



GOOD
NEIGHBOR

Turf to Prairie

Converting some areas of turf to native grasses and wildflowers could have significant and positive ecological effects, as well as save money for landowners.

Why Make the Transition

from Turf to Prairie?

The benefits of converting large, essentially unused areas of turf to native prairie are numerous. The mowing, watering, fertilizing, and chemical applications that go along with turf maintenance can be detrimental to the natural environment, as well as your wallet. Native prairie plantings require far less time and annual financial inputs to maintain following initial establishment costs and provide greater ecological benefits than turf.

The cumulative impact of frequent mowing on air pollution, as well as costs incurred through fuel purchase, can be significant. Converting some areas of turf to native grasses and wildflowers could have a significant and measurable positive ecological effect, in addition to saving money for land-owners through reduced turf watering and maintenance.

Additional benefits include:

- Increased storm water infiltration and groundwater filtration
- Habitat support for pollinators and wildlife
- Improved soil retention and health, and
- Enhanced beauty of your yard, park, or school!

The greatest takeaways of turf to native prairie conversions may be their potential to boost public education and awareness.

A majority of people today may have never seen or interacted with a prairie in their lives. Creating a greater proximity of prairie to people can go a long way in raising awareness and participation in prairie conservation.

Remember, every site is unique; each individual prairie planting will vary in price as well as approach. We hope that you'll use this document as a resource for transitioning high-maintenance turf into beautiful, native prairie.



Center for Energy &
Environmental Education
www.ceee.uni.edu

goodneighborowa.org
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SITE PREPARATION (to remove existing vegetation)

Method (choose one)	CONTRACTED	DO-IT-YOURSELF	Additional Notes
	Associated Cost	Associated Cost	
Herbicide	\$150/acre	\$11/acre	It is not recommended for civilians to broadcast spray herbicide in an area over 1/4 acre without proper licensing for health and safety purposes. If your project will be larger than 1/4 acre, it is strongly recommended that you contact a professional.
Tilling/disking	\$500-\$1,000/acre	\$99/day rental fee	Based on conversations with local contractors and rental prices for 8HP tiller from Black Hawk Rental
Sod Removal	N/A	\$105/day rental fee	Based on rental prices for sod-cutter from Black Hawk Rental
Weed barrier fabric	N/A	\$300/4,800 sq. ft.	Price based on average cost of a 4,800 sq. ft. (16'x300') roll of weed barrier. You could opt for a one-time entire acre kill at a price around \$3,000 or you could perform ten separate kills for your site preparation.

PRAIRIE SEED AND SEEDING

Product/Method	CONTRACTED	DO-IT-YOURSELF	Additional Notes
	Associated Cost	Associated Cost	
Prairie Seed	\$500-\$1,200/acre	\$500-\$1,200/acre	Seed costs will vary depending on the seed mixture as well as seed provider and size of project.
Drill Seeding	\$200/acre	N/A	Price based on private Black Hawk County contractor. Prices may vary depending on size and location of project.
Broadcast Seeding	\$125-\$150	FREE	Small prairie planting projects can often be easily broadcast seeded by hand. Be sure to research best practices if done without a professional.
Erosion Control (optional)	\$450/acre	\$500/4,500 sq. ft.	Steep or erodible sites may require mulching with straw or other material to prevent movement of seed, soil, etc. Depending on your access to erosion control materials, this step may be costly to do yourself.

PLANTING MAINTENANCE (Year 1)

Product/Method	Establishment Mowing (3 times)
Associated Cost (Contracted)	\$125-\$150/acre
Associated Cost (Do-It-Yourself)	\$20/acre (\$60 total in year 1)
Additional Notes	Price based on conversations with local contractors and City of Cedar Falls 2014 mowing research. Residual biomass (clippings) should be removed following mowing.

