



Maintaining Your New Prairie Restoration

You've done all the right prep work and planning for your new prairie. Better yet, you've contracted **EC3 Environmental Consulting Group** to handle your project from start to finish, so you *know* it was done right. The seeds are in the ground and things are starting to green up. This is not the time to sit back and let nature take its' course. Not just yet. A new prairie planting must be vigilantly maintained during the first and second seasons of its' long life.

New native grass and wildflower seedlings always grow down before they grow up. That means they are establishing a root system before they put on top growth. Even under ideal conditions, a native seedling will only grow a few inches high in the first season. This first year is a *critical time* for a new prairie planting. Regardless of how much herbicide prep was done, dormant weed seeds will germinate in your prairie in the first and sometimes into the second season. These undesirable weeds can out-compete the slower growing native perennials for light and nutrients. If left unchecked, these weeds will continue to produce seed and continue to proliferate in your new prairie planting. How do you keep this from happening? **MOW!**

Maintenance Mowing During The First Season:

The rule of thumb in the first season is to mow the new prairie to a height of *SIX INCHES* (no lower) each time the average height of the planting reaches *12 INCHES*. If you wait too long to mow, you can actually do more harm than good because the cut thatch will shade out the new seedlings and stunt their growth. Depending on rainfall, you may have to mow once a month from June to September in the first season. If you are not able to do this mowing until late in the season, it's better to wait and start mowing next year unless you have a way of removing the cut thatch.

Maintenance Mowing During The Second Season:

The rule of thumb in the second season is to mow the new prairie to a height of *10-12 INCHES* (no lower) each time the average height reaches *24 INCHES*. If you don't have a mower that can be set this high, beg, borrow, or rent one that can! Mowing too low in the second season can set establishment time back by a full season. The second season of mowing is not as critical as the first, but it will ensure good survival of your new native plants.

If you don't do this mowing, you **MAY** still get establishment of your prairie in patchy areas. Ignoring the importance of this early mowing maintenance is the second leading cause of failed prairie plantings...second only to improper site prep.