

Frequently Asked Questions

May I mow the roadside?

Iowa Code 314.17 prohibits mowing of roadside vegetation on the rights-of-way or medians on any primary highway, interstate highway or secondary road prior to July 15. There are some exceptions for safety and spot weed control. Contact your county roadside manager or engineer to ensure you are not mowing native plants that were seeded as part of a county IRVM planting. For more information, see the IRVM program's mowing law brochure.

May I harvest hay or collect seed from the roadside?

On state roadsides, all persons, including adjacent landowners, must obtain a simple permit before harvesting hay or collecting seed from state roadsides. The Iowa DOT requires these permits to make sure safety stipulations, cutting restrictions and adjacent property owners' wishes are respected. Please contact your local DOT maintenance garage or office for a permit. For county roadsides, check with your county engineer or roadside manager to see if a permit is required.

May I spray the roadside with herbicide?

On state roadsides, a permit is required to ensure compliance with pesticide regulations. On county roadsides, contact your roadside manager. Iowa Code 318.3 prohibits the destruction of plants placed within the right-of-way. Iowa Code 318.8 states that a person shall not excavate, fill, or make a physical change within a highway right-of-way without obtaining a permit from the applicable highway authority.

May I burn the roadside?

On state highways, burning is only allowed by permit because of safety and liability concerns due to high traffic levels.

Contact your county engineer or roadside manager for more information on county regulations or permits needed before burning.

For More Information

iowadot.gov/districts/permits

Iowa DOT application and permit to sponsor highway plantings

iowadot.gov/maintenance/ROW-harvesting-and-mowing

Iowa DOT harvesting and mowing permits

iowadot.gov/lrtf

Living Roadway Trust Fund: information on native plants used on roadsides

plantiowanative.com

Plant Iowa Native website: list of native seed dealers and other resources

tallgrassprairiecenter.org/technical-guides

Tallgrass Prairie Center technical guides on how to reconstruct prairie

tallgrassprairiecenter.org/roadsides

Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management: list of county contacts and IRVM Technical Manual that gives practical information on planting and maintaining roadside plantings

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Phone: 515-233-7729 or 515-239-1628

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA ROADSIDE OFFICE

Tallgrass Prairie Center
University of Northern Iowa
2412 W. 27th Street
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0294

Phone: 319-273-2813
tallgrassprairiecenter.org/roadsides
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What are the benefits of having native plants in the roadside?

Native plants greatly improve the value of roadsides as wildlife habitat. Many Iowa wildlife species are adapted to native prairie grasses and wildflowers that historically covered 85 percent of Iowa. Less than 0.1 percent of native prairie remains today. Prairie plants in roadsides provide habitat for many wildlife, including butterflies, bees and birds.

The root systems of native prairie grasses and wildflowers can reach 6-10 feet deep. Native plants are more effective at improving water infiltration and quality and reducing soil erosion on steep roadside slopes compared to non-native, or introduced grasses. Because of their deep roots, native plants can be effective competitors with noxious weeds or invasive plant species.



Native big bluestem root



What is Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management?

Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) is used by the Iowa DOT and many Iowa counties. IRVM includes selective mowing, judicious use of herbicides, mechanical tree and brush removal, and the planting of native plants in the right-of-way.

What should I do if I want to plant native plants in the roadside?

Along state highways, you will first need to contact the local Iowa DOT maintenance office and permit administrator within the Iowa DOT to obtain a planting permit. If your property borders a county road, contact the county engineer or roadside manager.

You may first be directed to individuals familiar with designing native roadside plantings. Planting success will be increased by using a seed mix with a diverse number of species that contains at least 50 percent native grass seed by seed count. This will keep the wildflowers from getting too tall and falling over and will help stabilize steep slopes. For further information on planting native plants, see the websites listed on the back of this brochure.

Establishment

YEAR ONE: WHAT TO EXPECT

Native seedlings will not get very tall during the first growing season. The annual weeds such as foxtail and ragweed that occur naturally, along with stabilizing nurse crop seedlings such as oats or winter wheat that are planted with the mix, are mowed frequently to reduce competition for sunlight and nutrients. The area may be mowed to a height of 4-6 inches whenever vegetation grows 12-18 inches high in the first growing season. Most prairie seedlings do not grow taller than 6 inches high in the first growing season and will not be damaged by the mower.

YEAR TWO: WHAT TO EXPECT

Stabilizing crop seedlings will begin to be replaced by native long-lived perennials. Some native species will mature and produce seed. Some weedy non-native biennials may be mowed once or twice to reduce competition. To avoid damaging native plants, during the second growing season the mowing height should be at least 12 inches. Perennial noxious and invasive weeds present may be carefully spot sprayed. Be sure to follow pesticide regulations.

YEAR THREE: WHAT TO EXPECT

Annual weeds should be nearly gone. Native species such as partridge pea, black-eyed susan and Canada wildrye, visible in years one and two, will be joined by other grasses and wildflowers.

YEAR FOUR AND BEYOND:

Native perennials will begin to occupy the space and outcompete weedy species. Some native species can take six or more years to mature and produce seed.

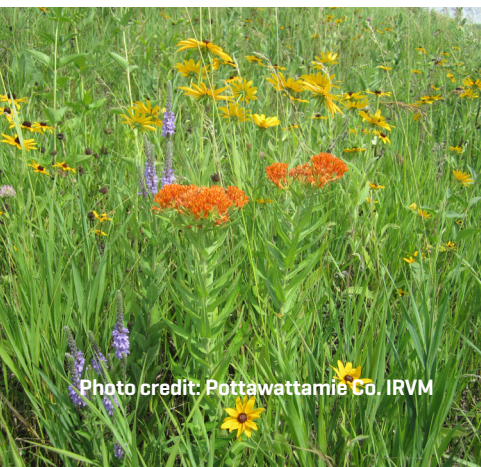


Photo credit: Pottawattamie Co. IRVM

