SITE-TO-SOURCE / SAMPLE CONSULTATION

A native garden with winter structure

Madison, Wisconsin

$179 Home Landscape Plant Palette • Prairie, shade and entrance zones

Illustrative report for a fictional client and site; no real property inspection or purchase. Sample edition: 7 Nov 2026 | PHY-SAMPLE-011_Madison_Four_Season

Your recommended direction

Build a crisply edged prairie pocket with grasses and flowering plants; add a separate woodland sedge border; keep the salt-exposed entrance zone more conservative. Retain standing stems for winter interest where they will not obstruct access.

The client behind the question

Fictional client: Thornton Melon

"I want less mowing and more flowers, but I also want the yard to look good when the prairie flowers are gone. We have a sunny patch, shade under an oak and a front walk where shoveled snow and deicer pile up. I like prairie grasses that stand up through winter, but I don't want a wild thicket across the entrance. Give me a sensible group of Wisconsin-native plants, and tell me what shouldn't go where the salt and foot traffic land."

Illustrative mock submission, not an actual customer testimonial. Adapted from the fictional intake originally prepared for this example.

Selected answers from the client intake

Intake question	Client's answer
What I want	A four-season native landscape with pollinator flowers, tidy edges, woodland shade planting and winter structure.
Spaces described	Sunny 340-square-foot conversion, oak-shaded 210-square-foot border and 120-square-foot entry bed.
Main challenges	Deep cold, deicing salt and snow storage, tree-root competition, occasional rabbits and spring runoff.
Plants I prefer	Wisconsin-native bunchgrasses and flowers, spring-to-fall bloom and intentional rather than chaotic structure.
Please avoid	Spines by walks, aggressive runners, high-ingestion-risk choices near visitors, and prescribed burning.
Budget and timing	Phased $850-$1,400 plant/material budget, roughly two hours monthly care, spring 2027 preparation.

How we answered the client's questions

Client asked	How this report responds
What can look good in winter?	Prairie dropseed, little bluestem and a defined edge give structure even after flowers fade.
What belongs beneath the oak?	Pennsylvania sedge, bottlebrush grass and woodland forbs are set apart from the sunny prairie group.
Can we plant in the snow-pile strip by the door?	Do not assume so. Leave the most salt-exposed first few feet unplanted or use a nonliving buffer until exposure can be managed.
Which coneflower is actually native in Wisconsin?	Pale purple coneflower is an appropriate candidate when site conditions fit; commonly sold Echinacea purpurea is not necessarily a Wisconsin-indigenous choice.

What we clarified in the simulated written intake

Follow-up question	Client reply and resulting decision
Where do snow and deicer actually land?	Client: In the first few feet along the entry walk. Report decision: Keep that strip clear and concentrate plant choices farther from salt deposition.
Would you rather have shorter, ordered plants near the door?	Client: Yes; I do not want a tall meadow at the entrance. Report decision: Use shorter grasses and flowers along edges, taller forbs in the prairie interior.

The plant recommendations and next steps that follow show the result of these client-specific choices. Site observations remain fictional, and conditions must be confirmed before real installation.

How we interpreted this project

A homeowner wants a smaller lawn, pollinator habitat, a planted oak-shade margin and a tidy entry exposed to snow piles and deicing salt. The example assumes a sunny prairie pocket and a shaded border.

The $179 Home Landscape Plant Palette coordinates several related spaces on one residential property, with planting priorities and phases; a formal consultation call and revision are not included.

Three decisions that matter most

01 Observe sun and drainage in each planting area rather than transferring one palette across the yard.

02 Mark spring runoff, salt drift and snow-storage paths before planting near entries.

03 Start with six to nine core species and expand once their growth and maintenance needs are known.

Plant recommendations

28 screened plant records are presented below, including one endangered species withheld from purchasing and one threatened species included only conditionally. They are alternatives organized by planting environment and

use—not a shopping list you must buy in full. Mature dimensions and growing conditions remain approximate; confirm the supplied plant form, actual site light and water before purchase.

