

DEEP ROOTS IN IOWA

No matter how many generations your family has here, you can put down seriously deep roots in the state with native plants for lawns and ornamental beds.



Go Native Turf!

Most lawns use cool-season grasses native to Europe, not America (yes, even the not-so-accurately named “Kentucky” bluegrass is from Europe). In Iowa, those grasses do well spring and fall, but struggle mightily during the hot, long summers or during dry conditions.

However, native turf lawns feature a blend of low-growing, deep-rooted warm-season grasses that provide lawn-like appearances with minimal maintenance while enhancing soil quality. It doesn’t green up as early in spring, but they thrive during summer when other lawns turn brown, according to the Iowa Stormwater Education Partnership. Native turf does best in the drier, warmest areas of yards with full sun, says Jennifer Welch with the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation

District. A hot, dry area might be the space between street curbs and sidewalks, for example.

Deep roots of native turf find soil moisture that shallow rooted non-native grasses can’t. Once established, native turf rarely needs watering. Deep-rooted native grasses also build soil quality, so lawns absorb more rain with less runoff. This protects water quality and helps reduce potential flooding. Native turf grass roots can reach six feet deep, versus six-inch deep roots on non-native turf. Native turf is easy to maintain. It resists local pests, disease and does not need fertilizer. Mowing is significantly reduced, too.

Mixes include 30 percent blue grama, 30 percent sideoats grama and 40 percent buffalo grass. Sideoats grama will grow to about 18 inches, so if you

don’t plan to mow, choose a 50-50 blend of blue grama and buffalo grass.

Learn more at iowastormwater.org and search “native turf.”

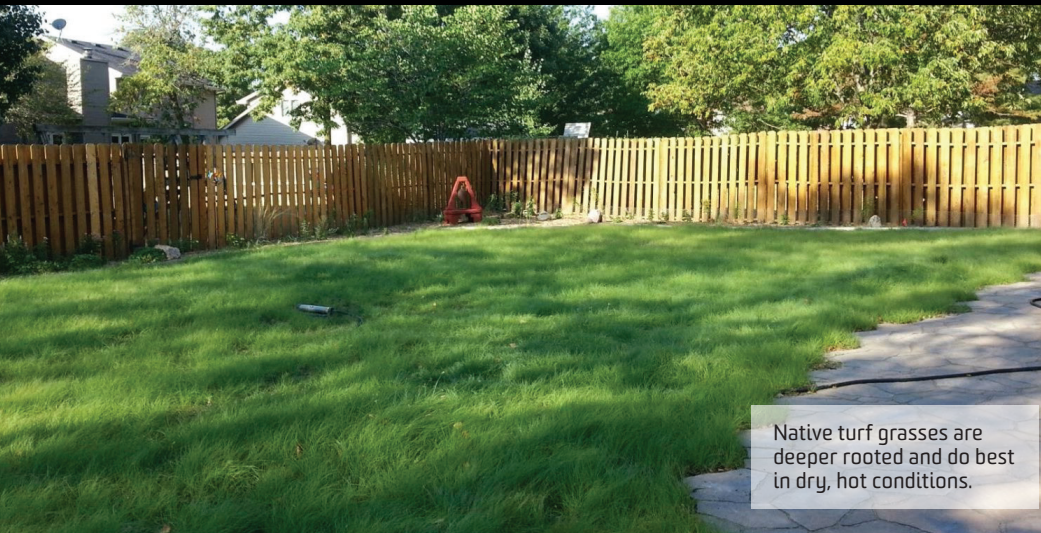
Add Native Prairie Plant Beds

Hidden deep underground, the massive root systems of prairie plants often extend deeper into the soil than the stems that rise above it. These densely tangled roots provide a variety of ecosystem services. Strategic use of prairie plants in the landscape slows runoff, reduces soil loss, lessens the severity of flooding, adds beauty and rebuilds damaged soil, according to the Tallgrass Prairie Center at the University of Northern Iowa.

