

strategy that could have prevented the mess I had. I recently picked up their book to get a more detailed look at their approach.

Rainer and West appreciate the value of native plants and they pair that appreciation with advanced design knowledge to create inviting landscapes that look and feel natural. Whether you are a homeowner looking to start a small landscape project, or a seasoned landscaper who has struggled with strategies for incorporating natives in your work, Rainer and West's book is well worth the investment. Here are just a few ideas from their book that I will be incorporating into my landscape at my new home:

>"Plants are the best mulch."

This was the title of Rainer's presentation at the conference. I was right to avoid the old practice of scattering plants around a landscape and surrounding them with wood mulch. It requires too much maintenance and is not visually appealing. I just didn't know

what I should do instead. A careful application of the right ground cover is one important key. If a landscape has about 50% groundcover, it not only helps suppress weeds, but it provides the support under the more showy species and allows them to stand up and be more visible in the landscape. It is also used to create space between the edge of the landscape and the taller plants, so that a



person can walk along and enjoy it without feeling crowded, viewing the plants from a comfortable distance. The Monarda and Ratibida would not have been falling onto my path if I had set them back a bit, separated from the edge of the trail by *Juncus tenuis* or *Sporobolus heterolepis*.

>Consider the plants' sociability and structural adaptations.

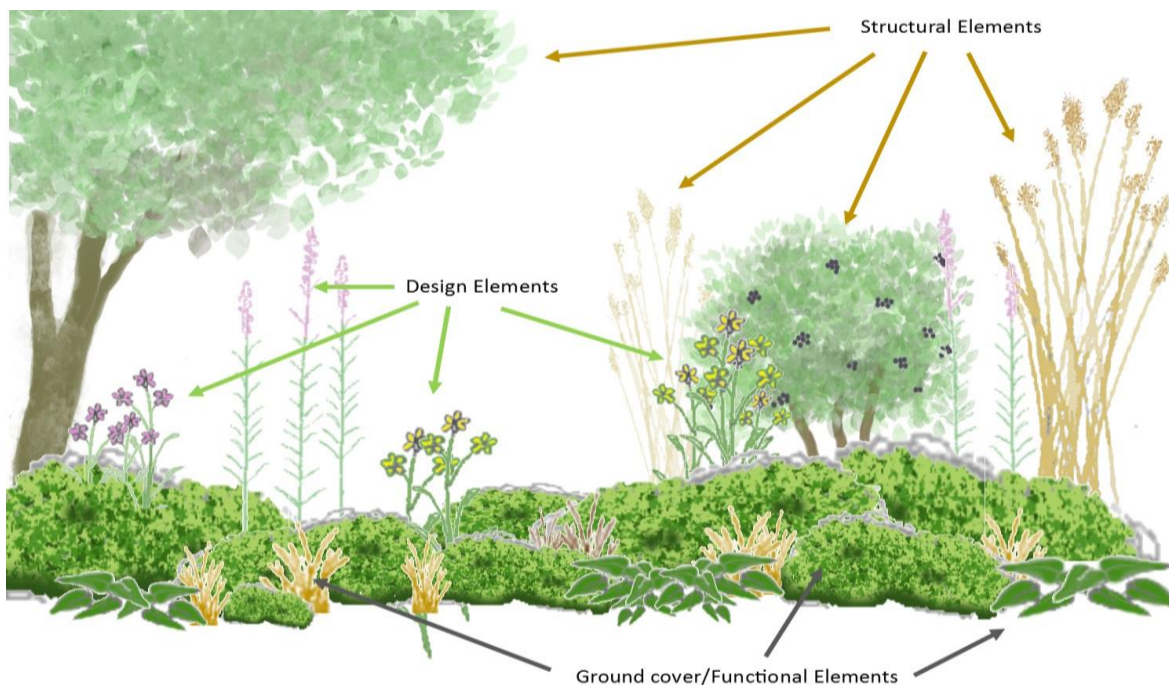
When I planted my prairie I used, almost exclusively, plants that Rainer calls "design layer" plants. They are the showy native plants that typically contribute the most color and variety. They are an important part of the design but they create problems when crowded into a landscape. First, when too many are clustered together, the individual plants cannot stand out to be appreciated as easily. In addition, these plants don't have the right structure to completely fill the space. Many design layer plants are relatively bare at their base. Plant two of them a foot apart and you'll have a gap in the middle because they are not full at the bottom. If there is bare soil in that gap, weeds will find it. The old strategy was to fill that gap with mulch. The new strategy should be to fill those gaps with plants that are adapted to function as effective groundcover.

These roles of ground cover and design layer can be further understood by looking at a plant's sociability. In its natural habitat, does the plant tend to grow individually, or does it tend to grow in large clumps? People often try to group plants that are not meant to be grouped. Plants that tend to grow in individually or in very small groups in the wild, like swamp milkweed, should be planted individually or in very small groups in a landscape. Rainer and West explain these different degrees of sociability and

provide examples of plants at each level.