Sunny prairie pocket

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Prairie dropseed *Sporobolus heterolepis* Core	Fine-textured bunchgrass framework with winter seedheads. **Best fit:** Full sun; dry-mesic to mesic, drained; 2-3 ft **Check:** Clump is slow to expand; do not bury crown or overfertilize.
Little bluestem *Schizachyrium scoparium* Core	Upright blue-green summer texture and copper autumn stems. **Best fit:** Full sun; medium to dry soils, not saturated; 2-4 ft **Check:** Not a low lawn substitute; use back from pavement edges.
Sideoats grama *Bouteloua curtipendula* Core	Shorter warm-season grass for matrix and seedheads. **Best fit:** Full sun; open, well-drained prairie soil; 1.5-3 ft **Check:** Avoid persistent wetness; allow spring warm-up.
Prairie smoke *Geum triflorum* Core	Low spring blooms and silky seed plumes along inner edges. **Best fit:** Full sun; lean soil and low competition; 0.5-1.3 ft **Check:** Can be crowded out by aggressive tall plants; not a footpath plant.
Prairie phlox *Phlox pilosa* Core	Pink early-season flowering bridges prairie smoke and summer bloomers. **Best fit:** Sun; medium soil, not extreme drought; 1-2 ft **Check:** Give airflow; avoid salt-laden snow pile.
Purple prairie clover *Dalea purpurea* Core	Compact purple flowerheads; native bee forage. **Best fit:** Full sun; draining prairie soil; 1-2 ft **Check:** Slow establishment; sensitive to crowding; do not infer local genotype.
Wild bergamot *Monarda fistulosa* Core	Mid-summer flowers and strong pollinator value. **Best fit:** Full sun to light shade; medium soil; 2-4 ft **Check:** Can spread and develop powdery mildew in crowded, humid beds.
Gray-headed coneflower *Ratibida pinnata* Conditional	Tall loose yellow coneflowers at the interior of the prairie pocket. **Best fit:** Full sun; medium soil; 3-5 ft **Check:** Too tall for street sightlines; tends to lean in rich soil.
Pale purple coneflower *Echinacea pallida* Conditional - WI threatened	Documented prairie coneflower alternative to nonindigenous E. purpurea. **Best fit:** Full sun; dry-mesic to mesic; 2-4 ft **Check:** Place away from close-use path if spiky seedheads concern visitors. Wisconsin DNR lists this species as state threatened. It is not a routine wild-sourced purchase: obtain documented lawfully propagated nursery stock with appropriate regional provenance, or select a different common prairie forb from this palette. Never collect wild plants or seed.
Rough blazing star *Liatris aspera* Conditional	Late-season violet bloom complements bunchgrass matrix. **Best fit:** Full sun; relatively dry site; 2-4 ft **Check:** Needs well-drained soil; avoid heavy wet clay and deep mulch.

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Heath aster *Symphyotrichum ericoides* Core	Small white flowers supply late-season bloom and insect forage. **Best fit:** Full sun; dry-mesic soil; 1-3 ft **Check:** Can self-seed; retain intentional edge and cut back if floppy.
Showy goldenrod *Solidago speciosa* Core	Upright yellow fall flowers provide season-end color. **Best fit:** Full sun; medium to dry soil; 2-4 ft **Check:** Keep behind shorter taxa; thin volunteers when too dense.
Golden alexanders *Zizia aurea* Conditional	Yellow early-season flowers fill the pre-summer gap. **Best fit:** Sun to light shade; mesic edge not driest corner; 1-3 ft **Check:** Put in a moisture-retentive transition, not the driest gravelly edge.
Black-eyed susan *Rudbeckia hirta* Alternative	Quick color while longer-lived prairie structure establishes. **Best fit:** Full sun; disturbed open soil; 1-3 ft **Check:** Often biennial/short-lived; reseeding cannot be guaranteed.

Oak-edge woodland

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Pennsylvania sedge *Carex pensylvanica* Core	Low sedge matrix for a woodland edge, not lawn-style traffic. **Best fit:** Part shade to shade; dry-mesic under trees; 0.4-1 ft **Check:** Can establish slowly in deep root competition; irrigation first year.
Sprengel sedge *Carex sprengelii* Core	Taller sedge seedheads add fine woodland texture. **Best fit:** Partial shade; mesic woodland soil; 1-2 ft **Check:** Do not use in very dry, compacted under-tree soil without correction.
Bottlebrush grass *Elymus hystrix* Core	Distinctive seed spikes offer texture and movement. **Best fit:** Part shade; medium-moisture woodland edge; 2-4 ft **Check:** Let it seed only where informal spreading is welcome.
Bigleaf aster *Eurybia macrophylla* Core	Broad leaves give summer ground texture under the canopy. **Best fit:** Part shade; medium soil; 1-3 ft **Check:** Rhizomatous spreading; do not use in a tiny tightly bounded bed.
Zigzag goldenrod *Solidago flexicaulis* Core	Yellow late flowers brighten shade as prairie fades. **Best fit:** Part shade; mesic woodland soil; 1.5-3 ft **Check:** Seed and rhizome spread; thin around small spring wildflowers.
Wild geranium *Geranium maculatum* Core	Pink spring flowers among sedges and woodland phlox. **Best fit:** Light shade; mesic woodland edge; 1-2 ft **Check:** Avoid saline runoff and chronically dry shallow tree roots.
Wild columbine *Aquilegia canadensis* Conditional	Airy red-and-yellow spring flowers in small pockets. **Best fit:** Part shade; well-drained woodland slope; 1-2.5 ft **Check:** Seeds and plant parts should not be eaten; keep away from mouthing visitors.

