

Title: "Prairie Up: An Introduction to Natural Garden Design"

Author: Benjamin Vogt

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By Morgan Vogt

Benjamin Vogt's "Prairie Up: An Introduction to Natural Garden Design" highlights the benefits of gardening with native plants communities and provides a step-by-step guide on how to select, design, install, and maintain those communities. The book focuses on the idea of gardening from a prairie perspective, which means opening yourself up to a new way of seeing your garden and using a different method of design and management than traditional landscaping.

The first chapter, "Bringing the Prairie Home," sets the premise for the entire book, both explaining the philosophy of gardening from a prairie perspective and defining native plant communities and their benefits. From there, Vogt dives into the details of this type of gardening, first by explaining how to choose plants that work best with your site conditions, and then by discussing how these individual plants must work within a plant community. As Vogt explains, the key to this is creating plant layers with a diversity of traits, including height, bloom time, sociability, succession, etc.

Vogt then presents three design approaches, with the focus on matrix design, as he explains that this is the simplest way to approach prairie-inspired gardening. Vogt then details how to prepare garden beds for this type of design, along with discussing the need to change expectations associated with native gardening, including letting plants find their way instead of micromanaging them.

The final chapters discuss both seeding, including creating your own seed mixes, and planting with plugs, which includes five garden designs for varying site conditions. The book concludes with resources for finding and learning about native plants.

This is the book I wish I had when I first started native gardening, when I proudly picked out my native plants and then made sure to leave gaps between them, as we're taught with traditional gardening. Vogt not only provides a clear blueprint for getting started with planting native, but also explains why planting in layers is so important. It's a lot of information, but he presents it as simply as possible with plenty of beautiful photos. Additionally, the garden designs are worth the price of admission – he could easily create a book dedicated to those.

This is one of the best books out there on planting native because it truly brings home the message about planting communities rather than individual plants. If you want to understand both the science and philosophy of gardening from a prairie perspective, this is the book.

Morgan Vogt is a member of the Wild Ones Greater Kane County Chapter. Morgan wasn't interested in gardening until 2020 when she moved to The Windings, a community that is devoted to protecting and restoring the local ecology. She is now an avid gardener and advocate for native planting.