Prairie Seeds of F.W. Kent Park
This flipchart is a volunteer project of Iowa Master Naturalists

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Additional information and assistance provided by:

- Johnson County Conservation naturalists

and

- *The Prairie in Seed; Identifying Seed-Bearing Prairie Plants in the Upper Midwest* by Dave Williams, University of Iowa Press

Important Note: Prairie plants and their seeds belong to Johnson County Conservation and should not be harvested for personal use. All seed harvesting should be conducted under the guidance of and/or with the permission of Johnson County Conservation naturalists. Seeds harvested at F.W. Kent Park and other county conservation properties are used for prairie restoration at F.W. Kent Park and other public lands in Iowa.

November 2018
Cream Gentian
Cream Gentian Harvest Tips

Scientific Name: *Gentiana alba*

Ripens for Harvest: Mid-October

Duration of seeds on stalk: 4 weeks or more

Found: Found in both wet and moderately wet soils in full sun. Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, including Valley View Prairie, Knight Prairie, the Conservation Education Center area, the prairie hill near the fishing pond, and along many hiking trails.

Identification Tips: Plants are 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet tall. Each seed head contains numerous capsules shaped like the plant’s closed upright summer blossoms. Dried blossom material is usually present around the seed capsules. Each capsule contains a high number of tiny seeds with pinkish-orange centers surrounded by a thin, oval, light-colored membrane.

Harvest Method: Harvest when the seed heads are completely dried. Seeds spill from the capsules easily, so hold your bag under the seed head when harvesting to catch them. Clip the stalk below the entire seed head and let it all fall into your bag. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads in an area. Cream Gentian is not abrasive to your hands.
Illinois Bundleflower

Seed
Illinois Bundleflower Harvest Tips

Scientific Name: *Desmanthus illinoensis*

Ripens for Harvest: Early September

Duration of seeds on stalk: Up to 4 weeks

Found: Found in medium dry to dry soils in full sun. The best place to find this plant at F.W. Kent Park is around the Conservation Education Center area.

Identification Tips: Plants are bushy and 2 – 3 feet tall with bright green fern-like leaves. Coffee brown seed pods stand out in sharp contrast to the foliage. This is one of the more beautiful seed pods, with its roundly textured appearance, variegated lovely brown pods, and occasional round seed resting on the rim of a pod.

Harvest Method: Seed pods are smooth and can be hand-picked or clipped off the stem. To avoid seed loss while harvesting, hold your open bag underneath the seed head when picking or cutting it off. Leave any unripe green pods on the plant. If harvesting in mid-October or after, break apart seed heads and check for seeds to ensure they haven’t already shattered out of the pods. Harvest only half of the ripe seeds heads on a plant or in the area.
Cup Plant

Leaves surround and “cup” the stem.
Cup Plant Harvest Tips

**Scientific Name:** *Silphium perfoliatum*

**Ripens for Harvest:** Mid-September

**Duration of seeds on stalk:** About 4 weeks

**Found:** Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, including Knight Prairie, the Conservation Education Center area, and along hiking trails in wet sunny areas. Likes wet soils in full sun.

**Identification Tips:** Plants grow up to 8 feet tall. Cup Plant seeds are sometimes confused with Rosinweed seeds, but the leaves of the two plants are very different. Cup Plant leaves surround a square stalk (i.e. “cup” the stalk) and are about 8 – 10 inches long, whereas Rosinweed leaves are opposite, oval, about 2 – 3 inches long, and attach separately to a round stalk.

**Harvest Method:** The entire seed head can be broken off the stalk by hand or clipped off with scissors. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads on a stalk or in the area. Hold your bag under the seed head before harvesting to catch the seeds and seed head.
Rosinweed

Shape of seed head (unripe example)
**Rosinweed Harvest Tips**

**Scientific Name:** *Silphium integrifolium*

**Ripens for Harvest:** Mid-September

**Duration of seeds on stalk:** Up to 4 weeks.

**Found:** Found where there are dry, well-drained, or moderately well drained soils in full sun, including the Knight Prairie and the Conservation Education Center area.

