Now is the time to spread wildflower seed over areas where you want them to bloom next spring.

There are some exceptions but most wildflowers need to be planted in full sun in a situation where there is bare soil so the wildflower seed can make contact with the soil. It doesn't work to spread the seed on an area where sod is growing thickly or there is a deep layer of weeds or other organic material. On the other hand, it is not necessary to prepare the soil. Disking may help the germination rate, but it is not necessary. In some cases, the planted site can be irrigated, but most gardeners rely on the rain to provide the necessary moisture. The attractions of planting wildflowers include their ability to germinate, bloom and reseed themselves with minimal attention.

Most gardeners that plant wildflowers are interested in having it naturalize to produce blooms and seeds every spring. The key to wildflowers naturalizing is to allow them to produce and mature seed. This part of the wildflower process is also the most challenging because it requires that the wildflower plant go through an "ugly period" where there is no color only dry foliage and seed pods. The ugliness of the "ugly period" can sometimes be reduced by planting a wildflower mix that includes species that bloom over a long period.

Wildflower seed can be purchased in mixes or as a single species packet. Your favorite retail nursery will often have both forms of seed packets. Obtain large quantities and less popular varieties from the internet wildflower retailers.

 The single species seed package allows you to emphasize the planting of a favorite flower because of its appearance or because of other characteristics such as its value as a nectar source or the timing of the bloom.

Mixes are desirable because the mix of seeds offers species that are capable of prospering in variations in weather and or produce a longer period of bloom.

Bluebonnets are the Texas state flower and a favorite wildflower. Based on the name you would expect the flowers to be blue, and most are, but white, pink, red and maroon blooms are sometimes also available, especially as transplants. Bluebonnets germinate in the fall and then lie low through the winter until they grow to 2 feet tall and bloom in March and April. The weather over the last few years has not been favorable to bluebonnet seed production, so the seed is scarce and relatively expensive this fall.

Many wildflowers are important nectar sources for butterflies. The one I really value is blue curl (Phacelia congesta). It grows over 3 feet tall and blooms in sun or shade. Use it as an early nectar source for butterflies to fill in the period before the zinnias and Gregg's mistflower begin to bloom. It does not seem to be included in the mixes I have seen but blue curl can be purchased from internet sources. Another option is to seek some seed from another gardener growing it for the butterflies.

Another wildflower that will bloom and spread in the shade is Salvia coccinea. The usual flower color is red but there are pinks and bicolors. Salvia coccinea is also desirable because it is a late bloomer and often blooms in the fall. Deer do not eat salvia coccinea. It is usually included as part of mixes designed for Texas and Oklahoma or more specifically for Central Texas.

Other wildflowers to consider are poppies, coreopsis, beebalm, Indian blanket, prairie verbena, phlox, coneflower, evening primrose, rain lilies, annual sunflower, Indian paintbrush, and Mexican hat.

It is time to plant your fall vegetable garden. For all the information about planting broccoli, cauliflower, kale, lettuce, English peas, beets, carrots, turnips, spinach, radishes, onions and other cool weather vegetables join me for a free program sponsored by the Dreamhill Estates neighborhood and Milbergers Nursery at 6802 Dorothy Louise Dr in the Medical Center area (410 to w on Babcock and s on Dorothy Louise). The program will run from 9:30 through 11:00 am. Attendees will receive a broccoli transplant and information handouts.