Prairie species have many advantages over nonnative species. Native prairie plants are perfectly suited to grow in Iowa. They are drought-tolerant, need little to no fertilizer and are a great attractors of native butterflies, birds, beneficial insects and other wildlife.

Prairie plants help build soil, improve water quality, help the land absorb and store water, reduce storm-water surges and flooding and provide year-round beauty.

Find resources, seed and live plant sources and more at tallgrassprairiecenter.org/plant-iowa-native or call 319-273-3836



Native turf grasses are deeper rooted and do best in dry, hot conditions.

New DNR Video Helps Iowans CORRECTLY PLANT TREES

April is Arbor Month and a new five-minute DNR video aims to help residents learn to properly plant trees and avoid very common mistakes—vital to the longevity of new plantings.

“Learning to correctly plant trees determine the longevity of that tree’s life,” says DNR urban forestry specialist Gabbi Edwards. “What we find at tree planting events is that people are wide-eyed during the planting instructions. They say ‘Oh my, I’ve always planted trees all wrong.’ But the video can easily help them do it the right way.”

Common errors such as planting roots too deep or shallow, or not removing encircling roots can lead to improper rooting and other issues years later. Improperly mulching—especially with mulch mounded up around the tree trunk—can lead to rot and also dramatically shorten tree life.

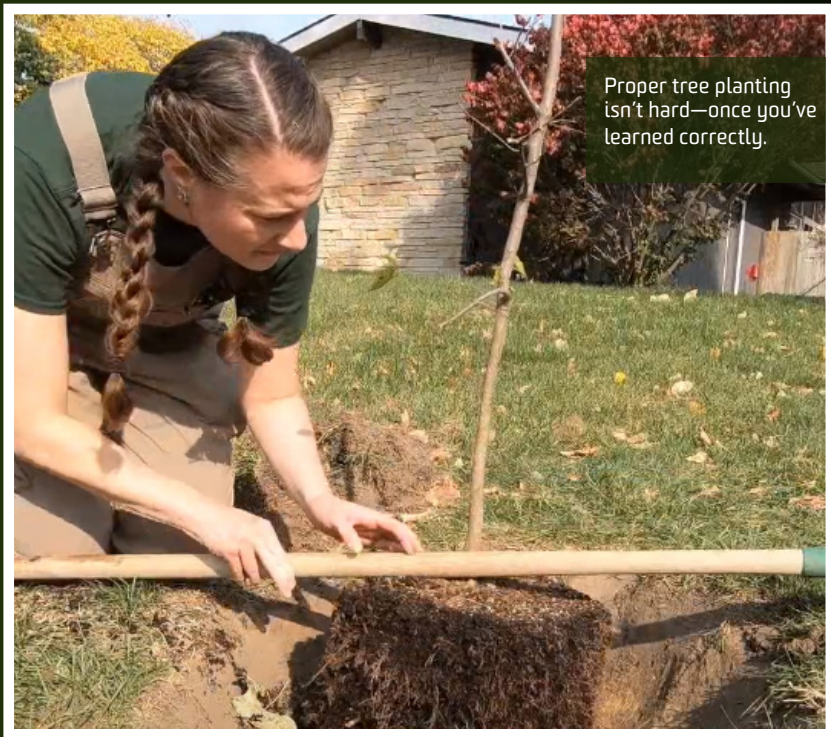
That’s where the video comes in. “We wanted a short and concise video people could use as a resource,” says Edwards. She says improperly planted trees more easily succumb to wind and storms or may look otherwise healthy, but then suddenly die in just 20 years. But with proper planting, that same tree may live a century or more.

With widespread tree losses due to old age, pests and two derechos, Iowans are more interested than ever in restoring lost trees to add beauty, shade

and habitat to their properties.

“The derecho provided a blessing in disguise,” she says. “People are now looking at the diversity of the tree canopy in their communities and have the ability to restart and move towards planting a greater variety of tree species” which aids wildlife and reduces impacts of tree pests, she says.

View the video at iowadnr.gov/urbanforestry.



RIGHT: Native prairie plants have super-deep roots that build soil, hold carbon and let water percolate deep.