SAMPLE PROJECT (1 acre)

IMPLEMENTATION COSTS

Method(s)	Associated Cost
Tilling/Disking	\$500
Prairie Seed	\$750
Broadcast Seeding	\$125
Establishment mowing (3 times)	\$325
Total Cost	\$1,700
Annual Costs (Burn)	\$75

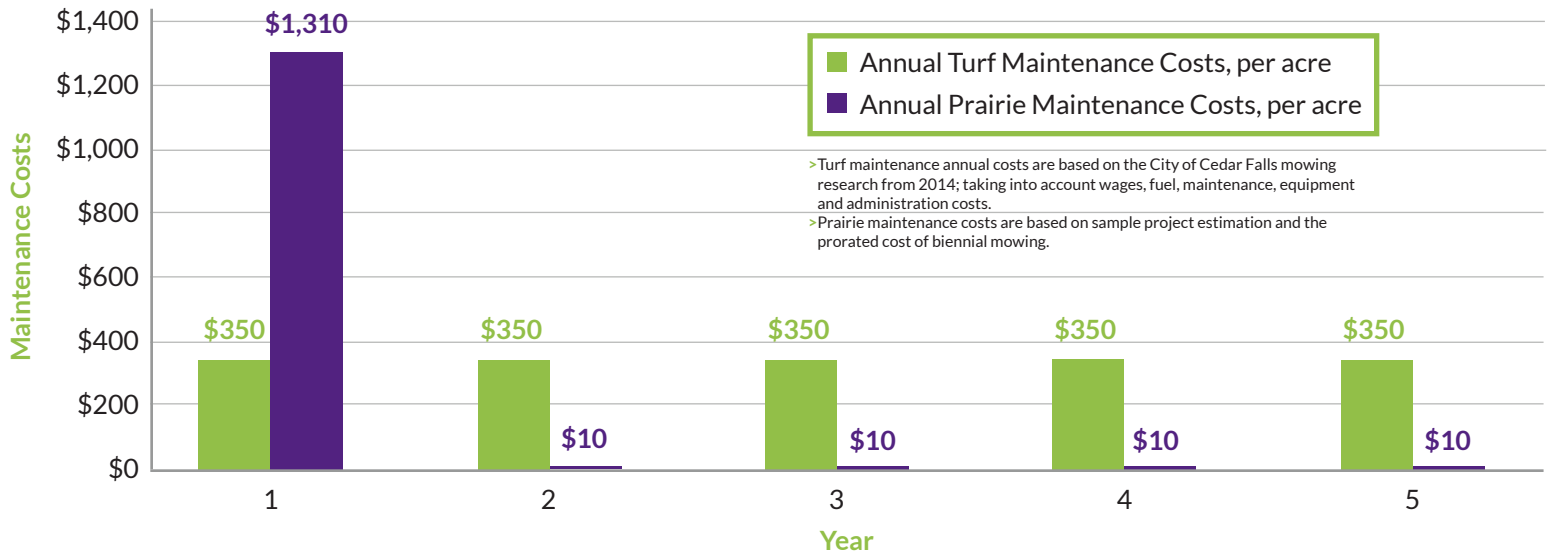
PLANTING MAINTENANCE (Long Term)

Product/Method	CONTRACTED		DO-IT-YOURSELF		Additional Notes
	Associated Cost	Associated Cost	Associated Cost	Associated Cost	
Burn (every 2-3 years)	\$150-\$300/acre (\$75-\$150/year)	\$50/acre (\$25/year)	\$50/acre (\$25/year)	\$50/acre (\$25/year)	Prescribed prairie burns encourage prairies to thrive by removing excess biomass. It is not advised to perform prescribed burns without proper experience or permits to ensure it is executed safely. Contacting a professional is recommended.
Mow (every other year in early spring)	\$125-\$150/acre (\$62.50-\$75/year)	\$20/acre (\$10/year)	\$20/acre (\$10/year)	\$20/acre (\$10/year)	Mowing can be done instead of burning; however, you should be sure to remove the residual biomass (clippings) from the prairie after mowing.





ANNUAL MAINTENANCE COSTS (per acre) TURF VS. PRAIRIE



Turf to prairie projects can expect to save approximately \$340 on maintenance costs per acre every year following installation.

Special thanks to UNI's Tallgrass Prairie Center and Green Iowa AmeriCorps for their contributions to this document.

To view services and contractors to assist with your prairie, visit www.goodneighborowa.org/turf-to-prairie.

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Turf to Prairie conversion on UNI's campus