

Plant Wildflowers

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Wildflowers bloom in the spring but the best time to plant them is right now with seed. Plant the seed in full sun on a site that does not have sod or a heavy cover of weeds. The seed must make contact with soil and the plants must grow in the sun after germination. Because of the hot dry summer there are many sites this year that fit that description. Not much was able to grow on the rocky, thin soils that exist in many parts of San Antonio and the Hill Country. Now that the heavy rains soaked the area last week, it is an ideal time to spread the seed.

If we had our choice of weather from now on over the winter and spring for maximum wildflower performance, we would limit further rainfall to just enough to meet the needs of the drought tolerant wildflowers. Two or three generous rains from now to bloom period will result in strong wildflower growth and not an overwhelming growth of other weeds. Rescue grass, henbit, bedstraw, thistle and the other winter weeds will compete with the wildflowers if we receive lots of rain over the winter and early spring.

The soil does not need to be prepared for wildflower seeding unless you want to rake some areas to make for better seed to soil contact. Do not cover the seed with soil.

There are several options to obtain wildflower seed. Most San Antonio nurseries have a Texas/Oklahoma mix, and some even have packages of bluebonnets, poppies, phlox, primrose, wine cups, coreopsis, Mexican hat, and coneflower, if you want to increase the blooming from a favorite flower. In addition to your retail nursery it is easy to go to Wildseed Farms, Douglas King Seed Co. or other seed producer websites and order from the internet. It is fast, reliable and you can choose from many mix and single variety packages.

One of the advantages of the mixes is that, depending on the weather, a variety of flower may dominate the planting one year, and a different wildflower may dominate the next year. Each species responds to more rain, less cold or other weather characteristics differently. With a mix you always have a species that responds well to the particular weather that year.

There are a few wildflowers that do well in the shade. My favorite is blue curl (*Phacelia*). It blooms in sun or shade over a long season and is a favorite butterfly and pollinator nectar source. Blue curl grows to 3 feet tall on some sites. Another shade tolerant wildflower is *Salvia coccinea*. *Salvia coccinea* has a red bloom on an 18-inch plant in the spring and the fall.

Keep in mind that one of the desirable characteristics of wildflowers is that they will reseed themselves every year if you select a good site originally and allow them to mature the seed crop. Allowing wildflowers to mature a seed crop means that you must resist mowing them down too early after the blooming period ends. It can be a challenge because the period between the last bloom and seed production is called the "ugly" period.