

Supporting Minnesota Butterflies with Prairie Cordgrass, *Spartina pectinata* in Your Landscape

by Elizabeth Carls, Masters of Professional Studies Horticulture Student

Prairie cordgrass, and other native grasses, provide a host of ecological benefits to your landscape. These benefits include a reduction in soil erosion, an increase in organic materials, and crucial habitat for many pollinators, including Minnesota native butterflies and moths.

Prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*) is a perennial grass species native to Minnesota and the upper Midwest that is commonly found in native prairies. This important native grass supports many species of native butterflies. It is an essential larval food for many butterflies including the noctuid moth (*Mesapamea stipata*), the spartina moth (*Spatiniphaga inops*), and the tortricidae moth (*Aethes spartinana*).



Photo by Mary Meyer

photo caption: Prairie cordgrass has long strap-like leaves and will grow in standing water.

Prairie cordgrass is a warm season grass that prefers full sun and relatively moist soil conditions. However, it is able to tolerate extended periods of hot dry weather. It is a tall, grass with long leaves that are deer resistant. The grass turns a rich golden-yellow in the fall, making it an attractive addition to your landscape. Additionally, its deep dense root system stabilizes soils, making it an excellent choice for embankments and shoreline areas. It should be noted however, prairie cordgrass spreads by rhizome and therefore is not appropriate for small gardens, and should be planted where rhizomes will not be a problem, such as for shoreline stabilization.

By planting prairie cordgrass, and other native grasses you provide many ecological benefits to a landscape. They minimize soil erosion and increase organic matter available in the landscape. They are drought tolerant with a low water requirement, and require no supplemental nutrients. In addition, native grasses provide important habitat and a reliable food source for many species of native butterflies and moths.