



Wildflowers from Seeds

Wildflowers are becoming increasingly popular as a landscape alternative, adding color and natural beauty to any area. Once established, wildflowers can pretty much care for themselves. But, even though they are "wild" flowers, that doesn't mean you can casually broadcast seed over an unprepared area and expect to achieve success. For best results, you'll need to give your meadow the same care you'd use to start any garden.

Create a design using your favorite individual species or go with a prepackaged mixture of assorted varieties. Johnson's carries an expanded selection of wildflower seeds suited for growing in this area.

Select a site with soil that drains well and receives at least 6 hours of sunlight a day. You'll need to remove all existing grass and weeds. A non-selective herbicide, such as Hi-Yield Killzall, works well for this step. Fertilizing wildflowers is usually not recommended so it's important to start with a nutrient-rich seedbed. To improve the condition of any soil type, work in some Cotton Boll Compost or Peat Moss before planting.



Planting

Wildflower seeds can be planted in fall or spring when conditions are cool and wet. In the fall, some plants will germinate right away and establish a root system before overwintering. Others will germinate with spring warmth. An alternative is to dormant seed in late fall when the soil is 50° or below and let them all come up in spring as soon as the soil warms, giving you a head start on spring seeding.

To aid in even distribution, thoroughly mix the seeds with a carrier, such as sand. Four parts inert material to one part seed is a good mixture. Some wildflower seed mixtures are already packaged with inert matter. Broadcast one half of your seed as uniformly as possible over the prepared area. Sow the remaining seed in a direction perpendicular to the initial sowing.

Lightly rake or press the seed into the soil by using a roller or by walking over the newly planted area. Do not cover the seed any deeper than 1/16 of an inch. Some seeds will be visible. The seeds must be kept moist to germinate. If rainfall is not adequate during the establishment period, light and frequent applications of water

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should be applied to keep the ground moist. If you are dormant seeding, water 2 or 3 times during the winter if there is no snowfall. Be careful not to over water. After your seedlings are 1-2 inches high, water should be gradually reduced and applied only if the plants show signs of stress.

Maintenance

An annual cutting to a height of 4-6 inches aids in seed dispersal, reduces competition of unwanted weeds and allows sunlight to penetrate to the lower growing plants and emerging seedlings. This may be done anytime from fall to early winter, depending on your preference. You need to allow at least two weeks after the full bloom period has passed for seeds to mature. As a general rule, when the dead brown foliage offsets the floral display, the area may be trimmed. Leave trimmings in place so plants can self-sow, or collect them for your compost pile. If you prefer, allow the natural cycle to progress without cutting off the seedpods or dried foliage, and the garden is transformed into a giant dried flower arrangement. This will also provide shelter and food for birds. The dried foliage and stems will then need to be cut in late winter before the new growth appears.

Regular weeding will be needed the first few years until established plants fill in. To help control unwanted grassy weeds in perennial plants use ferti•lome Over-the-Top Weed & Grass Killer.

Mulch will also help control weeds as well as temperature fluctuations.

Color While You Wait

Remember, when starting perennial plants from seed, it will take at least two growing seasons before you observe the spring or summer blooms. So have patience.

To provide quick color while the perennials are getting established, sow some annual wildflower seeds between the perennial plants. In the spring, rake the bed lightly to scratch the annual seeds into the soil. Keep the soil moist for 2-3 weeks until the seedlings start growing. Some wildflower mixtures contain a combination of annual and perennial seeds to be sown at the same time.

Keep your garden from looking bare while waiting for the spring blooms to appear. Plant bulbs in the fall between perennial wildflower plants and grasses. Crocus, daffodils, tulips and alliums will be a welcome sight as winter draws to an end.

Your wildflower garden will offer varied interest as the seasons change and will take on a new look each year as the plants become more established.