

Wildflowers

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We have spent quite a bit of time in this column over the last several weeks discussing weed control with preemergent herbicides. The weeds we are trying to prevent reproduce from seed that is in place in our landscape and is poised to germinate when the temperatures cool and we receive some moisture this fall. The idea of wildflower planting is to put seed of desirable blooming plants in place to take advantage of the same cool weather and moisture to produce blooms for us to enjoy next spring and summer. It does not work to apply preemergent herbicides in the same area as your wildflower seed, but both can be part of your overall landscape management. Consider this information about wildflower planting.

Wildflowers can be grown in rows in raised beds with irrigation but part of the desirability of growing wildflowers is their ability to bloom and reproduce themselves with minimal intervention. Wildflowers do not require good soil to perform. In fact, they do best in poor soils where there is not much competition from other plants. If your vacant lot or other planting site is in full sun and has bare areas and rocks protruding from the soil, it is probably a good place to plant wildflowers. The seed must be able to make contact with soil to germinate. Soil covered with sod or a thick weed cover is not the place to plant wildflowers.

The requirement for moisture is a similar situation. The seed will eventually need moisture to germinate but most wildflower gardeners successfully rely on the rains.

You have several options for seed. Most retail nurseries have special Texas mixes and some even have single variety packets. For an even larger range of selections, you can visit the websites of wildflower seed retailers to select the varieties you want from their catalogs. That is also the best route to go if you need large quantities of seed. Wildseed Farms(wildseedfarms.com) in Fredericksburg and Douglas King Seed Co(dkseeds.com) in San Antonio are two of the best websites to visit.

A major issue to consider if you are going to grow wildflowers is that if you are going to have them reseed themselves, you have to have some tolerance for an “ugly” period between the time that the main plants such as bluebonnets bloom, and when they mature their seed. The ugliness of the “ugly” period can be reduced by including late-blooming selections such as cosmos, beebalm, *Salvia coccinea*, *Ruellia*, and coneflower in your planting.

Full sun is required for most wildflower varieties but there are some wildflowers that will grow in shade.

Blue curl (*Phacelia congesta*) grows 2 feet tall on most soils with attractive foliage. The flowers are blue and as the name implies are curled. Some gardeners call them snail weed because of the curl. Blue curl blooms over a long period in the spring and often lasts into mid-summer. It is especially desirable because it is a favorite nectar source of butterflies before the mist flower, zinnias, and milkweed are at full bloom.

Another shade tolerant wildflower, *Salvia coccinea* grows to 18 inches tall in most neighborhoods. It is upright with limited foliage and attractive red flowers that are a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds. It blooms in the fall. *Salvia coccinea* is included in most Texas wildflower mixes.

Another of the wildflowers included in most seed mixes marketed for the Texas area is purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*). It is a perennial that spreads by seed. The plant grows from 1 foot to 2 feet tall depending on the soil and moisture. The flower has violet colored petals surrounding a mounded center

Butterflies seek out the coneflower as a nectar source and goldfinches and other seed eaters harvest the seeds.