

Non-Timber Forest Products and Implications for Forest Managers



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Collection, Growth, and Use of Native Plants, Trees, and Shrubs in Forested Landscapes

by *Steve Haines, Prairie Moon Nursery*

Prairie Moon Nursery, located on 356 acres of land south of Witoka, began 20 years ago as a co-op farm owned by 13 people. In the '60s this was called a "commune." Now, it's referred to as a "co-op," or intentional community. The land cooperative has existed in its present form since 1975, with members holding the land in common and owning their own homes. Within this context, Prairie Moon was established in 1982.

Initially, organic wheat farming was attempted on the land, but the terrain is steep and it made this type of agriculture extremely difficult. Then, smaller type production was tried, which included seed collection. Prairie Moon has led the way with others in native seed production and serves as a seed broker for over 100 producers from throughout the Midwest. A close network of those producing seed and those wanting it has been established.

Most plants offered for sale at Prairie Moon are grown outdoors in nursery beds at the Prairie Moon Nursery. Some woodland species have been moved from areas being destroyed by road construction.



Almost all of the nursery's forb seed is hand collected, which is a good way to ensure that the seed is ripe and free of weed seed.

To clarify terms used in native landscaping, it is important to point out that Prairie Moon Nursery only handles native species, meaning those species indigenous to North America prior to European settlement. Other companies that sell alien species advertise them as wildflowers; their sources may have come from outside North America. Some examples include naturalized aliens like oxeye daisy, bouncing bet, Queen

Anne's lace, chicory, dame's rocket, bird's foot trefoil, and crown vetch.

A unique feature of Prairie Moon is that it serves as a seed consignment center. This allows a landowner to begin this business very small and to grow a species of his or her choosing. It's a foot in the door to seed production that allows a grower to start small and grow larger.

How does one start seed for production? It's a good enterprise to consider as it doesn't take a lot of land area to do this. A quarter acre of pasque flowers can produce a lot of seed!

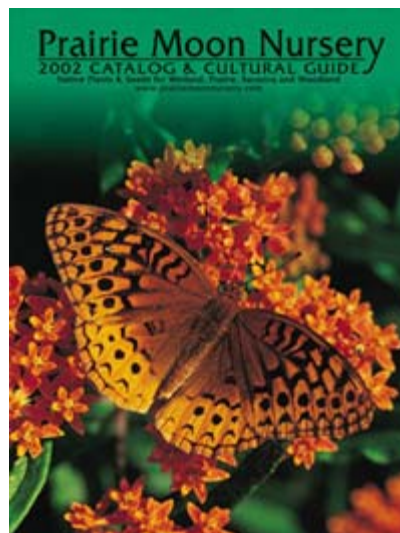
Producing native plant seed can be a lucrative non-timber forest activity. There is a demand for the seed of many different species; these seeds are used in revegetation projects on both public and private lands.

Native seed production can have a low impact on the land. Many production fields are, in fact, high diversity wildlife habitat restorations.

There are a few points to remember, however. You must know exactly where the source of the seed is. In other words, know what you have and where the seed came from.

The first consideration in native plant collection is to determine which species are appropriate to concentrate on. Just as one must decide the species mix when revegetating, let the land and soil conditions decide what will be the best species. Get to know the species that grow naturally and are native. If there are no high integrity landscapes around you, visit neighboring natural areas and research what might have grown there naturally. It is also best to have a local natural seed source from which to start production plots.

It is important to know with certainty not only what species you are dealing with, but also where it is from, the genotype or ecotype.



Prairie Moon Nursery catalog.
(catalog photo by David Cavagnaro; used with permission.)

The Prairie Moon Nursery has grown with the native plant industry over the past two decades. What began as a small niche market of people exchanging seed they collected from small remnant prairies, has grown into an industry that supplies quality, true native seed to revegetation projects for government agencies and private landowners.

Prairie Moon sells native seed on consignment. The nursery has products around the upper Midwest. This makes it possible for producers to start small and increase their operations incrementally.

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