I left Rainer's presentation inspired, but I lacked a list of plants that can specifically serve these different roles in a landscape. The book is not specific to any one region in the US, and Rainer encouraged people to find the plants that best fit their site and region. I've been working on such a list for Northern Indiana, and many of these species are appropriate for most of the Upper Midwest. This list was developed using plant information from the [Cardno Native Plant Nursery](#) Resource Catalog, along with years of field observations of plant growth and habitat. This list is not comprehensive, but provides a good start for a variety of site conditions.

Native plants are becoming more popular with landscape designers, who recognize their beauty, their ecological significance and their hardiness. Some designers may have the knowledge to avoid the kind of mistakes I made in my prairie. For the rest of us, "Planting in a Post Wild World" is a great, comprehensive guide. When used with the plants on the attached list, the strategies in the book can help create an inviting, natural-looking, ecologically productive, native landscape.



Ground cover Elements

- >Approximately 50% of the area of the landscape
- >Spreading, or clump-forming to suppress weeds

Design Elements

- >25-40% of the area of the landscape
- >Many of the most well-known species in prairies are in this layer
- >Provides much of the color and changes through the growing season

Structural Elements

- >10-15% of the area of the landscape
- >Tend to have stems that endure the cold months, so are a more permanent part of the landscape



Native Plant Nursery

Groundcover (Approximately 50%)	Sunlight	Moisture
Sporobolus heterolepis- Prairie Dropseed	Full	Dry, Moist
Allium cernuum- Nodding Onion	Partial, Full	Moist
Anemone canadensis- Meadow Anemone	Partial, Full	Moist, Saturated
Juncus Tenuis- Path Rush	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Schizachryium scoparium - Little Bluestem	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Conoclinium coelestinum- Blue Mistflower	Partial, Full	Moist
Fragaria virginiana - Wild Strawberry	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Asarum canadense - Wild Ginger	Shade, Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Carex pensylvanica- Common Oak Sedge	Shade, Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Carex blanda - Common Wood Sedge	Shade, Partial	Dry, Moist
Blephilia hirsuta - Hairy Wood Mint	Shade, Partial	Dry, Moist
Carex plantaginea- Plantain-leaved Sedge	Shade, Partial	Dry, Moist
Carex muskingumensis- Swamp Oval Sedge	Shade, Partial	Moist, Saturated
Geum laciniatum- Northern Rough Avens	Shade, Partial	Moist, Saturated
Mertensia virginica - Virginia Bluebells	Shade, Partial	Moist, Saturated
Onoclea sensibilis - Sensitive Fern	Shade, Partial	Moist, Saturated
Geranium maculatum - Wild Geranium	Shade	Moist

Design Layer (Approximately 25-40%)	Sunlight	Moisture
Liatris spicata- Marsh Blazing Star	Full	Moist, Saturated
Ratibida pinnata- Yellow Coneflower	Full	Dry, Moist
Liatris aspera- Rough Blazing Star	Partial, Full	Dry
Asclepias incarnata- Swamp Milkweed	Partial, Full	Moist, Saturated
Asclepias tuberosa- Butterfly Weed	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Black-eyed Susan- Rudbeckia hirta	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Echinacea purpurea- Purple Coneflower	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Euphorbia corollata - Flowering Spurge	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Lupinus perennis- Wild Lupine	Partial, Full	Dry
Mimulus ringens- Monkey Flower	Partial, Full	Moist, Saturated
Monarda fistulosa - Wild Bergamot	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Oligoneuron rigidum- Stiff Goldenrod	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Solidago juncea- Early Goldenrod	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Symphotrichum novae-angliae - N.E. Aster	Partial, Full	Moist, Saturated
Agastache foeniculum- Lavender Hyssop	Shade, Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Solidago caesia- Blue-stemmed Goldenrod	Shade, Partial	Dry, Moist
Smilacina racemosa- False Solomon's Seal	Shade, Partial	Dry, Moist

Structural Layer (Approximately 10-15%)	Sunlight	Moisture
Eryngium yuccifolium - Rattlesnake Master	Full	Dry, Moist

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Structural Layer (continued)	Sunlight	Moisture
Sorghastrum nutans- Indian Grass	Full	Dry, Moist
Andropogon gerardii- Big Blue Stem	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Eutrochium maculatum- Spotted Joe Pye	Partial, Full	Moist, Saturated
Panicum virgatum- Switch Grass	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist, Saturated
Senna hebacarpa- Wild Senna	Partial, Full	Moist, Saturated
Veronicatrum virginicum- Culver's Root	Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Corylus americana- American Hazelnut	Shade, Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Viburnum dentatum- Arrowwood	Shade, Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Viburnum prunifolium- Blackhaw	Shade, Partial, Full	Dry, Moist
Asimina triloba- Pawpaw	Shade, Partial	Moist, Saturated
Lindera benzoin- Spicebush	Shade, Partial	Moist, Saturated
Verbesina alternifolia- Wingstem	Shade, Partial	Moist, Saturated
Helianthus strumosus- Pale-Leaved Sunflower	Shade, Partial	Dry, Moist



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