

Plant Wildflowers Now
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Plant your wildflower seeds between now and the end of October

Seeds are available at your favorite nursery or you can order them from Douglas King Seed Co. (www.dkseeds.com) or Wildseed Farms (www.wildseedfarms.com) on the Internet.

Select seeds for individual flowers such as bluebonnets, poppies, coreopsis, Mexican hat, prairie verbena, winecup or use a mix of different varieties. There are Texas/Oklahoma and Southwest mixes that include a blend of the seeds that do well in our area. The advantage of a mix is that it doesn't matter whether it is a dry or wet winter and spring, at least some of the flower varieties will germinate and prosper.

Your wildflower site needs to be in full sun. There are a few shade-tolerating wildflowers (blue curl, *Salvia coccinea*) but most do best in the sun. Wildflowers can tolerate poor soils but can't compete well with other plants. Recognize a good wildflower site as a place where there is no sod or weed layer and bare soil is visible. Rock emerging from the soil is okay as long as the seed can reach some soil.

Soil preparation is not necessary, but raking before the seed is spread will increase germination rates. Never cover the seed with soil. Spread it over the soil surface. It is usually not practical to water in the seed. Most gardeners rely on rain to provide the moisture needed for germination and bloom.

Bluebonnets and some of the other species emerge in the fall. They don't grow much on top but develop roots in the winter. The best weather for their development is to experience a few rainfalls but not enough to encourage the growth of competing weeds. During extreme wet periods, bluebonnets will not only get overwhelmed by weeds, but they can develop root rot.

Among the first wildflowers to bloom, are primrose, prairie verbena and phlox.. Coreopsis are also early and bloom over a long season.

Bluebonnets begin blooming in March, but the major period is the first half of April.

Poppies, bee balm, Mexican hat and coneflowers are late spring bloomers. *Salvia coccinea* is considered a fall-blooming wildflower, but they also bloom in late spring. If

you can find seed for blue curl (*Phacelia congesta*)), plant it. The tall, attractive plant will grow in the sun and shade in late spring over a long period and is one of the favorite nectar producing plants for butterflies and honey bees.

One of the most desirable characteristics of wildflowers, in addition to their tolerance of dry weather and poor soils, is their ability to reseed themselves. It isn't automatic, however, for the wildflowers that bloom in the spring after they are planted to reseed and bloom the next year. The seed must be allowed to mature on the plant, and then it has to reach bare soil again.

Allowing seeds to mature means that the plants must be allowed to sit in place long after the flowers have declined. until the seed pods form and brown.

We call the period after the flowers decline as the "ugly period" of wildflower culture. It is hard to tolerate the ugly period and quite often the maturing wildflower seeds are mowed down before they reach maturity.

Several options exist if you do not want an ugly period in your wildflower patch. Make sure there are plenty late blooming varieties in your wildflower seed mix. Supplement the blooms of poppies, Mexican hat, bee balm and *Salvia coccinea* with sunflower and Cosmo seeds. The yellow and gold cosmos make the most impact, but there are also pink, white and lavender. Cosmos will bloom all summer and fall. They are planted in April just like wildflowers were in September and October.

Another option is to physically reseed your wildflowers every year rather than expect any natural reseeding.