get questions on what grows in dry shade so here are a few suggestions.



Giant Wild Rye *Elumus cinereus* - This grass was discovered growing in the forest along the Assiniboine River. It is a clump grass for sun or shade and is not invasive. The erect white seed heads look great against a dark backdrop such as a dark fence or evergreens. It grows 90 - 120 cm tall (3 -4 ft.)

Wild Columbine *Aquilegia canadensis* - Hummingbirds like to visit this unusual flower for nectar. It does well in sun or shade and well drained soil. The plant lives for a few years but it generally continues on and moves around by reseeding. Columbine grows 90cm tall (3ft).



Bush Honeysuckle *Diervilla lonicera* - This small native shrub grows 50 -100 cm tall (2 -3 ft.) in sun or shade. It spreads by roots and requires well drained soil. The leaves turn red and gold in the fall.



Purple Oat Grass *Schizachne purpurascens*
This handsome, cool season grass has low green clumps of leaves. The seed heads appear in June and grow 50 - 100 cm tall (2 -3 ft.) This clump grass is not invasive. It is the host for the Northern Pearly Eye Butterfly.



The Northern Pearly Eye has only recently been determined a species in its own right. The larva feed on forest grasses instead of the cane favored by the more southern Pearly Eye. The Northern Pearly Eye is confined to forests and their borders. It tolerates more shade than most other butterflies. And, unlike most other butterflies, it is not attracted to flowers, preferring tree sap, carrion and scat for its nutritional needs. It often perches on tree trunks, leaves and bushes, often gathering in groups like the ones pictured here.

Western Canada Violet *Viola canadensis* - Loads of white flowers are produced all through June and into July. this plant grows 20 -40 cm tall (8 - 16"). It spreads by roots and seed to form a thick groundcover. It does well in dry or moist soil.



Star Flowered Solomon's Seal *Smilacina stellata* - This plant takes 3 -4 years to get established but it lives a long time. It spreads slowly to make a thick groundcover, 30 - 50 cm tall (1 -2 ft.) The starry white flowers are followed by striped red berries. It is also called False Solomon's Seal.

Also, keep in mind that adding lots of organic matter, such as compost, and tilling it in before planting will help the soil to hold moisture. Compost is available at some topsoil companies if you don't have enough of your own. In shady, woodland plantings, I add at least 10 cm (4") of Oak leaves to my beds every fall. This slows down moisture loss, looks nice and it helps keep the weeds down. The plants have no trouble growing up through the mulch in spring. If you don't have oak leaves you can use 5 cm (2") of woodchips.

BENEFITS OF NATIVE PLANTS

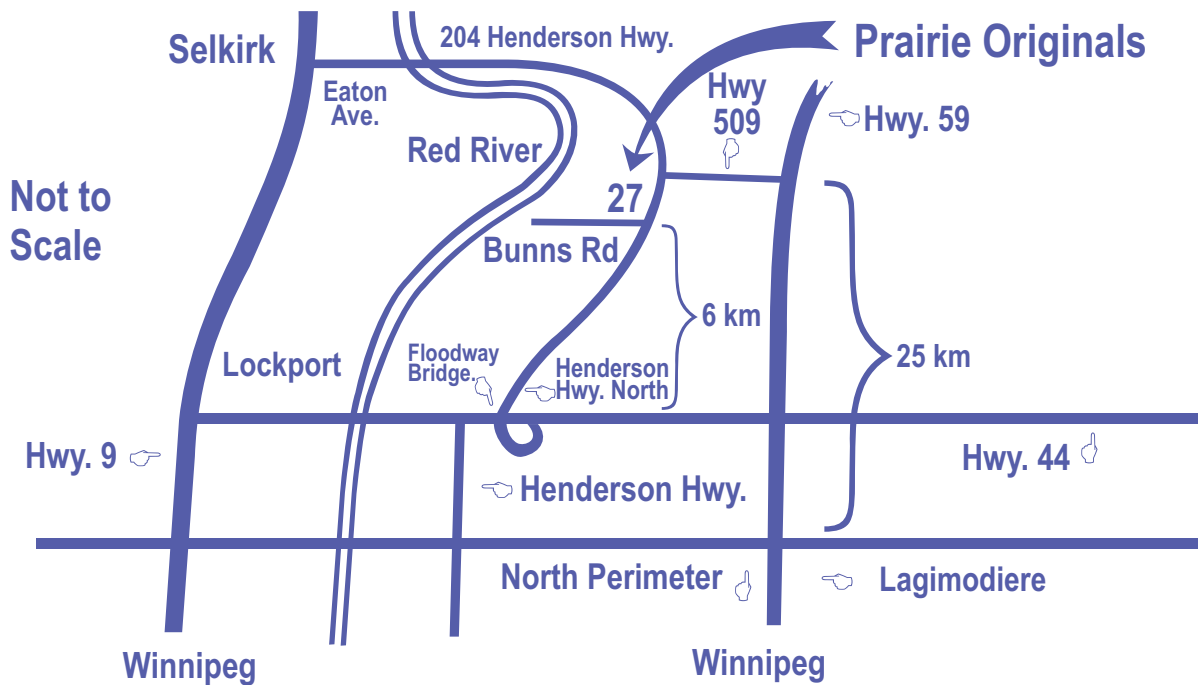
One of the benefits is that regular watering is not required. The plants require some watering the first year until the roots are established but after that they do very well on natural rainfall. This helps to save our precious water resources and also saves you a lot of time so you can do other things. This is quite a contrast to the regular watering required by thirsty annuals.

CAN YOU GUESS PHOTO - Answer - Prairie Crocus seedhead.

Until next time,

Shirley Froehlich & Stef Johnson

LOCATION



HOURS

May 12 - June 27

Monday to Friday

10 am - 6 pm

Saturday

9 am - 5 pm

Sundays - until June 15

11 am - 5 pm

July, August & September

Usually open Monday to Saturday, **Phone to confirm**

Evenings by Appointment