Treeways

2015 – 8

Wildflower Planting Demo

Native bees and birds and plants are threatened by invasive species and lack of space to live. Native species typically require food that comes from specific plants and when those plants are not available they have to move on. Reintroducing native plant species has been much in the news the last couple years and is one way we all can help the bees, birds and butterflies. One small wildflower garden is good but a lot of small wildflower gardens add up to make a huge difference. The Parks and Public Lands Committee agreed that planting a demonstration wild flower area would be a good way to encourage City residents to try a similar effort on their own properties.

The area chosen is a site of about 1000 square feet located just south and east of the intersection of Salem Church Road and Windy Hill Road. There is a yellow sign identifying the location. Reintroducing prairie wildflowers and grasses is a process. The demonstration planting process began with mowing last spring to break up and mulch up the old dry grasses and weeds. It was mowed again a few weeks later after the bromegrass and other vegetation was about a foot tall. Multiple mowings tend to stress and weaken established grasses and other perennials. Several weeks later when all the grasses and weeds were growing well, it was treated with Roundup herbicide to kill both. Bromegrass, an introduced pasture grass, is a tough one to kill so a second Roundup treatment was done about a month later.

Next 8 cubic yards of commercial grade compost was spread over the site primarily to level out the ruts left over from past vehicle or construction traffic. Then we waited until the first week of November to spread seed across the site. The late fall/winter seeding was done because wildflower seed requires a period of wet and cold before it will germinate and our Minnesota winters provide just the right blend of wet/cold/freezing to get good seed germination next spring. The seed was mixed with moist par-boiled rice hulls to enable more even seed distribution since many species have fluffy or very tiny seeds. The seed was broadcast by hand and now all we need to do is wait till the seeds begin to germinate next spring. Next summer year we will mow the demonstration plot to keep grasses down to about the 5-8” height while the other native species become established.

We used the Pretty Darn Quick (PDQ) seed mix from Prairie Moon Nursery in Winona, MN and that mix includes the following species: anise hyssop, prairie onion, rose milkweed, sky blue aster, Canada milk vetch, swamp marigold, partridge pea, lance-leaf coreopsis, purple prairie clover, purple coneflower, rattlesnake master, cream gentian, early sunflower, great blue lobelia, wild bergamot, foxglove beardtongue, prairie cinquefoil, mountain mint, yellow coneflower, black-eyed Susan, wild petunia, showy goldenrod, blue vervain, hoary vervain, golden Alexanders, side-oats grama, blue grama, plains oval sedge, brown fox sedge, Canada wild rye, and little bluestem. We enhanced this seed assortment with: nodding onion, smooth blue aster,

pale purple coneflower, prairie blazing star, fragrant giant hyssop, swamp milkweed, common milkweed, butterfly milkweed, prairie clover, and meadow blazing star.

In addition four swamp white oaks and two hazelnuts where planted to make the site a little more interesting. These trees were rooted in a gravel bed system prior to planting and had terrific root systems when they were installed. While it may seem that there are lots of steps to planting native wildflowers it is in fact really easy and no step in the process is difficult or very time consuming. With the exception of mowing or herbicide application it is so easy that a second grader could do it – get your kids to help with your project and you can do your part to save the bees, the bugs, the birds and the planet together.

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