

# Pieces of prairie

**Little remains of** the tallgrass and wet riverbottom prairies that once covered one-third of Missouri. Tall grasses like big bluestem dominated the landscape. Along railroad corridors such as the Katy and Wabash, some prairie grasses and

flowers survived long after those on surrounding land were plowed under.

In what is now the St. Charles Ecopark, wet prairie grasses like cordgrass and switchgrass grew thick. In the past, periodic floods and fire kept large areas of the floodplain in grassland. Now pioneering trees like willow, sycamore, and cottonwood quickly take hold and grow tall in old prairie strongholds.



**Left to right:** Bottlebrush blazing star at Mora Conservation Area. Controlled burns imitate natural conditions. Indian paintbrush. **Background:** Yellow coneflower. (All photos courtesy of Missouri Department of Conservation)