

USDA Forest Service Botany in the News

Great Divide Native Garden Project (From Lawn to Garden)

Who (*partners*): Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Great Divide Ranger District, Glidden, Wisconsin

What (*species*): Various species of native grasses and flowers.

When: 2005 to current

Where: Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Great Divide Ranger District Office, Glidden, Wisconsin

Description:



The Native Plant Garden began as an idea in early 2005. After a preliminary site search, a garden location was selected after consultation with district staff at the Glidden office (where the garden would be placed). We chose a site with high visibility, both to offer a place for visitor education as well as to help “beautify” the office grounds and reduce the areas mowed lawn.

The entrance drive to the visitor’s parking lot and the walkway to the offices front door form an ideal border for the garden. Besides acting as a barrier to encroaching weeds, the drive and entrance walkway provides easy access for visitors to view and enjoy the garden.

Following a visit by local utility companies to mark out potential hazards posed by buried electrical and gas lines, it was time to get started. Long before seeds or plants were to be planted however, the site needed thorough preparation.

The first step in our site prep was to apply a broad-spectrum herbicide that is approved for use on National Forest administrative sites. Glyphosate was applied by hand to the entire garden site during the mid-summer of 2005 and a purple dye was added to the herbicide as an aid to help show what had been treated. The perimeter of the area was then marked with “Herbicide



Treatment Area” signs to inform the public.

We timed this initial herbicide application to a period of hot, dry weather to help put the targeted plants under stress, making the herbicide more effective. The site was then allowed to sit for about two weeks to see how effective the treatment had been. We followed up this initial treatment with a second spot application of herbicide to several small areas that appeared to have been missed in the initial treatment.



About one month after the initial herbicide treatment, the garden site was ready for groundbreaking. A small tractor pulling a disc harrow was used to turn the now dead sod over and work the ground into a seedbed. A sign was erected along the office entrance walkway to inform visitors as to “What’s Happening Here?”

The site was sowed with a mix of native grass and flower seed early in the fall of 2005. Because this site is highly visible, we chose to seed heavy to showy wildflowers although we also included a mix of about a dozen native grasses and sedges.

We tried to choose species that would bring color to the entire growing season from spring through autumn as well as add form to the winter landscape. Many of the plants chosen also provide nectar sources for native pollinators and winter seed for birds.



Although the seed used in the garden comes from several sources (including collection from the National Forest), all of the plants represented have been documented on the land types that make up Great Divide District.

Some of these include wild geranium, early meadow-rue, Robin’s plantain, balsam ragwort, Culver’s-root, columbine, brown-eyed Susan, hoary vervain, smooth aster, heart-leaved aster, showy goldenrod, tall sunflower, yellow and green-headed coneflower, and bee balm among many others.

Following the initial fall seeding in 2005, hundreds of plugs (live plants) have been added both in the spring of 2006 and 2007. We plan to continue to add plants for the next couple of years in order to fill gaps in bloom times and add interest and diversity to the garden.



Besides providing a source for public education and enjoyment, an added benefit of the native garden is it provides the Forest with a ready source of seed for a variety of projects.



As the season progresses, a percentage of the available seed is harvested from the garden by hand and stored for future projects. These may include seeding projects in campgrounds, along trails, in wildlife openings, or on temporary woods roads following closure.

Regardless of the time of year, we invite you take a moment to walk about and enjoy our garden. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

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