**Identification Tips:** Plants are 4 - 5 feet tall. The seeds are in a whorled disk underneath the center disk flower. Rosinweed seeds are sometimes confused with Cup Plant seeds, but the leaves of the two plants are very different. Rosinweed leaves are opposite, tear drop shaped, about 2 – 3 inches long, and attach directly to a round stalk; whereas Cup Plant leaves are about 8 – 10 inches long and surround a square stalk (i.e. they “cup” the stalk).

**Harvest Method:** The entire seed head can be broken off the stalk by hand or clipped off with scissors. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads on a stalk or in the area. Hold your bag under the seed head before harvesting to catch the seeds and seed head.
Prairie Dock
Prairie Dock Harvest Tips

**Scientific Name:** *Silphium terebinthinaceum*

**Ripens for Harvest:** Early to mid-September

**Duration of seeds on stalk:** About 4 weeks.

**Found:** Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, including Knight Prairie, the Conservation Education Center area, and along hiking trails in sunny areas.

**Identification Tips:** Plants grow up to 10 feet tall. It is most easily recognized by its very large, spade-shaped basal (near the ground) leaves, which can be over a foot long and a foot wide, extremely tough, and have a sandpapery feel. Children often compare them to elephant ears! The stalk is smooth, reddish, shiny, and nearly leafless.

**Harvest Method:** The entire seed head can be broken off the stalk by hand or clipped off with scissors. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads on a stalk or in the area. Hold your bag under the seed head before harvesting to catch the seeds and seed head.
Culver’s Root

Licorice-colored leaves in whorls of 5 around the stem.
Culver’s Root Harvest Tips

**Scientific Name:** *Veronicastrum virginicum*

**Ripens for Harvest:** Early October

**Duration of seeds on stalk:** 4 weeks or more

**Found:** Found in wet to moderately dry soils in full sun and partial shade. Found in the Valley View Prairie, and Knight Prairie, and occasionally in other areas of F.W. Kent Park.

**Identification Tips:** Plants are 3 - 5 feet tall with dark copper-colored spikes of seed heads that, to some, resemble the profile of a pitch-fork or thin-boned skeleton hands. Equally noticeable, when ripe, are their licorice-colored leaves in whorls of 5 around the stem.

**Harvest Method:** Strip the seeds off the seed heads into your open bag while wearing rubberized gloves. Alternately, you can cut off or break off the entire seed head. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads in an area.
Prairie Blazing Star
Prairie Blazing Star Harvest Tips

Scientific Name: *Liatris pycnostachya*

Ripens for Harvest: Late September

Duration of seeds on stalk: About 4 weeks, depending upon winds.

Found: Found where there are somewhat wet soils in full sun, such as the Valley View prairie.

Identification Tips: Plants are 2 ½ to 4 feet tall. Flower spikes are 1 inch wide and 5 to 10 inches tall.

Harvest Method: Harvest when the seed heads have a fluffed out appearance. Seeds ripen from the top of the stalk down, so wait until the entire stalk is ripe. Harvest entire seed head by clipping it into a bag, not by pulling, to avoid damaging the plant. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads in an area. Wear gloves to protect your hands from the abrasive stalk.
Round-Headed Bush Clover
Scientific Name: *Lespedeza capitata*

**Ripens for Harvest:** Late September

**Duration of seeds on stalk:** 4 weeks or more

**Found:** Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, including Knight Prairie, Valley View Prairie, the Conservation Education Center area, and along hiking trails in wet sunny areas. Grows in wet, medium, and dry soils and in full sun or partial shade.

**Identification Tips:** Plants grow 2 – 4 feet tall. Their clusters of soft, fluffy, brown seed heads are unique, making them one of the easier prairie plants to identify.

**Harvest Method:** The entire top part of the stalk containing seed heads can be harvested by either breaking it off by hand or clipping it off with scissors. Each stalk produces only a few small bean shaped seeds that are hidden inside a fluffy seed head. Harvest no more than half of the plants in an area.
Pale Purple Coneflower
Pale Purple Coneflower Harvest Tips

**Scientific Name:** *Echinacea pallida*

**Ripens for Harvest:** Late September

**Duration of seeds on stalk:** Seeds remain in seed head 4 weeks or more before shattering out of the seed head. Seed heads remain connected into the winter.

**Found:** Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, particularly in the Valley View Prairie area. Grows in all soil types and likes full sun.