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Woodland phlox *Phlox divaricata* Conditional	Blue-lavender flowers near native sedges and geranium. **Best fit:** Part shade; mesic soil; 0.8-1.5 ft **Check:** May need more early-summer moisture than the driest under-tree edge.
Short's aster *Symphyotrichum shortii* Conditional	Late purple bloom keeps woodland border interesting into fall. **Best fit:** Open shade to part shade; medium soil; 2-4 ft **Check:** Reseeds; place behind lower plants and control volunteers.

Salt-exposed entry edge

Plant / selection status	How it may work and what to check
Purple lovegrass *Eragrostis spectabilis* Core	Low, airy purple-red seed haze and autumn seedheads. **Best fit:** Full sun; dry, drained interior entry planting; 1-2 ft **Check:** Not validated for direct salt piles; give unsalted setback.
Wild petunia *Ruellia humilis* Withheld - WI endangered	Low violet flowers help maintain entry sightlines. **Best fit:** Full sun; well-drained, protected strip; 0.5-1.5 ft **Check:** Not for foot traffic or snow-storage footprint. Wisconsin DNR lists this species as state endangered. It is included to explain screening, NOT as a purchase or planting recommendation. Choose lower-risk, non-listed options already in this palette instead; do not collect wild material.
Gray goldenrod *Solidago nemoralis* Core	Compact late yellow flowers near low grasses. **Best fit:** Full sun; dry-ish sheltered edge; 1-2.5 ft **Check:** Can spread by seed; keep off sidewalk.
New jersey tea *Ceanothus americanus* Conditional	Low deciduous shrub with summer white blooms for pollinators. **Best fit:** Full sun; well-drained interior border; 2-3 ft tall and wide **Check:** Mature width matters; avoid plow pile, saline runoff and snow throw.
Dwarf bush honeysuckle *Diervilla lonicera* Conditional	Woody texture where entrance bed meets light shade. **Best fit:** Sun to partial shade; moist-to-dry protected border; 2-4 ft tall, spreading **Check:** Can sucker; allow room and keep from path; not proven salt tolerant.

How to put the recommendations to work

01 Survey sunshine, soil drainage and snow storage in spring.

02 Build a compact prairie group and sedge-led shade border with deliberate edges.

03 Evaluate the first winter before expanding any entrance planting into salt-prone ground.

Important site and safety considerations

- “Native” in a nursery catalog is not automatically a claim of indigenous Wisconsin prairie flora.

- Do not infer salt tolerance for a plant merely because it is native to Wisconsin.

A few things we would hold back

purple coneflower: Common trade item but the Wisconsin prairie atlas treats it as an adventive/escaped species, not indigenous Wisconsin prairie flora. Use E. pallida when fit supports it.

common milkweed: Spreads by rhizomes; latex and ingestion exposure make it a poor default for a small dog/visitor-accessible entry and prairie pocket.

wild ginger: Potential ingestion concern for exposed visiting children or pets; no claim that common native woodland plants are categorically safe.

Plant sourcing and expectations

Ask growers for the exact scientific name (including any trade synonym), the plant or seed format, the propagation source and whether stock is suitable for the local climate. A nursery listing is a lead for shopping, not proof of current inventory, correct provenance, or guaranteed establishment.

Examples of places to inquire

Two Ferns Native Nursery, Madison. Dated fall 2026 list ONLY; not confirmed in stock on 5 Nov; season end, enquire for spring 2027. No local wild provenance certified.

Sprig Native Plant Nursery. Supplier lead; exact taxon quantity and in-stock claim not checked or guaranteed

Prairie Fairy Native Plants. Catalog lead, no current reservation or species-specific lot verification

Sources consulted

The references below support the regional botanical, gardening, or regulatory decisions in this illustration. Published range, nursery listings and generalized soils information do not prove parcel-scale conditions, county indigeneity or seed-lot origin. Check dated rules and availability before making real purchases.

Native Plant Sale: plant information sheets
Gardening with Native Plants: Short Gardens
Gardening with Native Plants: Sun to Shade
Wisconsin Native Plant Garden, 2026 Bloom Updates
Plant native plants to help nature
Wisconsin DNR: Echinacea pallida (threatened)
2026 Fall availability, updated Oct 19, 2026
Gardening with Native Plants: Sunny Gardens
Gardening with Native Plants: Spring Planting, Late Summer Blooms
Native plant garden: Spring planting and woodland guidelines
Gardening with Native Plants: Spring Transition
Wisconsin DNR: Ruellia humilis (endangered)