

Rehabilitating a Failing Prairie Planting

Many prairie plantings have disappointing results due to poor seed specifications, difficult site conditions or adverse weather conditions during establishment. In some cases, these issues are so bad that it is best to start over by killing the first attempt and reseeding with a new seed mixture. In other cases, however, there are methods of rehabilitating the prairie to salvage the first attempt.

Sometimes a particularly aggressive species has become overly dominant in the prairie. It may be one of the species in the seed mix such as big bluestem or switchgrass or a volunteer plant such as Canada goldenrod. In the case of aggressive tallgrasses, a grass specific herbicide may be utilized to reduce the grass cover while releasing the forbs. If the problem is Canada goldenrod or Canada thistle, mowing the planting at a height of 6 inches monthly for two growing seasons will dramatically reduce these weeds which are far less tolerant of mowing than most prairie species.

Unwanted recruitment of woody species is another common problem in prairie plantings. While burning and mowing can knock back woody species, this maintenance rarely results in a fatal blow. Rather, the woody species quickly resprout from the root system. Complete removal normally requires the use of herbicide. The more labor-intensive method is to cut the woody stem near the ground and immediately treat the cut surface with a concentrated solution of a Glyphosate-based herbicide. A less labor-intensive solution entails a basal bark application of an appropriate herbicide formulated to be absorbed through the bark and kill the plant.

In some instances, you may need to overseed if the above problems have resulted in a substantial loss of diversity in the planting. To prepare for overseeding, burn or mow the planting short in late fall. The seed may then be applied as a dormant sowing via broadcasting or drilling. If overseeding is performed, the areas should be mown as described above for at least one growing season.

Plant Feature – Grey Goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*)

A plant that thrives under adverse conditions, grey goldenrod is a low stature goldenrod characteristic of poor dry soils. Typically 18 to 24 inches tall, it produces a pyramidal golden inflorescence that peaks in September. The rough-textured foliage is attractive throughout the growing season. Grey goldenrod should be planted in well-drained soil in full sun. It competes best when grown in infertile soils.

In a restoration, grey goldenrod should be utilized in dry prairie and savanna mixes with associates from our [Low Stature Prairie Mix](#). It does particularly well in sandy soils.

