

April is Plug Planting Time!



The fastest way to establish a native plant community is through the installation of overwintered native plugs in April and early May. Planting at this time is highly effective because the plants typically have a surge of root growth right after they break dormancy in early spring. The result is rapid establishment and a reduced need for watering.

When overwintered perennial plants initiate growth in the early spring, they do so with a growth spurt of both top and root growth. If the plants are put into the ground just as this spurt is initiated, the roots quickly grow deep into the soil, rapidly becoming established within a few weeks of planting.

Another great advantage of early plugs installation is the high soil moisture and typically generous rainfall in April and May. Often plants installed at this time may be watered in and require little if any additional watering. Since the rapid root growth is in balance with the top growth, the plants become independent of the need for watering much sooner than plants that already have lush top growth when installed later in the season.

For these reasons, a plug installed in April will often grow larger by July than a gallon plant installed later in the spring. At Spence Restoration Nursery, we over winter around 600,000 plugs every year in preparation for spring sales. We urge our customers to take advantage of this early availability to gain impressive results through April installation.

CRP Mid Contract Management:: Interplanting With Forb Plugs

There has been quite a buzz recently about the Conservation Reserve Program MCM requirement to enhance enrolled CRP acres with native plant plugs to increase diversity for wildlife, particularly pollinators. Spence Restoration Nursery produces several plant species attractive to pollinators, including five different types of Milkweed. Talk with your local OFSWCD representatives for information on how to order the plugs you need.

Plant Feature: Smooth Beardtongue (*Penstemon calycosus*)

An attractive and underused perennial, *Penstemon calycosus* is a rather common native plant of open woods and woodland edges here in central Midwest. It occurs in both floodplain and upland situation. It is similar in form and stature to the better known Foxglove Beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), but the flowers are washed with pink or purple rather than the pure white of *Penstemon digitalis*. Smooth Beardtongue typically reaches 18 to 24 inches in height. The flowers are quite variable in the amount of pigment, ranging from pale pinkish to a darker violet color. In cultivation, it grows equally well in dappled shade or full sun, however the flower color is more intense in sunnier locations. In a restoration, *Penstemon calycosus* grows well in upland or floodplain woodland restorations with associates in our [Upland Woodland Mix](#) or our [Forested Wetland Mix](#).



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