

Gardening Basics

Growing Wildflowers from Seed

Growing native wildflowers brings a bit of the prairie to your backyard. Sowing wildflower seed mixes is an inexpensive way to fill an area with a variety of colorful springtime blooms. Native bees and other pollinators that are important to our food chain appreciate the nectar that wildflowers provide early in the season.

To have the best chance of success with your wildflower garden, here are a few things to consider:

Seed Selection

Select seeds of species that are native to your area. These will be the most attractive and beneficial to native pollinators and adapted to your weather conditions. Some seed suppliers prepare blends that are labeled for specific geographic regions. You can also compare the seeds listed on the packet with the native [plant database](#) on the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center website (www.wildflower.org), which also includes the 20 most common Texas wildflowers. Texas A&M's Wildflowers in Bloom website (<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wildseed/>) also provides detailed growing information and photographs for dozens of wildflowers.

Site Selection

Locate your wildflower garden in full sun. Most wildflowers bloom best with full sun, meaning at least 5 to 8 hours of direct sun. Although tolerant of our slightly alkaline soil in North Texas, it is essential that the soil drains well. Sites with standing water or heavy clays will not yield good results.

When to Plant

In North Central Texas, sow wildflower seeds in the fall for spring bloom. Typically, North Texas experiences enough rain in the fall to help the seeds germinate and then has a sufficiently cold winter for those species that prefer some chilling hours.

Site Preparation

Start with a clean slate. Remove weeds and turf grasses that will crowd out wildflower seedlings. Lightly rake the surface no more than 1" deep to loosen the soil, but not so deep that you expose more weed seeds. Integrating organic material or compost improves the soil by adding plant nutrients and helping to break up clay soil.



*Photo by Lori Malhiot via pixabay.
Bluebonnets and Indian Paintbrush herald spring in Texas.*



*Photo by Dean Moriarty via pixabay
Proper soil preparation is key for growing wildflowers.*

Sowing Seeds

Scatter seeds by hand or with a handheld spreader onto bare earth. You may wish to add sand or perlite to your mix in a ratio of 4 parts inert material to 1-part seed mix to help tiny seeds disperse evenly. Do not cover the seeds with soil but do press down on the area by walking or using a roller. It is important that the seeds are in contact with the soil but not covered with more than 1/16"-1/8" of soil.

Ongoing Care of your Wildflower Garden

Gently hand water at first sowing and keep the area evenly moist (but not saturated) for the next 4 to 6 weeks, supplementing with irrigation, if necessary, until the plants are a couple of inches high. Once established, wildflowers need minimal supplemental water.

If you planted a mixture of seeds, germination will be sporadic as not all species have the same germination rates or requirements. Be aware that emerging seedlings could easily be mistaken for weeds. Texas A&M's Wildflowers in Bloom website includes photographs of common wildflower seedlings to assist in identification. The website also suggests sowing a pinch of seeds into a potting soil container for comparison.

If Mother Nature cooperates, come spring your wildflower garden will be a beautiful haven for beneficial insects. Then sit back and enjoy your own little piece of the prairie.



*Photo by Michelle Raponi via pixabay
Monarch butterfly enjoying nectar from larkspur*

References

The Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center: <http://www.wildflower.org/>

Texas A&M Wildflowers in Bloom: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wildseed/>