

Mattawan Later Elementary Native Prairie Teaching Garden
Our teaching garden is an outdoor classroom for all children to explore and all teachers to use. See more on the Later EI website home page, under "News/Info."

**Please join us for a 'Next Steps' Planning Meeting
Thursday, February 3 at 6:30 pm**

in the Center Building Conference Room.

**Parents, teachers and staff welcome – please RSVP to Carrie Aussenmacher,
call 679-4909 or email: carriemacher@ctstelecom.net**

What's going on in the Garden ... in January?

Our garden gives us gifts all year ...

Last month we talked about some of the many gifts our Native Prairie Teaching Garden gives us – such as improved air quality and water quality, not to mention natural beauty outside our windows all year long! Another gift from our garden is a glimpse into the history of Michigan. In fact, our Native Prairie Teaching Garden helps link us to our past.

Learning about our heritage - All the grasses and flowers in our garden are indigenous to Southwest Michigan, which means they grow here naturally and were not transplanted from somewhere else. The prairie garden helps us learn how the landscape around us looked about 150 years ago, before the area was changed by settlers and farmers.

Food and medicine - Native Americans collected hundreds of different native plants from the prairie for food. A perfect example in our garden is Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*). This graceful fountain-like grass has a distinctive fragrance, some say it smells like popcorn! Did you know that the seeds from this grass were ground into flour and used for baking years ago?

Native Americans used plants for medicines, too. You might be familiar with the name of this plant. It was used as medicine by the Native Americans and is still widely used today: Echinacea (Coneflower).



Coneflower

Housing - During the pioneer days when the prairies were being settled, homes were made of prairie sod and were called "sod houses." The thick, dense, and tangled roots of the prairie allowed settlers to cut out large bricks, typically measuring two-foot x one-foot x six inches, and stack them together to make walls.

(Photograph courtesy of Hidden Savanna, www.hiddensavanna.com)