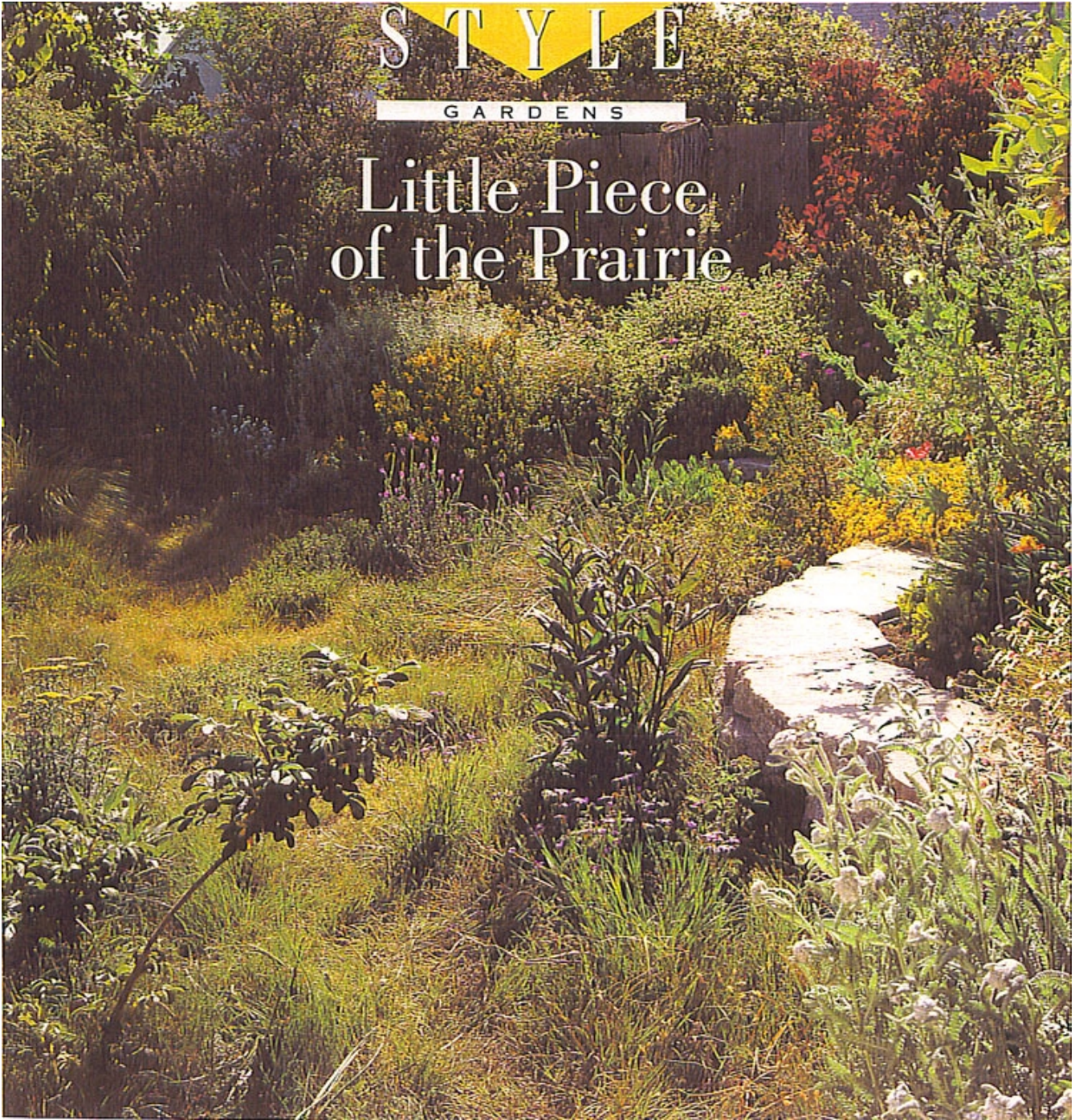


STYLE

GARDENS

Little Piece of the Prairie



A grass that once fed herds of bison on the vast American prairie may yet become, as Pomona nurseryman John Greenlee puts it, "the turf of the '90s." Billowy buffalo grass already grows in residential gardens that require little moisture and even less mowing. And, as seen at the Pasadena home of landscape designer Robert Cornell, its subdued blue-green hue harmonizes well with many gray and silver dry-climate plants.

In his back-to-nature back-yard meadow, Cornell planted a type of buffalo grass—appropriately named 'Prairie'—from seed. It sprouts in six-inch-tall clumps, spreading slowly via above-ground runners (there are no invasive rhizomes, as with Bermuda grass) and thinly enough to share space with other plants. Here, Spanish lavender, California blue-eyed grass (actually an iris

relative), penstemon, a number of bulbs, puddles of thyme and a few benign weeds spring up amid the grassy tufts in true meadow fashion.

During spring, summer and fall, the garden is fragrant and full of flowers. In November, the buffalo grass turns paper-bag brown until March. Whatever the season, however, this meadow needs almost no care: even a manicured buffalo-grass lawn would require water only twice a month and a trim once a month. Buffalo grass has taken hold in lawns across Colorado and Texas, but its long dormancy may limit its popularity elsewhere. That's why, according to Greenlee, whose nursery specializes in ornamental grasses, new strains are being developed now. Even Southland sod companies are getting into the act. Good news for anyone who might wish their home was on the range.

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