



PRAIRIE SMOKE

Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter

Fall 1990

SPECIAL
SEED GATHERING
EDITION



A cool breeze and good company make the important task of seed gathering at Nachusa an enjoyable pastime.

Fall Seed Gathering - You Deserve It

Laurel Ross, North Park Village Nature Center

After a rugged season of scything white sweet clover, girdling box elders, pulling Canada thistle and cutting brush, the arrival of fall brings prairie volunteers relief in two forms: a cool breeze and a task that rests our weary bones as it nourishes our spirit. Seed collecting, arguably the single most important job of the restorationist's year, is also among the pleasantest of pastimes.

The rewards are rich and varied. It can be challenging on an intellectual level. A person intent on learning plants could not do better than to devote some hours gathering their seeds.

The process of travelling like a bee from one plant to another forces one to observe carefully, and to recognize a species over and over again, giving extended and repeated identification practice, and putting that plant permanently in one's botanical repertoire.

There are also sensual pleasures unique to seed collecting. Silky rye, for example, a grass with a common name that refers to its luxuriously soft leaf surface, is also sometimes called "pop grass" because its seed head makes a delightful popping sound as it is plucked off. Indian grass is "zipper grass" in the fall because the ripe seed

comes off so neatly in a hand pulled up its stalk. Zip, zip, zip, and a large bag is soon full of soft, golden kernels, ready for the seed mix. It's hard to adequately

FALL SEED GATHERING SCHEDULE INSIDE

describe the feeling of satisfaction.

Even the smells are extraordinary...yellow coneflower seed has a particular sweet fragrance; dropseed grass smells like buttered

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popcorn; and perhaps less appealing, though more intense, is beardstongue, the ripe seed of which smell remarkably like equally ripe dirty socks.

As in most other prairie volunteer activities the camaraderie during seed gathering is impressive as everyone helps everyone in a spirit of fun. One group near Chicago, for example, invents song parodies as they work. My current favorite is "Taenidia, Taenidia" sung to the tune of Groucho Marx' "Lydia, Lydia." It sounds silly, but is useful in helping people remember the Latin name of yellow pimper-

nel.

And as if this were not enough, enjoyment of the seed gathering experience is enhanced by the knowledge that the work being accomplished is so important. The restoration process can only continue in direct proportion to the amount of seed which is available. People have learned the hard way that clearing brush without planting seeds in the bare soil created, only invites a bigger weed problem than before.

Are you interested? Check the schedule below and choose the dates when you can join a seed collecting party. You deserve it.

FALL SEED GATHERING SCHEDULE

Sunday, September 23 1-4 p.m.

Saturday, October 20 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Saturday, September 27 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

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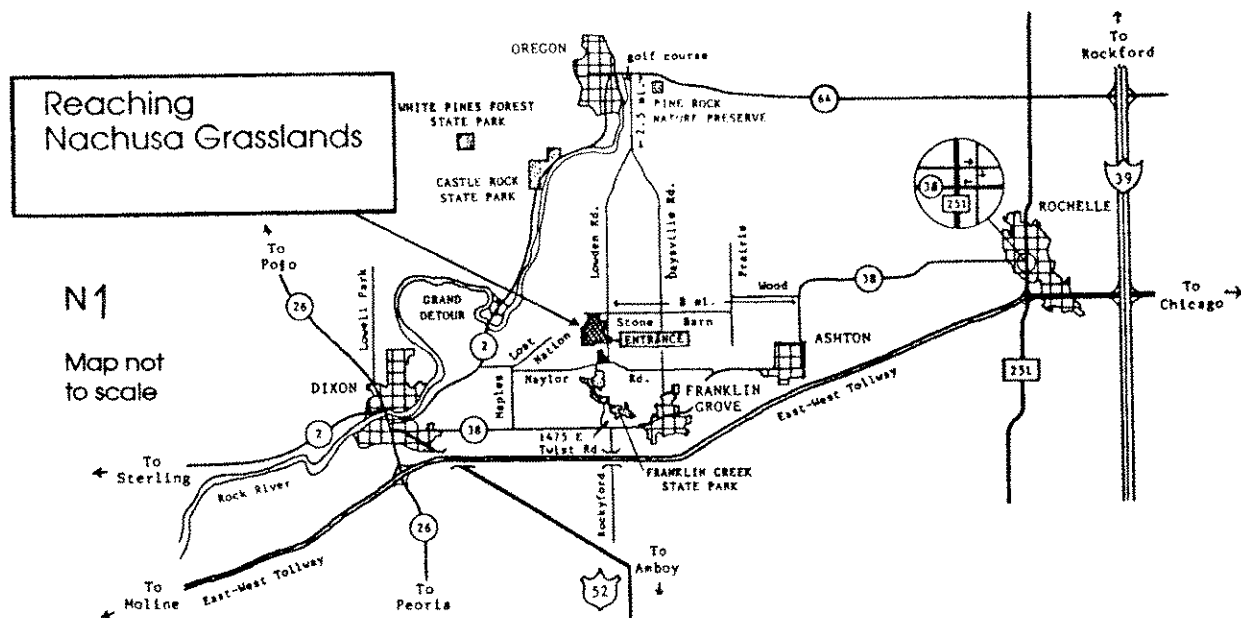
Sunday, October 7 1-4 p.m.

