



# Prairie Originals

WILDFLOWERS  
NATIVE GRASSES



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Spring 2011 is here! You would never know it by these pictures I took on May 1st, but the Crocus are blooming so it is official. They started blooming around April 20th and bravely stuck their heads through the 10 cm of snow as it fell. This illustrates how tough our prairie plants are. The plunge in temperatures doesn't kill them, it only slows them down a little.



*Top left: Crocus in snow;  
Top right: Marsh Marigold in snow;  
Right: Wild Iris pots in snow.*

It has been a slow motion spring this year even before the snow came. We know warm weather is on the way so we are busy seeding, potting, watering and tending the new little prairie plants so we can release them into prairie gardens.

We are opening for the season on May 12, Manitoba Day. Due to the cold spring there are a few varieties of plants that will not be ready the first week of opening. Closed Gentian will probably be ready in June. Purple Coneflower will only be available in late June or July. Unfortunately, Wild Hops are not available at all due to poor seed quality. On the up side, Crowfoot Violet is not listed in the catalogue but we do have some nice 4.5" pots of this showy, spring violet.

Also, during the week of May 12 the best route to reach Prairie Originals is via Highway 59 and 509 (*See map on our website*). The bridge between us and Selkirk and the road under the Floodway Bridge on Hwy. 44 at Lockport are closed due to flooding as I write this. I am not sure when they will reopen. If in doubt feel free to phone us.



## What's Blooming Now?

The Speckled Alder *Alnus rugosa* in our 3 Gallon containers decided to bless us with its unusual flowers this spring.

This April bloomer is a large native shrub growing 2 - 4 metres tall (6 – 16 ft.).

The birds love to eat the seeds and it is the host plant for Harvester butterfly (*inset*) caterpillars.



## Bird & Butterfly News and Other Wildlife

This month we are focusing on "Other" wildlife. We love to observe wildlife but we feel it belongs outdoors and we draw the line at the door. However, on Saturday night, April 10th we had a visitor drop in unannounced. I discovered a small jagged hole in the basement window screen Sunday morning. "That is really odd" I thought and immediately changed the screen. Sunday afternoon I was watering some plants in the basement (our underground greenhouse) and out of the corner of my eye I saw the tip of a tail disappear around a corner. We immediately set a bunch of mousetraps. Late Sunday evening we heard noise in the basement. My husband bravely went to investigate. He returned with startling news. There is a Muskrat in the basement!!! He was swimming in a pail of water! Unfortunately, he then went into hiding.

We went to bed thinking we would call an exterminator in the morning. Monday morning Alexis and I discovered Mr. Muskrat sitting up on a plant bench eating breakfast. He likes Prairie Sage and Smooth Aster. He wasn't even shy. We got within 3 or 4 feet of him but couldn't catch him with a sheet. We decided to try a live trap with the recommended bait of apples and carrots. Unfortunately by Monday evening it was clear he wasn't interested in the bait and we needed a new strategy. We convinced our son and his girlfriend to join our team to herd the muskrat out of the basement and up the stairs to the garage. It took a while but he eventually went up the stairs and then tried to hide in the garage behind the firewood and the lawnmower. Even after he left the garage he hung around the house for a while before he finally ran off into the trees. He really didn't want to leave.

I guess he figured we were interrupting his tropical vacation, complete with heat, a place to swim and fresh greens. Needless to say, it made for an interesting weekend, for us and the muskrat. We now have animal-proof screens.



## New for 2011

**White Cedar** *Thuja occidentalis* is one of Manitoba's native evergreen trees. Its native range in Manitoba is mainly in the south-east corner of the province, although it does grow in Bird's Hill Park on the Cedar Bog trail. It is seen occasionally between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Winnipegosis as far north as Grand Rapids. It is also native throughout eastern Canada and the north eastern United States.

White Cedar grows 10 – 15 metres tall (30 – 45 ft) and 2-4 metres wide (6 – 12 ft) with a broadly pyramidal shape. It stands alone as a beautiful specimen tree and also makes a gorgeous shelterbelt. This long lived tree grows best in moist, well drained soil in full light.

It tolerates wet soils and shade too although it will be slower growing. It is not drought tolerant. Tea prepared from the foliage and bark is high in Vitamin C. This is what saved the crew of Jacques Cartier from scurvy. It is available in 4.5" pots now and we will also have 1 Gallon pots available in late June through to fall.

**Grey Dogwood** *Cornus racemosa* is available again in 4.5" pots after a few years hiatus. It has grey stems and showy white flowers followed by white berries which the birds love. It blooms in June and grows 1-2 metres tall (3 – 6 ft) and about 1 to 1 ½ metres wide (3 – 4 ft). It does send up some new shoots through root suckers but it is not a big spreader.

Grey Dogwood is a host plant for the Spring Azure little blue butterfly caterpillars. In fall the leaves turn purple and red. It is native to southeast Manitoba and eastern Canada and the U.S.

**White Cedar**  
*Thuja occidentalis*



**Grey Dogwood**  
*Cornus racemosa*



## International Day for Biodiversity

Sunday, May 22 is Biodiversity Day. Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth.

Every living organism from microscopic bacteria to insects to large plants and animals has a role to play in our environment. Healthy ecosystems have lots of diversity. Biodiversity Day is a chance to stop and appreciate the fabulous mix of life we have in our corner of the world. It is also a time to think about what we can each do to help preserve nature's bounty and to restore some diversity if it has disappeared. Planting native wildflowers, grasses and native shrubs in cities, towns and cultivated spaces is an excellent way to preserve these plants and all the myriad creatures associated with each type of plant.



## Fascinating Facts

**Sweet Flag** *Acorus americanus* is a very interesting plant. It doesn't have showy flowers but it has bold, sword like leaves similar to Wild Iris. The leaves have a strong citrusy fragrance. In the wild it grows in wet soil or shallow water.

It has a long history of medicinal use and is used by Herbalists and Aboriginal people. For Aboriginals Sweet Flag or Wikis (pronounced Wee-Kay) is considered one of the most commonly known and used medicines. Its uses include throat infections like strep throat, congested lung infections, diabetes and for sinus congestion. The oil has been found to be anti-fungal, anti-septic and anti-spasmodic. It has been chewed to induce a bad taste of tobacco smoke (for those wanting to quit smoking).

The plant produces long, reddish rhizomes. These roots are cut into small slices and dried. It can be boiled and drank as a tea but it is most commonly chewed. Small slices the size of a pinky fingernail are chewed 3 – 4 times per day.

**Until next time,**

*Shirley Froehlich & Alexis Nazeravich  
Lesley Schiller & Bailey Wiebe*



