

SUCCESSFULLY INCORPORATING PRAIRIE INTO THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

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Vast areas of Louisiana and Mississippi were once covered with grasslands. These systems have declined due to agricultural and urban development and the discontinued use of fire. They can be restored in smaller scale urban environments. Establishing a prairie in the cityscape, the designer establishes a foothold to enlighten the masses about the benefits of the locally specific grassland and the fauna that depends upon it. The challenge to the designer is one of presenting a unique system that can often seem esthetically questionable. Most of the contemporary approaches to the design of these landscapes in the urban environment focus on creating a managed perennial landscape with wild or native grasses. The challenge in planting urban grasslands is between creating a more visually sophisticated perennial garden and creating a functioning ecosystem that is managed by natural processes. Both approaches have their place in the contemporary landscape, but the designer must consider how maintenance, education and location affect these decisions. Understanding the habitats and manipulating the individual species in a planting, allows designers to speed up the establishment of the prairie garden, enabling the design to become more appealing visually in the initial stages of growth. The prairie ecosystem fits well into green building projects. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) provides an excellent opportunity to use meadow as a lawn substitute. The meadow landscape provides a low maintenance alternative to turf and is much more interesting to explore and enjoy.