

The Fine Line Prairie and Nature Area

Prairie Tapestry

The Fine Line Prairie and Nature Area is dedicated to the preservation of open space, environmental education and the opportunity for all to experience the natural world.

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Frogs and Your Garden

Frogs are a welcome addition to the cast of animal characters that live in a garden.

Frog Friendly Environments

Frogs are very beneficial garden residents. In our state alone there are 21 species of frogs, although not all of these can be found in a garden setting. To attract frogs to your garden it is necessary to have a wet area or pond. You may want to introduce beneficial plants such as arrowhead, pickerel weed, spikerush, wild celery, frogbit, pond lily, water starwort, and lizard tail. Putting rocks and logs, especially red cedar, by the pond will provide resting and hiding areas. With a little luck you might have a chorus of frog song next spring!



A Northern Leopard Frog (*Rana pipiens*), a common Illinois resident.

Other Ways to Protect Frogs

Even if you do not have a pond or wet area in your garden there are many things you can do to help frogs who live in nearby wet areas or streams. Since frogs breathe through their skin they are particularly sensitive to environmental toxins. Reducing the use of herbicides and pesticides, and by using the correct amount of organic fertilizer we can

reduce the amount of toxins in the water that will wash into streams and wetlands. Even a small amount of nitrates (chemicals found in fertilizers) are enough to kill some amphibians. Organic fertilizers release more slowly creating a healthier soil.

If you use insect repellent make sure to avoid those containing DEET which is extremely toxic to amphibians. Consider growing plants that repel insects such as marigolds, citronella and lemon balm amongst your veggies to reduce use of pesticides.

Remember to keep substances such as oil, household cleaners, antifreeze, paint and other toxic liquids out of drains, sinks and toilets. They should be disposed of according to the guidelines of your local solid waste management office.

We, and the frogs, will enjoy a cleaner and healthier environment!



International Attention Focused on Frog Decline

The decline in the number of frogs is a worldwide phenomenon. This issue was first brought to the attention of the scientific community at the First World Congress of Herpetology held in England in 1989. Two years later the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force (DAPTF) was formed to investigate the problem.

A lot has happened in the scientific community since then. The good news is that locally, frog populations have been increasing since 1999 in northern Indiana and Illinois and seem to be rebounding.

Globally, the picture is very different. In the past twenty years, according to the 2004 Global Amphibian Assessment of the 5,700 species of frogs, toads, salamanders and caecilians, almost a third are threatened and 168 have become extinct.

The destruction of habitat, pollution, and the hunting for food have been the usual suspects in the list of culprits causing species decline of all sorts. In the case of frogs there is a new villain, the chytrid fungus.

This fungus was first reported in the 1930's in South Africa. It began its spread throughout the world through the importation and trade of clawed frogs. Once infected frogs escaped from captivity the fungus spread easily through water and damp materials such as leaves. Frog to frog contact and perhaps other mechanisms not yet discovered also spread the fungus.

Fine Line Frogs

We all can be sure when spring has arrived at the Fine Line. You need only step out of your car to be greeted by the almost deafening sound of the many frog inhabitants in the wetland.

The chorus frog (*Pseudacris illinoensis*) is the most commonly found frog in the wetland. It begins its breeding season in mid-March and ends in late May with the majority of activity happening in April. Each female frog will lay approximately 1000 eggs in several gelatinous clusters. Depending on water temperature the eggs will develop into tadpoles and mature in about 8 weeks

They are extremely wary little creatures. If you take a little hike over the hill from the parking lot to the wetland area and happen to step on a twig the loud chorus of frogs will become silent. But if you remain quiet for a just a short time they will resume their singing. Our wetland is also home to the Leopard Frog (*Rana pipiens*) and Spring Peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*).

During the 2007 frog census it was discovered that the wetland was home to a rare frog species. The wood frog, *Rana sylvatica*, is not endangered but it is uncommon in our area. It is a voracious eater of insects, worms and slugs. This frog spends a lot of time on land and its front legs are not fully webbed. Its call can be distinguished by its sound which resembles a duck's quack.



Frog Decline (cont.)

