

While talking about this prairie plan with church members and others, we found many had similar questions. Here are those common questions, along with answers and comments.

Q: What are the goals of the project?

A. We want our Natural Prairie to be a vibrant, sustainable addition to our community, which will:

- ✿ Encourage environmental education and awareness, recreation, and stewardship for people of all ages within our church and in the community, through a living example of a thriving natural Illinois prairie,
- ✿ Support a wide variety of plant and animal species, improving soil health and stability, water retention, and natural pest control while providing vital resources for birds, butterflies, bees, and other wildlife.
- ✿ Reduce economic costs and pollution caused by repeated mowing and chemical spraying of the land,
- ✿ Help mitigate climate change by storing carbon in the soil and plants,
- ✿ Enhance the beauty of the area and offer, when established with paths and benches, a peaceful place for reflection, prayer, and joy.

Q: Where will the new prairie be?

A: The plan is to use 2+ acres of land north of the church for the prairie. An overview outline of the perimeter is included in this material. This area has been unused for 30 years. It has little biological activity. We mow and spray it, but it has gotten almost no use other than occasional grazing by some Canada geese. We are confident the geese will find other places.

Q. Will it interfere with youth group sports and games?

A. No. Kelli Owens has reviewed the site and assured us that there is still plenty of open space for kickball and other games.

Q: What could go wrong?

A. While prairie planting is usually successful, it can fail due to temperature extremes, droughts, floods, certain plant diseases or pests, and more. It is a new natural planting, and there are many factors we cannot control. While we are doing all we can to make it successful, of course, there are no guarantees.

Q: *When will it start?*

A. Update: Only one spraying was needed, and planting was done in November of 2025.

Q. *How will we kill the current vegetation?*

A. Following the advice of experts, we will hire licensed professionals to apply a vegetation killer. It will be done following strict EPA guidelines that regulate all aspects of the process.

Q. *What maintenance will be required?*

A. Not as much as our current mowing and spraying. We may need to mow it occasionally during the first year to kill weeds and promote the growth of native plants, and we might need to remove invasive weeds periodically. Native prairie plants are hardy and adaptable, and once established, they should be fine without much attention.

Q. *How long will it take for the prairie to become mature?*

A. This very important question highlights the need for **PATIENCE**. Prairie plants spend most of their energy in the first few years developing a deep and sustainable root system. Only after that will the plant begin to focus on the above-ground parts, such as flowering. We expect the newly planted prairie to be sparse and rough for several years after planting. It should start to look better by the third year and be fully mature by year five.

Q. *What will the planting cost?*

A. The cost of seeds, weed killing, equipment rental, planting, signage, and related expenses is expected to be around \$4,000.

Q. *How will we pay for it?*

A. Our firm goal is to plant this prairie with no hit to the church budget. We expect to pay for it with funds currently in the Green Team fund, a small portion of the money raised by the October church rummage sale, and grants from several possible sources. Of course, gifts from individuals are most welcome.

Q. *Will there be future expenses?*

A. Yes. We want to develop the prairie into a pleasant destination for all. So, after a year or (more likely) two, depending on the growth of the plants, we plan to add signs identifying some plants, benches or large rocks for people to sit on, several trees along the border for shade, trails throughout the area and maybe a picnic table or bird houses. These enhancements may cost \$3000 to \$5,000, depending on what is done and when.

Q. *Will there be maintenance costs for the church.*

June 2025

A. We do not expect so. In fact, with 2+ fewer acres to be mowed and sprayed, the church will see a reduction in lawncare costs.

Q: Will we burn the prairie?

A: Yes. A natural prairie needs burns every few years to clear out old brush and to open up the ground to the sun so more new plants can start. Unlike prairie burns many years ago, which were started by lightning, our prairie burns will be conducted by specifically licensed experts who follow rigorous safety measures. Volunteers from Pheasants Forever can conduct and oversee the burns at little or no cost to the church.

Q. Will the prairie harm the trees that currently line our property on the north and west?

A. We love our trees, and we want to keep them. The prairie will be planted at least 20 feet from the trees so they will not be damaged during prairie burns.

Q. What if there is a future opportunity to use the land for another purpose?

A. An advantage of a prairie is that it is not a permanent structure. We can remove all or part of it, put solar panels above it, or change its boundaries as desired down the road.

Do you have other questions, or do you want to know how you can get involved? We are happy to hear from you and invite you to contact Rob Mentzer or any member of the Green Team.