

LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED!

VISIT OUR NATURAL AREAS

See over 130 acres of native Illinois habitats—oak woodland, prairie and river—through four seasons of the year at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

JOSEPH REGENSTEIN, JR. SCHOOL OF THE CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

The Joseph Regenstein, Jr. School of the Chicago Botanic Garden offers classes and seminars in gardening, landscape design, botanical arts and more.

For a course catalog, please call (847) 835-8261 or visit www.chicagobotanic.org/school.

SCIENCE AT THE GARDEN

The Chicago Botanic Garden is home to one of the nation's premier plant conservation programs, through which scientists tackle the most pressing issues in the plant conservation field. To learn more about the Garden's many conservation and scientific efforts, visit www.chicagobotanic.org/research.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

You'll make new friends as you help maintain the prairie, monitor its progress, collect seeds and teach others about its wonders. To learn more, call the Volunteer Department at (847) 835-6800.

EXPLORE CHICAGO WILDERNESS

Chicago Wilderness is a partnership of more than 190 public and private organizations that protect, restore and manage the natural lands in and around Chicago.

To learn more about a variety of programs and volunteer opportunities, visit their website at chicagowilderness.org or call (708) 485-0263, ext. 396.

For further information on rare plants, visit the website for the Center for Plant Conservation, of which the Chicago Botanic Garden is a member, at www.w.w.centerforplantconservation.org.

The Center's National Collection of Endangered Plants is a repository for more than 600 imperiled native plants.

Support for the care and display of endangered plants at the Chicago Botanic Garden has been provided in part by Norman J. and Alice E. Rubash.



CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

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The Chicago Botanic Garden is owned by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN



Wander the trails of the Suzanne S. Dixon Prairie to discover the beauty and diversity of native grasslands of Illinois.

Illustration: Juliana Kang

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DIXON PRARIE

Many Prairies in One

Dixon Prairie was created here at the Chicago Botanic Garden to bring you the sights, sounds, and scents of the prairie, and to help you better understand its richness and complexity. Each of the six prairie types within this 15-acre site were once common in northeastern Illinois. Each differs in the roll of its land, the nature of its soil and the plants it can support.

Building a Prairie

Construction of Dixon Prairie began in 1980. Bulldozers reshaped the land, creating an open, rolling landscape like the native prairies of Illinois. We mixed new soils, adding sand or gravel in certain sections. Over time, we've introduced more than 300 species of plants. Many insects, birds and mammals have arrived on their own to become part of this developing habitat.

