

Changes Over Time

The plants in the urban meadow will grow and change over time, it will take several years for the meadow to develop and become established.

In the beginning the meadow is planted with a combination of seed and small potted plant stock. The first year, like a new room that you are moving into, the meadow may feel empty with bare spaces where plants will emerge later on.

It is important to protect the soil for new growth and not walk off the path in the meadow area. Fragile seedlings can be damaged or the soil compressed and growth completely stopped if students walk on what appears to be bare earth.

In spring when the first one or two tiny leaves emerge many of the meadow plants look the same. Most of the growth is taking place underground at this point. Be patient, allow the plants time. This is a wonderful opportunity to get on your knees, close to the soil, to observe growth and change.

During the summer the meadow will fill in and the plants reach 18"-24" high. In the next year those now established plants may grow to different heights. Some of the meadow plants will self-seed and will start small again the next year. Others develop a strong underground root stock of stored energy and will become larger even earlier in the spring in following years.

Plant survival depends on soil composition and nutrients, moisture, sun, the effect of insects, the impact of adjacent plants, and many other factors. It may take three, four or five years for a stable (yet dynamic) ecology to be established in the meadow.

Over time some plant species may move location by underground stems called rhizomes. Roots and shoots emerge from the rhizomes. For example in the Gardner outdoor classroom a milkweed patch that was observed in one area for several years showed up in a location 10 feet away the next year.

The one constant in a natural landscape is change, careful observation of that change over time is an essential, and fun, part of the learning experience.



May 2009 Chittick Elementary School, meadow planted, just the beginning.



May 2010 Chittick Elementary School, spring growth one year later. Arthropods, overwintering insects, and caterpillars that will become butterflies may start to be found now, and in even greater quantity in future years as the meadow ecology is established.



Meadow seedlings emerging through a protective mat in the first spring.

Originally seeded with 20-30 varieties of plants (several thousand seeds), different meadow plants will survive and grow in different locations within the meadow.



Meadow grasses in the second fall after planting.