**Identification Tips:** Plants grow 2 – 3 feet tall. Seed heads are prickly, 1 inch wide by 1 inch, on a solitary, nearly leafless, hairy stalk. The ripened plant looks similar to Purple Coneflower but Pale Purple Coneflower seed heads are somewhat smaller. The individual seeds also differ. Pale Purple Coneflower seeds are distinctly two-colored – dark brown at the base and tan to the tip. Purple Coneflower seeds are slightly larger and tan colored.

**Harvest Method:** The entire seed head can be broken off the stalk by hand or clipped off with scissors. Hold your bag under the seed head to catch shattering seeds and the seed head. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads in the area.
Rattlesnake Master

Distinctive razor sharp leaves
Rattlesnake Master Harvest Tips

Scientific Name: *Eryngium yuccifolium*

Ripens for Harvest: Early October

Duration of seeds on stalk: 4 weeks or more

Found: Found in wet to moderately dry soils in full sun. Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, including Valley View Prairie, Knight Prairie, the Conservation Education Center area, and along many hiking trails.

Identification Tips: Plants are 2 - 3 feet tall, and when ripe, are a distinctive chocolate brown color with spiky round seed balls branching out in many directions from the stalk. Their profile resembles a drawing of an atom. The leaf margins are very sharp, with large serrations. Everything about this plant is highly textured, from the seedheads to the leaves.

Harvest Method: Definitely wear gloves when harvesting this plant. It is easiest to cut the seed heads from the stalk and let them fall into your bag. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads in an area, harvesting the larger seed heads and leaving the smaller ones.
Slender Mountain Mint
Slender Mountain Mint Harvest Tips

Scientific Name: *Pycranthemum tenuifolium*

Ripens for Harvest: Late September

Duration of seeds on stalk: 4 weeks or more

Found: Found in moderately wet to moderately dry soils in full sun. Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, including the Valley View Prairie, the Knight Prairie, and the Conservation Education Center area.

Identification Tips: The distinguishing traits of ripened Slender Mountain Mint are the silvery gray seed heads and delicately thin leaves that remain bright green well into the fall. Seed heads appear pock-marked. At around 2 – 3 feet tall, look for them closer to the ground, tucked in among the taller prairie plants. Not surprisingly, Slender Mountain Mint seed heads emit a minty aroma when crushed.

Harvest Method: Use scissors to clip the entire seed head into your open bag (or break it off with your hand). Harvest no more than half of the seed heads in the area.
Sweet Black-Eyed Susan

October appearance

November appearance
Sweet Black-Eyed Susan Harvest Tips

**Scientific Name:** *Rudbeckia subtomentosa*

**Ripens for Harvest:** Late September

**Duration of seeds on stalk:** 4 weeks or more

**Found:** Found in moderately wet to dry soils in full sun or part shade. Found throughout F.W. Kent Park, including Valley View Prairie, Knight Prairie, the Conservation Education Center area, and along many hiking trails.

**Identification Tips:** Plants are bushy and 3 – 5 feet tall with dome-shaped seed heads, smooth round stems, and leaves that are oval near the top and with three lobes further down the stem and to the ground. It differs from Black-Eyed Susan in that it is generally larger, more prolific, and not hairy.

**Harvest Method:** The entire seed head can be broken off the stalk by hand or clipped off with scissors. Seed heads remain on the stalk a long time, but the seeds may have shattered. If harvesting later in autumn, periodically crush a seed head to see if any seeds remain. Harvest only half of the ripe seeds heads in the area.
Thimbleweed

October appearance

November appearance
Thimbleweed Harvest Tips

Scientific Name: *Anemone cylindrica*

Ripens for Harvest: Ripening begins in August.

Duration of seeds on stalk: Approximately 4 weeks, depending upon winds. Seeds are in a cottony mass that can remain on the plant stalks into the fall if protected from the wind, but they otherwise blow away easily.

Found: Found in well-drained, moderately drained, and dry soils, particularly in the Valley View Prairie area and along hiking trails in sunny or partly sunny areas.

Identification Tips: Plants grow 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet tall. They are easily recognizable by their thimble-shaped seed head and white to yellowish cotton.

Harvest Method: To ensure ripeness, make sure the stalk is brown and the cotton and seeds pull easily from the stem. Pinch or clip the entire cottony seed head into your open bag. Harvest no more than half of the seed heads in the area.