

PLANTING AND GROWING WILDFLOWERS

–Compiled by Ellis County Master Gardener Volunteers

Even though wildflowers have been propagating themselves without human help for many centuries, planting the seeds with some care, and following through, will help ensure an excellent showing of the flowers of your choice.

Wildflower seeds need three things to germinate: 1) contact with the soil, 2) full sun and 3) water.

Plant spring wildflowers in September and October and fall wildflowers in mid-spring to take advantage of the rain in those seasons.

Select a well-drained location. Moist, low-lying areas attract weeds, not wildflowers.

Select a sunny site. Nearly all Texas wildflowers thrive in full sun (at least 5 hours per day). If grown in the shade, they will become spindly and won't bloom well.

Eliminate competitive weeds and grass, either by hand or with an herbicide. Don't plant wildflowers in clover, rye grasses or other plants that grow during the winter. These plants will choke out the wildflowers.

Mow the area so that vegetation is as short as possible.

Rake up the plant debris and remove it.

Rake or **lightly** till the area to expose bare earth. Don't till more than ½ inch to 1 inch because deeper tilling will disturb dormant weed seeds, encouraging them to grow.

Mix the seed with a "carrier" such as masonry (weed free) sand, perlite or potting soil to increase the volume and distribute the seed more evenly. One part to 4 parts inert material is recommended.

Weeds should not be a major problem if the site was chosen correctly and the soil properly prepared. If possible, remove weeds by hand after the wildflower seeds have been sown.

Native annual and perennial wildflowers will return year-after-year once they are well established and allowed to go to seed. "Domesticated" varieties may or may not return abundantly. Generally, these varieties must be replanted each year.

Broadcast (by hand or with a seed spreader) ½ of the seed over the area. Then broadcast the remainder at a 90 degree angle to the initial seeding. This helps to ensure even coverage.

Press the seed into the ground by walking on it or using a roller. Don't cover the seed with more than 1/16 inch of soil. You will be able to see some of the seeds. Apply light amounts of water frequently to keep the top of the soil moist until the seeds have germinated. Two or three short sprinklings a day are much better than one heavy watering. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy, or the young plants will "drown."

When the seedlings are 1-to-2 inches tall, reduce the watering gradually. Then apply water only if the plants show signs of stress.

If it isn't possible to apply supplemental watering, the wildflowers are likely to be sparse in dry years.

Fertilizing is not recommended unless the wildflowers have been planted in a barren area. Fertilizer encourages weeds, and the wildflowers will have lush foliage but few blooms.

To ensure return of the native wildflowers next year, leave the spent flowers on the plant for 2 weeks after full bloom has passed. Then mow the area to a height of 4-to-6 inches to spread the seeds, reduce competition from weeds, and allow sunlight to get to the seedlings.