



Making a Meadow, Episode 3: **Designing a Meadow**

This companion document to the *Making a Meadow* series provides more information about meadow restoration: designing a meadow

When creating a meadow it is important to determine whether it's best to use seed or live plants. Each technique has pros and cons: using live plants jumpstarts the meadow's development and allows more control over how the meadow looks. However, creating a meadow using live plants will cost many times more than establishing a meadow from seeds. Most meadows are established from seed.

Following are key factors to consider when designing your meadow:

- ❖ What is the size of your future meadow?
 - If your site is above a few hundred square feet it is not economically feasible to plant a meadow using live plants, often called “plugs” in the nursery trade.
- ❖ Where can you go to buy seed?
 - Ernst Conservation Seed: <https://www.ernstseed.com/>
 - Roundstone Seed: <https://roundstoneseed.com/>
 - Prairie Moon: <https://www.prairiemoon.com/>
 - Prairie Nursery: <https://www.prairienursery.com/>
 - Pinelands Nursery: <https://www.pinelandsnursery.com/>
 - Many of these vendors carry pre-made seed mixes for creating meadows in different growing conditions (i.e., dry or wet), for various purposes (pollinators, wildlife, etc.) and to achieve a certain vegetation height.
- ❖ What region do you live in?
 - This question is important for determining the “ecotype” that works best for where you live.
 - An ecotype is a population of plants that is most suited to a particular set of growing conditions. Just because a species can grow in CNY and Florida does not mean seeds from Florida will perform well in CNY! Finding a more local ecotype ensures those plants will be more suited to local growing conditions.
 - Most seed companies will help you select the appropriate ecotype for your project.
- ❖ What is the best balance between grasses and flowers in a seed mix?
 - If you're designing a meadow for pollinators don't leave out the grass in favor of planting more flowers! Grass is an important part of a healthy meadow

ecosystem and many insects rely on grasses for shelter when hibernating or for food.

- ❖ How much does meadow seed typically cost?
 - The cost of a seed mix depends on which species are included and at what amounts.
 - Seed mixes can range from less than \$20/lb for grass-heavy mixes, up to \$100/lb for flower-heavy mixes. Most of the seed mixes we help landowners create are \$35-85/lb.
 - Meadow type also affects price: a pollinator meadow is planted at a higher density than a meadow for wildlife. Meadows under an acre in size are typically designed for insects. These meadows require 10-20 lbs of pure live seed per acre, or around 1 lb of seed per 2,000 square feet.
 - Some species cost much more than others. Price differences in meadow seeds reflect how difficult it is to grow a species and process its seeds for sale, as well as simple economic factors like demand for that species compared to others.
- ❖ How do you know what plants to choose for a meadow?
 - Meadows can look very different depending on their purpose. Wildlife meadows tend to look “messy” with lots of variation in plant height and spacing, and with fewer flowers. Pollinator meadows tend to be very rich in flowers and have a relatively uniform height with flowers at all levels. Most landowners we work with create meadows for pollinators, both because the appearance is more appropriate for residential settings, and because the small size of these parcels can best be used to benefit small animals like pollinators.
 - The premade meadow seed mixes available at the websites listed on this document can serve as a starting point for designing meadow plant composition, or figuring out which plant species you like best.

Next time we will discuss clearing the existing vegetation on your lawn, including why you need to clear your lawn before planting a meadow, and the pros and cons of different removal methods.

Feel free to reach out to us with any questions at:

Sam Quinn: [saquinn@esf.edu](mailto:sacquinn@esf.edu) and Lilly Kramer: likramer@syr.edu