Managing the Prairie

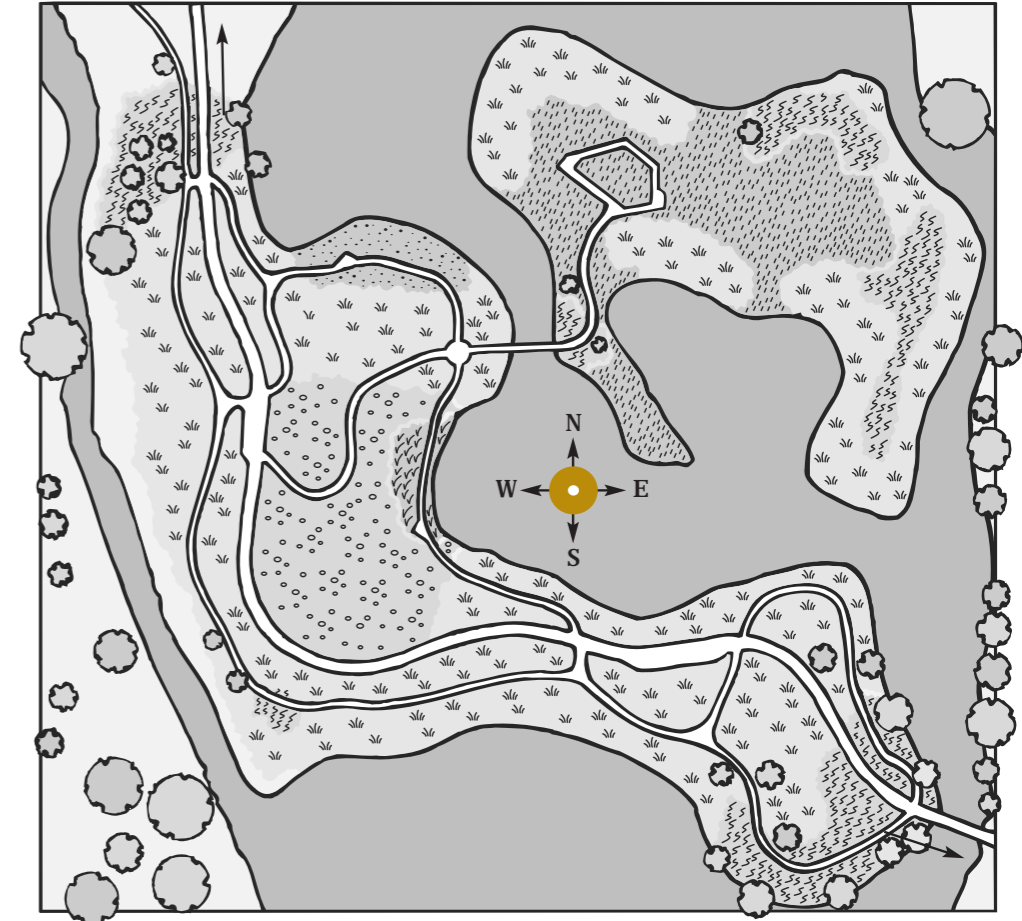
Fire is essential to maintaining the prairie. Fire prevents woody plants from getting established—and recycles nutrients back to the soil. In Dixon Prairie, we burn sections periodically in spring and fall. We also control invasive plant species by mowing, hand weeding and, when necessary, applying herbicide.

Preserving Prairies

Constructing and restoring prairies in urban landscapes is a growing trend, providing low-maintenance, sustainable landscapes and increasing plant diversity as well as providing habitats for bird and animals. Our observations on how to create, restore and manage prairies helps support this movement. We're also working on genetic and reproductive studies to better restore endangered plants.

The Suzanne S. Dixon Prairie was created with the generous support of Mr. and Mrs. Wesley M. Dixon, Jr., who also have provided an endowment to ensure that the prairie will be enjoyed by future generations.

To Evening Island and Regenstein Center



PRAIRIE TYPES

- Fen:** This type of prairie often develops where groundwater is present, creating cold, wet, mucky peat soils.
- Gravel Hill:** Located where glaciers left mounds of gravel and sand, gravel hill prairies contain soil that is rocky and well-drained.
- Mesic:** Often located on flat or gently rolling plains, mesic prairies contain soil that is rich, dark, and moist yet well-drained.
- Sand:** This type of prairie is characterized by an undulating landscape of low, well-drained sand dunes.
- Savanna:** Found between open prairies and woods, Savanna's contain scattered, fire-resistant oak trees and plants that thrive in the partial shade they produce.
- Wet:** The dark, organic soils of wet prairies can be found in low-lying areas that stay moist throughout the year.

PRAIRIE HIGHLIGHTS

Here are some of the plants and animals that you may see as you explore the Prairie trails.

PLANTS



Big Bluestem

(*Andropogon gerardii*)

This tall grass is also called turkeyfoot grass because its seed clusters radiate like the claws of a turkey. Look for purple to bronze-colored stems and leaves. (Mesic)



Bur Oak

(*Quercus macrocarpa*)

The thick bark of this oak makes it more fire-resistant than other trees. Notice its large leaves and fuzzy, capped acorns. (Savanna)



Butterfly Milkweed

(*Asclepias tuberosa*)

The bright orange flowers on this milkweed attract many kinds of butterflies. (Sand)



Compass Plant

(*Silphium laciniatum*)

The huge, deeply divided leaves of the compass plant often orient on a north-south axis, to avoid the strong midday sun. Look for yellow flowers on a tall stalk in late summer. (Mesic)



False Sunflower

(*Heliopsis helianthoides*)

This plant is similar to the true sunflower, but it blooms earlier in the season. Goldfinches relish its nutlike seeds (Savanna, Mesic)



