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Wildflowers

Plant your wildflower seeds between now and the end of November.

Seeds are available at your favorite nursery or you can order them from Douglas King Seed Co. ([www.dkseeds.com](http://www.dkseeds.com)) or Wild seed Farms ([www.wildseedfarms.com](http://www.wildseedfarms.com)) on the Internet.

Select seeds for individual flowers such as bluebonnets, poppies, coreopsis, Mexican hat, prairie verbena, wine or use a mix of different varieties. There are Texas/Oklahoma mixes that include a blend of the seeds that do well in our area. The advantage of a mix is that is 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-loving wildflowers (snailweed, 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. 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 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 verbena and primrose. Coreopsis are also early and bloom over a long period.

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 are considered fall-blooming wildflowers, but they also bloom in late spring.

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, and then it has to reach bare soil again.

Allowing seeds to mature means that the flowers must be given the time to decline naturally, and then the seed pods form and must stay in place until the seed pods 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 reseed your wildflowers every year rather than expect any natural reseeding.

**Garden Tasks**

It is time to plant your vegetable seeds for fall production. Green beans, summer squash, carrots, lettuce, turnips, beets, rutabagas and greens work well.

Cut back on lawn watering in the fall and only irrigate in the mornings to reduce the chance of brown patch fungus disease.

Give your roses a quick pruning to remove dead wood and open up the middle. Restart your fertilization and pest control spray programs. Slow-release lawn fertilizer works well. Use one-half cup per small plant and one cup for a large plant.

Reduce tool handle drying and cracking by rubbing them with boiled linseed oil.