All September, celebrate the Chelsea Grasslands with Friends of the High Line. Planted from 18th to 20th Streets, the Grasslands are inspired by the tallgrass prairie of the American Midwest.

The plants of the High Line’s Chelsea Grasslands reach their peak fullness in the early fall, evoking the density and diversity of life on the wild prairie. Taken collectively, they remind us of the wide-open, uniquely American expanses that have largely vanished from the country’s landscape.

We invite visitors to take a closer look at the Chelsea Grasslands and learn more about the remarkable beauty, history, and adaptations of each plant that makes up this garden. As part of our Grasslands Celebration, this month we’re also offering special Grasslands-focused tours, a panel featuring High Line planting designer Piet Oudolf (pictured on the cover) and other notable experts, and a day of family-focused activities highlighting the prairie.
How to design a grassland on the High Line

Borrowing from the wild prairie, Oudolf designed the Chelsea Grasslands as a matrix. Grasses form the bulk of the plantings with showier perennials, planted individually and in groups, scattered throughout. This garden design engages all the senses through sound, motion, color, scent, and texture. In the fall, shades of gold and blonde throw the remaining blooms into high relief.

**Raydon’s Favorite aromatic aster**
*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium* ‘Raydon’s Favorite’

Fragrant foliage and abundant blooms make this prairie native doubly valuable in the garden. A broad profile and densely massed lavender blooms give it a cloud-like appearance in autumn.

**Shenandoah switch grass**
*Panicum virgatum* ‘Shenandoah’

Along with other grasses, Shenandoah forms the foundation of the matrix planting. This cultivar’s foliage deepens to burgundy over the course of the summer. In fall, the sound and motion of this grass in the wind adds another dimension to the garden.

**Sundown coneflower**
*Echinacea* ‘Evan Saul’

The cone-shaped seed heads of this prairie native persist for months, adding a striking architectural form to the garden in winter. Selected in part for its bolder colors, the Sundown cultivar has blooms that range from orange to pink.

**Autumn moorgrass**
*Sesleria autumnalis*

This cool-season European grass greens up early in the spring, when many of our native grasses are still dormant. As new construction casts shade over the garden, autumn moorgrass has become more prominent in the Chelsea Grasslands.

**KEY**

**Plant Type**
- tree
- shrub
- grass
- herbaceous perennial
- shrub

**Light**
- full sun
- partial shade
- full shade

**Nativity**
- North American native
- Northeast native

**Features**
- attracts wildlife
- drought tolerant
- drought tolerant
- drought tolerant
Many people don’t realize that the wild prairie hosts more plant species per 50 square feet than the rainforest, and that grasses can reach heights of 8 feet with roots stretching 10 feet deep. The prairie soil, built up from thousands of years of plant debris and held tightly in place by continuous root systems, teems with microscopic life. While the Chelsea Grasslands differs dramatically from the wild prairie, many of the plants we cultivate serve important ecological functions in the garden.

### How plants contribute to the health of the Chelsea Grasslands

#### Standing Ovation
**little bluestem**
*Schizachyrium scoparium*  
‘Standing Ovation’

This grass has adapted to store energy just below the soil surface. In late spring, when the threat of wildfires in the wild have lessened, it converts that energy into new growth.

#### Purple prairie clover
*Dalea purpurea*

This perennial is prized in prairie restoration efforts and on the High Line because, as a nitrogen fixer, it is able to convert atmospheric nitrogen into the form that plants use. It also attracts a variety of pollinators, including many bee species.

#### Prairie dropseed
*Sporobolus heterolepis*

This perennial grass—an easily adaptable, so-called opportunistic plant—has a fitting home on the High Line since it is commonly found growing along roadsides and train tracks throughout its native range of central and eastern North America.

#### Leadplant
*Amorpha canescens*

This common prairie subshrub is sometimes planted to minimize soil erosion because its root system can extend into the ground as deep as 20 feet. Leadplant draws many pollinators to the High Line, particularly beetles and solitary bees.
How human history was shaped by the grasslands

The American prairie has supported human life for thousands of years. Pioneers, initially taken aback by the vastness of this landscape, tried to pass through it as quickly as possible. However, realizing the agricultural potential of the rich soil, settlers swiftly transformed the Midwest into farm and grazing lands that continue to feed much of the country. Today, farmland has replaced most of the original prairie, leaving only fragments. We hope that the Chelsea Grasslands can serve as a reminder that we need to find a balance between human needs and the natural environment.