Flat-topped Aster

(*Aster umbellatus*)

This rare aster grows only where groundwater is near the soil's surface. Showy white flowers attract butterflies in August and September, and birds feed on the fluffy seed heads in fall. (Fen)



Golden Alexanders

(*Zizia aurea*)

Flat or slightly domed clusters of tiny yellow flowers radiate from the top of a branch. The plant grows in small colonies and blooms in late spring. (Mesic, Wet, Savanna)



Little Bluestem

(*Schizachyrium scoparius*)

In spring, the stems of this grass are blue, but they turn yellow-tan in summer and reddish in fall. Tufts of fuzzy white seeds provide food for small birds. (Sand, Gravel Hill)



Meadow Anemone

(*Anemone canadensis*)

This anemone prefers moist soils, colonizing along rivers and in low, moist meadows. White, five-petaled flowers dance above bright green foliage in spring. (Wet, Mesic)



New England Aster

(*Aster novae-angliae*)

A showy aster, this plant bears clusters of daisy-like flowers with purple petals and yellow centers in late summer. (Wet, Mesic)



Ohio Goldenrod

(*Solidago ohioensis*)

This showy, flat-topped goldenrod produces an exuberant, golden display of flowers from late summer into early fall. (Sand, Fen)



Prairie Dropseed

(*Sporobolus heterolepis*)

This light-green grass grows in low bunches, with an arching spray of leaves like a pom-pom. Its inconspicuous flowers have the odor of buttered popcorn. (Mesic, Gravel Hill)



Purple Prairie Clover

(*Dalea purpurea*)

Look for tiny leaflets and conelike clusters of tiny rose-purple flowers from mid- to late summer. (Gravel Hill)



Side-oats Grama

(*Bouteloua curtipendula*)

The grass blooms in late summer with bright orange and purple flowers. In fall, seeds dangle off one side of each 2- to 3-foot stalk. Can be found in prairies with dry soils. (Gravel Hill)



Spotted Joe-Pye Weed

(*Eupatorium maculatum*)

Look for a cluster of fuzzy pinkish purple flowers atop a tall stem. Spaced along the stem, you'll see whorls of narrow, toothed leaves. (Sand)

INSECTS



Common Sulphur

(*Colias philodice*)

The color of these common, pale yellow insects probably gave rise to the name "butterfly." Mates are attracted by the ultraviolet light that reflects from their wings (humans can't see it).



Differential Grasshopper

(*Melanoplus differentialis*)

This grasshopper is yellowish with brown and black markings. It is the most common large grasshopper native to Illinois.



Monarch Butterfly

(*Danaus plexippus*)

These orange and black butterflies lay their eggs on milkweed plants and can be seen May through October.



Painted Lady Butterfly

(*Vanessa cardui*)

These butterflies can have a wing span of nearly three inches, with recognizable orange-brown, black and white markings. Some people call them "thistle butterflies" because their favorite food is thistle nectar.



Syrphid Fly

(*Syrphidae*)

This fly family includes members that are striped yellow and black and are often mistaken for bees or wasps. They are important pollinators of prairie plants.

BIRDS



American Goldfinch

(*Carduelis tristis*)

This tiny yellow and black bird is partial to the seeds of thistle plants, often found in prairies. They turn a drabber, more brownish color in winter.



Eastern Kingbird

(*Tyrannus tyrannus*)

Well-known for its aggressive behavior toward other birds, the kingbird's scientific name means "tyrant." This bird is black on top and white underneath, with a black tail tipped in white. The kingbird eats insects, catching them while in flight.



Song Sparrow

(*Melospiza melodia*)

The song sparrow builds its nest on the ground, or in low weeds or shrubs. It also feeds on the ground, eating seeds, insects and some fruit. Its whitish breast is streaked with brown and its reddish-brown crown displays a central gray stripe.



Tree Swallow

(*Tachycineta bicolor*)

At maturity, the tree swallow is an iridescent dark greenish-blue color above, and white below. Young females have mostly brown upper parts, developing their deep blue color over a two-year period. As their name suggests, tree swallows spend very little time on the ground, preferring to perch in trees.