The fungus grows on the frogs' skin and blocks the internal balance of water eventually killing the animal. If infected the mortality rate is 80% for individual frogs and the entire species has a 50% chance of disappearing in one year. Currently, there is no cure .

Counting Frogs??

It seems to be an impossible task but every spring frogs in the Fine Line wetland are counted. How can you count something that is so difficult to see and disappears at the slightest disturbance?

With patience and training the number and variety of frog calls are counted. By counting the number of calls, not the actual frogs themselves, a fairly accurate estimate of the number of frogs in a given area can be determined.

Who cares enough to count frogs? What do they do with the information? The Chicago Wilderness Habitat Project in association with the Chicago Region Audubon Society has created the frog calling project as a part of its amphibian biodiversity recovery plan.

By monitoring frog populations changes can be detected before it is too late. In the 1960's the cricket frog was the most common frog in our state. Now it is practically extinct in northern Illinois. With frog populations being challenged by toxins and disease worldwide it is important to have facts to use when making wetland management decisions.

If you would be interested in participating in this project you please Karen Glennemeier at 847-328-1250 for more information. Learn how to identify the calls of 13 area frogs!





Adam Scott completes Eagle Project

With a little help from his friends, Adam Scott directs the construction and completion of a new walking trail on the prairie.

After over 6 months in planning we are very proud to announce the completion of a walking path in the prairie.

Last fall, the Fine Line Prairie was approached by Batavia Boy Scout Adam Scott. Adam was interested in doing an Eagle Scout project to benefit the Fine Line Prairie and Nature Area.

A walking path was planned featuring a resting area with a bench and 3 bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) trees. This variety of oak tree was commonly found in the prairie growing in groupings called 'bur oak openings'. These trees feature thick cork-like bark that is able to withstand prairie fires. Many thanks to Irma Orum of Midwest Ground Covers for the generous donation of the bur oaks.

After planning meetings at the Fine Line and the several Eagle Scout meetings necessary for approval Adam was ready to set a date to complete the project.

The first weekend in May was chosen. The scouts that were organized to work on the project, as well as several dads and Adam's mom, convened early in the morning.

Adam had a carefully constructed plan and was able to direct the scouts in preparing the ground, laying out the course of the path and the resting area. At the same time other groups of scouts were learning to identify prairie plants and learning to create a map of the area.

The trees were placed, planted, mulched and watered with the invaluable help of Jim Manna at the controls of the mighty John Deere.

A seed splitter was used to plant grass seed in the path area, which will be maintained by mowing. Many thanks again to Jim Manna for his expert mowing skills. Jim has also extended the path a greater distance to the east.

Please enjoy walking through the prairie on this path. To be able to enter the prairie in this way is a very peaceful and unique experience. I was able to see plants and insects up close in a way I had never done before!



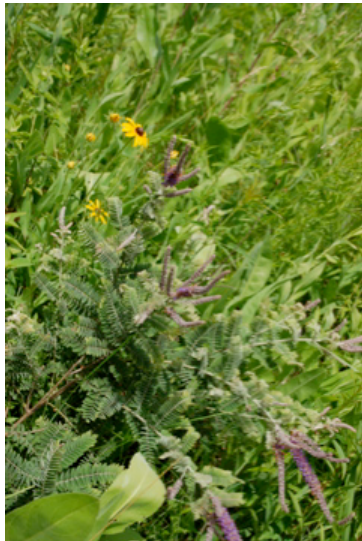
The accomplished crew.

Prairie plants to try in your garden.

During my last walk down the new prairie path I saw three plants that would be stunning additions to your garden.

Lead Plant- *Amorpha canescens*

This northern Illinois native is happy in full sun and average soil. It needs 3 years of growth to produce their lovely light to dark purple flowers.



Prairie Dock *Silphium terebinthinaceum* The extraordinary leaves of this plant make it a stand out in the garden. It has a 10' (yes feet!) flower stalk producing yellow daisy like flowers.

Wild White Indigo *Baptisia alba macrophylla* also known as *Baptisia leucantha*. This easy to grow plant is not fussy about growing conditions. It has strikingly beautiful 2' long racemes of white flowers.



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