

Recommendations for the Collection and Use of Native Plants

Native ecosystems can never be replaced. Conservation of remaining plant communities must be considered an important priority because of the many economic, spiritual, medicinal, and sociological values that are associated with them. The genetic diversity of these well adapted ecosystems is also of key importance. All native plant species in any given area should be considered of value to that area. Our ability to reclaim or revegetate areas should never be an excuse for destruction of native plant communities. However, if areas are to be destroyed this presents an opportunity for collection of native plants.

This brochure reflects our current understanding of conservation and use of native plants. As we learn more about how plant communities develop and maintain themselves, about the genetics of individuals and populations, and about what succeeds and fails in harvesting, growing, and using native plants, we will continue to update these recommendations.

Included in this brochure is a list of further readings that you may find helpful in working with native plants.

Know Your Species

1. Know the flora of the area before you collect. Avoid uncommon, rare, or endangered species for that area.
2. Identify plants before collecting seeds or cuttings.
3. Collect from large local populations, both to maximize genetic diversity of your collection and to minimize effects on the natural population.
4. Report occurrences of rare species to:
5. University of Saskatchewan Fraser Herbarium (966-4950); or Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre (787-7.198).

Use Local Genotypes

1. NATIVE: indigenous, originating in a certain place. A native ecosystem is dominated and composed primarily of native plants, animals, insects, and microorganisms that occurred together before the time of Eurasian settlement.
2. When buying native plants and seeds choose species native to Saskatchewan (see suggested references);
3. Select plants from your ecological region (Aspen Parkland, Mixed Grass Prairie; Boreal Forest, etc.). Purchase seed of local origin within a 300 ,to 500 kilometre radius of where the native seed will be used. The shorter the distance moved the better.
4. Use, caution when purchasing "wildflower mixtures" as well as from store displays. These usually contain species that are wild in other parts of the world, but not found in Saskatchewan, Some species such as common tansy or bird's foot trefoil are potentially invasive.
5. If you use either registered seed cultivars or ecovars ensure that the original material was collected and developed in your region Cultivars have limited genetic variation and adaptability but they are a less expensive alternative to wild-harvested seeds.

Use Weed Free Material

1. Know the species which could create a problem in your ecoregion.
2. When purchasing seed in large quantities, obtain an independent weed analysis and ensure that it is free of restricted, noxious, or nuisance weeds.

Buy Nursery-Propagated Plants

When purchasing native plants from nurseries, ensure that plants are nursery-propagated. Many wild species. of cactus, orchids, ferns and lilies are dug from the wild and sold and are now threatened by the international trade in plants. Ask your nursery person where the plants came from; refuse to purchase wild-collected plants. Moreover, do not shop at nurseries that sell wild-collected plants and tell them why.

How to Collect Seeds

1. Collect when sites are least susceptible to damage by your collecting. Collect seeds or cuttings, not entire plants.
2. Flag or label plants with a marker while in bloom or be able to identify plants in seed stage.

3. Collect ripe seeds (firm, plump, and dry). Seeds are usually ripe six to eight weeks after flowering. Usually the stem will be brown and dry. Make sure you label seed when you collect them.
4. Make sure seeds are dry before storing and then store in a cool, dry place. Heat and moisture will deteriorate the seeds.
5. Remember you are not the only person collecting seed so use your discretion and leave enough seed to allow propagation, and provide food and habitat for insects, birds, and small mammals. Usually a few seed heads will provide you with ample seeds. Note that native seed production is generally low and infrequent.
6. Do not intensively collect from the same area year after year. Keep records of collection date, location, and species present.
7. To promote genetic diversity, collect seeds at several times during the season and over several years. Use multiple locations within the ecoregion for collection.

Where to Collect

1. It is illegal to collect from national, provincial, and municipal parks and protected natural areas.
2. Obtain necessary permits to collect on forestry reserves and community pastures.
3. Obtain permission from landowners or lease holders to collect on private lands.
4. Avoid busy highways and roads. Roadside collection is dangerous and may encourage indiscriminate collection by others.
5. Avoid rare or fragile habitats such as sand dunes or wetlands.

Further Reading

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