**KEY**

**Plant Type**
- tree
- shrub

**Light**
- full sun
- partial shade
- full shade

**Nativity**
- North American native
- Northeast native

**Features**
- attracts wildlife
- drought tolerant

**Rattlesnake master**
*Eryngium yuccifolium*

Shoes and baskets crafted from the fibrous leaves of this plant have been found in the Midwest and dated to as far back as 5,500 BC. Another interesting fact: the plant gets its name from the false belief that its roots could be used to heal rattlesnake bites.

**Big bluestem**
*Andropogon gerardii*

Pioneers recounted needing to stand on their horses to be able to spot their cattle that had wandered off through the 8-foot-tall big bluestem. Cattle may have been quite happy to be lost in this grass, which came to be called “ice cream for cows.”

**Bur oak**
*Quercus macrocarpa*

While many people envision a prairie landscape as a monotonous sea of grass, it is actually punctuated by groves of trees, like this drought-tolerant North American oak. Historically, oaks provided a welcome oasis of shade and familiarity to weary travelers.

**Compass plant**
*Silphium laciniatum*

Years ago, compass plant was as characteristic of the prairie as bison. Sadly, as conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote, “what a thousand acres of silphiums looked like when they tickled the bellies of the buffalo is a question never to be answered.”
Find our featured plants in the park

1. Purple prairie clover  
   Dalea purpurea

2. Autumn moorgrass  
   Sesleria autumnalis

3. Compass plant  
   Silphium laciniatum

4. Big bluestem  
   Andropogon gerardii

5. Sundown coneflower  
   Echinacea ‘Evan Saul’  
   BIG SKY SUNDOWN™

6. Standing Ovation  
   little bluestem  
   Schizachyrium scoparium  
   ‘Standing Ovation’

7. Rattlesnake master  
   Eryngium yuccifolium

8. Raydon’s Favorite  
   aromatic aster  
   Symphyotrichum oblongifolium  
   ‘Raydon’s Favorite’

9. Shenandoah switch grass  
   Panicum virgatum ‘Shenandoah’

10. Leadplant  
    Amorpha canescens

11. Bur oak  
    Quercus macrocarpa

12. Prairie dropseed  
    Sporobolus heterolepis
ROVING GRASSLANDS

CLASSES
Tuesdays in September (except 9/27)
9:00 – 10:00 AM, 6:00 – 7:00 PM
FREE, RSVP: thehighline.org/activities
Weather permitting
Join us for a tour of the Chelsea Grasslands as we celebrate the unique design, history, and ecology of this garden in its peak season.

Tuesday, September 6
Designing a Grassland

Tuesday, September 13
Ecology of a Grassland

Tuesday, September 20
The Human Experience of Grasslands

THE GRASSLANDS PANEL:
PRARIE IN THE CITY
Monday, September 26
6:00 – 7:30 PM
FREE, RSVP at thehighline.org/activities
for location details
Discover the intersections of the garden design, plant ecology, and cultural history of our Chelsea Grasslands during a panel featuring three experts in their respective fields and moderated by Andi Pettis, Director of Horticulture at Friends of the High Line. Guest panelists include planting designer Piet Oudolf, On the High Line author Annik La Farge, and Curator of the Native Flora Garden at Brooklyn Botanic Garden Uli Lorimer.

MAKE IT!
Saturday, September 24
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
On the High Line between 13th and 14th Sts.
FREE, children and their caregivers
Enjoy a whole day of family fun on the High Line! Get your hands dirty in our mobile garden, create a large-scale art installation, hear stories from everyone’s favorite librarian, design custom-made structures with the Children's Workyard Kit, and watch an outrageous variety show hosted by Whoop Dee Doo! This month, for the last program in our Make It! series, we'll explore the wild side of the High Line, from its earliest self-seeded plants to the animals that call it home.

MORE FAMILY FUN
Visit our website to download FREE family guides.
You can also sign up for monthly family emails with behind-the-scenes info and creative ideas from experts on how to learn as a family.

SUPPORT
Our gardeners keep the High Line thriving with your help

thehighline.org/join

To keep the Chelsea Grasslands and the entire landscape of the High Line beautiful all year long, we count on members like you. Members provide the tools and resources our gardeners need right now to prepare the High Line for winter, and to keep the High Line in bloom next spring. Plus, members receive special benefits and access – so you’ll never miss out!

Visit thehighline.org/join to join now!
TD Bank is the Presenting Green Sponsor of the High Line.

Public Programs on the High Line are supported by Altman Foundation. These programs are supported, in part, with public funds from the New York City Council, under the leadership of Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito.

Major Support for High Line Families comes from Deutsche Bank. This program is supported, in part, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the New York City Council.

MetLife Foundation is a Supporting Sponsor of High Line Families.

Visit us at grasslands.thehighline.org and follow @highlinenyc on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.