Saturday, November 3 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Sunday, October 14 1-4 p.m.

Saturday, November 10 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

All trips will begin at the Nachusa Grasslands sign. Call Ted Wood (815) 453-2561 if you have questions or would like to schedule a weekday seed collecting party.



Tips for the Do-It-Yourselfer

Just can't get enough seed collecting during the scheduled seed gathering days? If you're interested in setting out on your own, remember the following tips:

1) Seeds gathered for Nachusa must come from within a 50 mile radius of the preserve. Genetic variances within a species remain minimal at this distance. Be sure to obtain permission from the land owner before collecting seed.

2) Because they allow the seeds to "breathe," use paper bags instead of plastic. Use a separate bag for each species and label with species name, date and collection site. Store the bags in a cool, rodent-free place.

3) Every seed has its season. If collected too soon, seeds may not be fully developed, but wait too long and the wind, or other natural methods of seed dispersal will leave you empty-

handed. The species list below gives approximate collection dates for a few easily recognized species. Exact dates depend primarily on temperature and rainfall.

Purple prairie clovermid-September to early October
Prairie coreopsisearly September to late October
Pale purple coneflowermid-September to late October
Rough or button blazing starmid-September to early October
Astersmid-October to mid-November
Stiff goldenrodmid-October to November
Yellow or gray-headed coneflower	..mid-September to November
Showy goldenrodmid-October to November
Northern dropseedmid-September to mid-October

Burn Workshop set for November 3

Those who have looked both left and right from the firebreak at Nachusa's main south boundary have seen the benefits of fire. Undesirable woody and weedy plants tangle with each other to the south, only inches from a waving stand of little blue stem stretching acres to the north. Native forbs, both common and rare, nestle beneath the blue stem, creating a prairie plant community that is beginning to look like it did hundreds of years ago.

The difference, of course, is fire. Before white settlement, fire was a natural part of Midwestern ecosystems, and today, in the field of restoration, it is a key element.

Burns are being planned for Nachusa this fall. Before they take place, a workshop has been scheduled to familiarize volunteers and other interested individuals with prescribed burning.

Ed Collins, vegetation specialist for McHenry County, will lead the workshop Saturday, November 3, from 1-4 p.m. at the Loveland Commu-

nity Center in Dixon. All aspects of burning as a management tool will be discussed--from site preparation and burn techniques to permit policies and public relation. A time for questions and answers will follow a discussion of

burn scenarios specific to Nachusa Grasslands.

Anyone interested in learning more about the use of controlled burns is encouraged to attend.

Celebrate the Prairie State

Autumn on the Prairie at Nachusa Grasslands

October 13, 1990

1 - 5 p.m.

Enjoy an afternoon of entertainment and education. Walking tours, story telling, artwork, scientific studies in progress and much more.

Tent displays

Ron Panzer - Rare butterfly and insect survey of Nachusa

John Spangler - Area history

Dr. Bo Dzaidyk - Native plant studies

Thelma Dahlberg - Native Indian lore

Free admission.

For more information contact:

Deb Osmer (815) 288-2170 or Hazel Reuter (815) 857-3623

Fall interns arrive at Nachusa

Autumn relief has come to Nachusa volunteers in ways other than cool breezes. Recognizing the amount of work involved in prairie restoration this time of year, The Nature Conservancy has hired two fall stewardship interns to assist volunteers at Nachusa.

Ted Wood, a native of Minneapolis and recent graduate of the University of Texas, brings to Nachusa experience in outdoor education, preserve maintenance and volunteer conservation work. He will be coordinating brush control and prescribed burns in addition to assisting with seed gathering responsibilities. Ted will be working at Nachusa until December 10 and welcomes questions or advice about the preserve. He can be reached at

(815) 453-2561.

Ted's Brush Bash
October 27 and November 10
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Loppers and saws will be provided. Chainsaws and other brush cutting equipment are welcome.

Intern Maria Urice, Bemidji, MN, has coordinated various public relations and seed gathering efforts since arriving in early September. She will be leaving Nachusa in mid-October to begin work at the midwest branch of the National Wildflower Research



Ted Wood

Center near Minneapolis. Until then she can be reached at (815) 732-6890.



The Nature Conservancy brings you **Prairie Smoke**.
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